

Marvellous things

Psalm 98

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I am glad that today we will have time together to look at, and discuss, our Mission Action Plan. That plan is to help us, as a small congregation, to play a role in the worldwide mission of God.

Our God wants this whole world, the people, the nations, even nature, to be joyful in knowing him.

The psalm we read today touches on this subject.

1. Victory

God has given a victory, a great salvation, to Israel. This is what our psalm begins with. Let us sing for God, because He has done marvellous things.

There are times in your life when you need a miracle. When all things are out of your hands, when everything seems to go bad, you do not know how to handle things.

But God can do marvellous things.

You are not good enough for God to help you? Why did God give Israel his great salvation? This victory? Because ‘He remembered his mercy and faithfulness.’

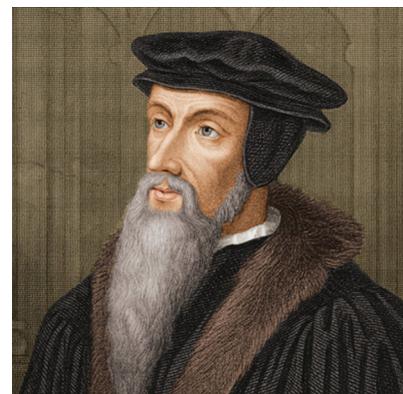
(vs 4)

John Calvin, the French reformer, writes about this:

God was influenced by no other motive than that of faithfully performing what he had himself promised. [This shows that God’s help for Israel in its time of need] was not grounded at all on the merit or righteousness of man.

If you are in need, never think that God will help you when you are good enough. The presence and help of God is because he is merciful.

The victory this psalm writes about, was, it seems, Israel’s return from Babylon, back to its land. But the language used also reminds us clearly of how God saved Israel from Egypt, a thousand years earlier.



I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously; your right hand, O Lord, your right hand shatters the enemy; you are awesome in glorious deeds, because of the greatness of your arm.

These are some of the words of Moses when he sung to God after Israel passed through the Red Sea; psalm 98 clearly echoes these words, because the writer felt that Israel now experienced similar events. God saved Israel from Babylon, a great salvation.

And God can also intervene in your life, and help you to get through very difficult times and sort out the things you struggle with.

But, maybe you think, 'I am not Israel, who am I to think that God can come to my rescue, to help me?' Good question.

We will get there...

But first, have you noticed how psalm 98 is very clearly linked with our Lord Jesus Christ?

When our Lord as a baby was presented in the temple, Simeon prayed a prayer, recorded by Luke, and he quoted quite literally from Psalm 98, 'My eyes have seen the salvation, that you have prepared in the presence of the nations.' Jesus is that salvation.

The Virgin Mary also used this Psalm as a model, if not its literal words, when she praised God, after she found out she was pregnant of the Saviour.

My soul magnifies the Lord.
He who is mighty has done great things for me.
He has shown strength with his arm... and He has brought down the mighty from their thrones.
His mercy is for those who fear him, from generation to generation.
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy.

The parallels are striking; it seems as if Mary had this psalm in mind when she composed her song of triumph. Jesus, Son of God and son of Mary - He is God's salvation for Israel and for the world.

When Jesus prayed this psalm, his mother must have told him that she prayed it when his birth was announced. Because she knew - Jesus himself is the salvation for Israel.

That is why as a church we read this Psalm ultimately as praise to God for the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ, and it is about the proclamation of his gospel in all nations of the earth. No language can be too strong, nor poetic imagery too high, to point out the awesome riches of Jesus Christ.

The psalm is a sort of Coronation Hymn, officially proclaiming the conquering Messiah as King over the nations, with blast of trumpets, clapping of hands, and celebration of triumphs.

2. Sing a new song

When you and I are in need of God visiting us with his help, we can trust Him to do that. He visited the world in Jesus Christ, to forever make sure to us that if we hold on to Jesus Christ - in faith, in obedience, then God holds on to us.

Therefore with the writer of the psalm, we can burst out in new songs and you can expect that you will see marvellous things - his presence and help in your life.

Moses sang a new song when God saved Israel from Egypt. The psalm is a song for God's deliverance of Israel from Babylon - and it points to Jesus Christ.

When Jesus came, Mary sang a new song of praise.

New songs are appropriate for hing-moments in Gods history with mankind. But also when he acts in your life.

“Your life is hidden with Christ in God.” Paul writes to the church in Colosse. Your life is hidden with Christ in God. What a reason for praise and for trusting Him. What a good reason for us to make joyful music.

The psalm even speaks of all nature making music for God. Even the thundering roaring of the sea, the noise of the wild rivers, the sounds of the winds you hear in the hills, they are praise to God.

Nature praises God in this psalm. We see this more often in the Bible, nature being personified. The trees, the fields, the sun, the stars, they all play their role in worshipping God.

But this view of nature echoing the glory of God, it may be true to some extent. But I think it is mostly something we look forward to. It is music of the future.

Our world today is full of beauty - and nature hints at the greatness of God and his goodness for you.

But Paul, in Romans 8, has a more sombre view of nature around us. A sombre view that is very common in our days. Creation is subject to futility, it is bound to corruption. The whole creation is growing.

If there was ever a time when we understood that the sins of mankind - of us - even impact nature, it is now. Our greed, our consumptive lifestyle, damages the world badly.

Psalm 98 looks forward to the messianic kingdom when this whole world will be renewed. Only when God will judge the world in righteousness and the people with equity, then nature will be finally renewed to excessively praise God.

Our lack of righteousness and equity subjects people and even our natural world to incredible damage.

We look forward to the day when even nature will clap, sing, rejoice in new songs - together with all people.

The Psalm calls all people - not just Israel, but the whole world, to sing for God. And therefore we might even call the psalm a psalm of mission.

God is not only interested in us - though He is very interested in you - but He is just as well interested in this whole world. In everybody. Even in the stones, the trees, the rivers.

That is why as a church, we desire to not have a nice time together only, but we also look for ways to engage people outside our community, our friends, our neighbours, our colleagues. We want to engage them also in loving God, in loving people, in caring for our world.

Because God is the God of this whole wide world.

3. Because he will come to judge the world

The seas must roar, the rivers must clap their hands, the hills must sing, and all people in this world join in, why?

for [the Lord] comes
to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.

Notice that as the psalm first pointed at our Lord Jesus, who came as the Saviour to our world, it now also points at his second coming, to judge the living and the dead. We look forward to God doing marvellous things in the future!

I do not know how often you have praised God for his judgment. But that is what this psalm does.

Many people become worried and afraid when they think of the judgment of God. How can this psalm tell the whole world to rejoice in that judgment?

Because it looks forward to the wonderful time when Jesus Christ will reign this world. When his kingdom of peace, now ruling in our hearts, will be rolled out in this whole world.

With righteousness he shall judge the world, and the people with equity. This is the joy of it. No more place for wicked rulers. No more wars. No more unrighteousness. This judgment is something to look forward to!



There is no terror in it for those who follow Jesus Christ. It is something we desire!
'Come Lord Jesus, come soon!'

Yes, for those who do injustice, for those who oppress the poor, for those whose hearts are bombs of hatred, for wicked rulers, his coming is to be feared.

But for you who trust in God, who believe in Jesus Christ, who desire to follow Him, who endeavour to love your neighbours, there is no fear. You are hidden with Christ in God. Malachi summed this up well:

See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; [...] But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. (Malachi 4.1-2)

God will ultimately intervene and give us victory. Christ has come, salvation has come. And he will come again to finish the job; you, our country, nature, the whole world will be made new.

Conclusion

It is as if we live in between D-Day and V-Day - between the Decisive landing in Normandy and the full surrender - the Victory over the enemy.

Because D-day has occurred when Jesus lived and died and rose again, we can be assured that the war has been won. The backbone of the enemy is broken. So V-day is surely coming.

Now we live in the time of the final skirmishes, and our problems can be really tough. Between D-day and V-day, Arnhem and Nijmegen have seen very awful days.

But if you know where things are going, it helps you to cope with the problems of today.

Jesus Christ is with you. He helps you. He listens to your prayers. You are on the side of the victorious Lord.

God's coming judgement is the great finish line of the victory march of our Lord Jesus Christ - it is the perfection of the salvation He came to bring for you. It means the setting right of all things that are still wrong.

This is our God. This is your God, your redeemer. We can trust him totally. We are safe with him.

So by all means, share with him what problems you face today. He is the great lover of mankind; He has done marvellous things in the past, and He will do marvellous things when this whole world will be perfected.

And He can do marvellous things for you, as we wait for His coming. He loves you; He is present in your life, and He invites you to share your needs and problems with Him.

Amen.