
Special Messages -- Worshipping God In Time

Psalm 98 | Sunday, December 30, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

SPECIAL MESSAGES

WORSHIPPING GOD IN TIME

Psalm 98

Let's pray. Father, help us. Open your word to us. Let us understand your truth. Speak to us. I pray, Lord, God, that anything and everything that would make it difficult for us to receive from you, you would just remove. You are powerful and I pray, Lord that you would do that in this moment, that you would help me to speak and all of us to receive and respond in faith as you give us understanding. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Psalm 98

Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things!

His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.

The LORD has made known his salvation;

he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.

He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;

break forth into joyous song and sing praises!

Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody!

With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD!

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it!

Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the LORD,
for he comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

Tomorrow is New Year's Eve. Many of you will stay up until midnight and watch the ball drop in Times Square. We will celebrate that another year has passed and a new year is beginning. It provides for us a new beginning. It provides for us an opportunity to reflect, to consider what God

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has done, to consider what God is doing, to consider where we are going in 2019, and what we are hoping God will do as we prepare our lives for what's to come.

Many of you will make New Year's resolutions. I encourage you to do that. I think it's a great opportunity for us to evaluate and to resolve to do what God would have us do. It reminds us that we are born into time. We are born into the timeline of history. We live our lives in time. Our lives are marked by time and in due time our time will be up. We will die and we will pass into the eternal. This psalm helps us worship the Lord in light of time. In fact, it provides for us a template, if you will, a pattern for worshipping God in light of the fact that we live in time.

The psalmist really gives us three ways to worship God. He talks to us about worshipping God for what he has done, then worshipping God for what he is doing, then finally, worshipping God for what he will do. It's an important concept for us because scripture talks to us about the way we approach God.

Francis Chan has written a new book and this is just one of his thoughts from his book, [Letters to the Church](#). He writes: "Since the beginning of time, there has been worship God loves and worship he rejects." Then he makes a rather startling statement. He says, "As I examine the state of the Christian Church today, I can't help but think that God is displeased with many of the churches in America, displeased with the worship in many of the churches in America."

Now, he goes on to give some explanation for that, but just think about this statement: There is worship that God accepts and worship that God rejects, worship that God is pleased with and worship which God rejects. Think of Cain and Abel in the book of Genesis, very early in the Bible. They come to worship the Lord. There is a worship offered that is accepted; there is a worship offered that is rejected. Then much of the Bible gives us instruction that's about the worship that God accepts. It's an important topic for us.

Eugene Peterson passed away this year and he stressed this a lot. He taught that the psalms give us a language for worship. They give us a vocabulary for prayer. They model prayer and worship. Really, if we will go there, we will be strengthened and encouraged and equipped to call out to the Lord. So, it is just wonderful for us to stop here right before the eclipse of another year to say, "Okay, let's think about living a life of worship to God as we begin a new year and see what we can learn from the psalms as we do this."

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Now, I want to confess to you that what I'm going to share with you in some ways just flows out of my own personal time with the Lord. I've been in Psalms in recent months, so I'm going to share with you from Psalm 98 and in some ways open the door a little bit to some of my own devotional time with God. Then I'll try to illustrate that from Psalm 99 and Psalm 100, just to give you a little bit broader look as we work at preparing ourselves to worship the Lord as we begin a new year. Are you ready? Alright.

I. We praise God for what he has done. Verses 1-3.

In the first three verses, the psalmist reflects on God, our Savior. We see the salvation of God. He says, "Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made known his salvation. He ends verse 3 with: "All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God."

If you were part of the people of Israel, you would be able to celebrate that here we were, this little bitty nation, hardly a nation that God set his love and affection upon. We were enslaved to a powerful nation, the superpower that ruled the earth in that time, and God showed his strength and his power on our behalf. He delivered us through this series of plagues, and the intensity of these plagues increased. God was pouring out this public demonstration of his power and holiness and love for us as his people, and that culminated in the Passover.

We know, as followers of Jesus Christ, that Passover is where a lamb was slain. Then there was a feast. But the blood of the lamb was put over the doorpost and death passed over the house with the blood of the lamb on the doorpost, signifying that in Christ and through his sacrifice we would receive the forgiveness of sin and the gift of salvation. So, the children of Israel would celebrate the salvation of God.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we reflect back. And if we desire to worship the Lord, we want this to be our anchor of our relationship with the Lord -- the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. God has provided for our salvation. It's very easy when we look back to be locked into a temporal thinking. Time plays a cruel trick on us, because in many ways it's all we can see. It's all we can think about. But in another way, we have this intense desire to experience the eternal and to be free of its grip.

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When we reflect back, it's easy for us to be just be filled with regret, or for our minds to go to what's happened, what we did, what was done to us, what we experienced. But are we able to see above that the salvation of God, the power of God, the holiness of God, and the love of God on our behalf? God wants us to be able to worship him with this as the foundation of our lives so that we can deal with what's gone before without being in bondage to what's gone before.

The cross is the foundation of all true worship. I think it's significant when the psalmist tells us, "Sing a new song," he is saying, "Don't let the salvation of God grow old in your heart. Don't let it just be matter of fact, something you are familiar with, just, 'yeah, yeah, yeah, here we go - Christmas again, Easter again, communion again.'" Is the love of God a fresh revelation in your heart? The incredible love of God, that his Son was given on your behalf, and that he offers you salvation? Grace! The gift of God, freely offers to you the forgiveness of sin and eternal life. We marvel at the love of God.

So we celebrate what God has done. He is a Savior. The gospel. The salvation. Our response is one of faith. Our response is one of trust. This is the way we praise God. We have language here that models worship for us. We worship God in his holiness. We worship God in his power.

Look, if you will, at Psalm 99. The very next psalm takes an aspect that's here in the first part of Psalm 98. It focuses on the holiness of God. This psalm really takes place in two parts. The first part celebrates the holiness of God. I just want to encourage you -- if you are at home alone and you open your Bible and you open a psalm like this, it's so helpful not think to about how much scripture you're going to move through. Don't think, "I've got to read the Bible in a year. I've got to read four chapters today and I've just got to get through this." No, stop and think and reflect and say, "Lord, would you pour these truths into my heart? Would you warm my heart with the power of the truth that you are holy? I am surrounded, I swim in an ocean that profanes your name day in and day out. The psalmist teaches me to adore you as the one who is holy."

The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble!
He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!
The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples.
Let them praise your great and awesome name!
Holy is he!
The King in his might loves justice. You have established equity;

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you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.

Exalt the LORD our God; worship at his footstool!

Holy is he!

It's an invitation for us to marvel at who God is. It is fearful. The elders prayed today, "Lord, let us love people, not fear them. Let us love you and fear you."

Now, if you're like me and you're reading Psalm 99 and the battering ram of the psalmist's words is knocking through the door of your heart with the holiness of God, you want to say, "I want to retreat to the backyard."

The second part of the psalm talks about priests and priesthood. "Moses and Aaron were among his priests." What is the connection there? It's saying, "Listen, how do we approach this holy God?" In the Old Covenant they celebrated that there was a priesthood and it was awesome. In the pillar of cloud he spoke to them. They kept his testimonies and there is this tension that unfolds here. He is saying that the priests help us approach God; God forgives us, but he also avenges wrongdoing.

Now, I don't want to confuse you, but I think this will help you. And if it doesn't help you, just take out your phone and do some email or something for a minute. When I go to the psalms, I think of three people. I go through this outline. You may want to write this down.

- First, I think of the human author. I say, "Lord, help me identify with the human author. What is he saying?" Sometimes that's just going to be a fit for me and he is going to help me express the emotions of my soul. So if I want to interpret the psalm correctly I need to try to identify, to understand what this human author was saying. The first person is the human author.
- For the second, I think of Jesus as the perfect man, holy and without sin, representing me, and that he prays this psalm for me. This is not a biblical revelation. This is just something I do to help me worship the Lord in the psalms. Sometimes I'll imagine (without really picturing physically) Jesus in the garden. He is going to the cross. My sin is poured out on him. He is crying out to the Father, but in his perfect humanity he expresses everything I'm unable and undeserving and inadequate to express, and he worships for me. He worships in my place.

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- So, the first is the human altar. The second is Jesus praying for me. Then Jesus goes to the cross. He pays for my sin. He is my high priest. He opens the way for me into the very presence of the Lord. Now, I pray the psalm in Jesus, in his righteousness. I have the liberty to come and be completely honest and pour out my heart to the Lord because of what Jesus has done. Okay? Turn your phones off.

Think in terms of: I don't want to just read this. I want to pray this. I want to worship God through this opportunity of worship, this model of worship here in the psalms. I want to pray it in Christ. So, as we go back to wrap up this first point in Psalm 98, we are worshipping God in his role as Savior. His holiness is satisfied in the cross, in the work of Jesus, and I receive the grace of God. This is my foundation for looking back at everything in my life. This is how I look back and I can say, "Lord, in all of my struggles, in all of my failures, in the stubborn sins of my life, and in the greatest moments of disappointment, I can worship you, because those are there anchoring me to the cross, where I am cleansed of my sin, and I receive your grace, and in my weakness your grace floods into my soul. Okay? We praise God for what he has done.

- II. We praise God for what he is doing, verses 4-6.

Here the emphasis from the psalmist is on God our King. He rules. The world may appear to be chaotic, but God is King. The picture is one of all-out praise to God.

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises!

Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody!

With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD!

Go for it and worship the Lord. Don't hold back. It's ironic that we had a Sunday where we scaled back, right? We didn't have the drums today. We had a little bit more of an acoustic set. That's okay. It's good for the variation and that's part of what God calls us to - just to worship him in every way imaginable.

Some churches have smoke machines. They have like strobe lights and flashing lights and smoke coming from the stage. We're as far out there as we really can get for us. It's always interesting to

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hear Christians talk about that. I really don't have a theological objection to doing that. I don't want us to do it, because I feel like it moves us away from something and toward something that isn't helpful in worship. It's just my subjective opinion. This is not hard truth. This is my best effort to lead this church pastorally.

My concern is that it moves us into kind of a concert mentality and expectation mentality, a performance mentality. The thing that I long for and I love is when together we sing to God and worship God. So we try to build that and provide opportunity for it and cultivate it, because that is the expression of worship that we really want to take place. Having said that, the principle of whatever fits your culture and whatever works -- just go for it.

We have our brother Adam here today, Adam Greenfield. It's great to have you here, Adam and Nikki. Adam served in this church for 15 years. He has said it felt like 45 at times, but 15 years. He is dear to us and he is about to get ready to take a position at a church not too far from here - New Covenant. We are praying for him. He is in the final stages of confirmation there. His dear wife, Nikki -- we love you so much. She is going through chemo and you are just constantly in our prayers. We love you dearly.

Perhaps Adam is going to have smoke coming from the stage at the new church, right? Strobe lights? He's going to wear tight leather pants, skinny jeans, sequin shoes, right? He's going to be out there, maybe. Who knows? Aren't you glad you came to church today?

Listen, people: Don't be Pharisees! Do not start criticizing churches that have strobe lights and judging the motives of their heart. Don't! It's just not necessary. I could give you a hundred reasons, but we are the body of Christ and it's sacred. Stop criticizing the members of your body, the body of Christ. Let Jesus deal with it. He is the head. He is capable.

When we do that, we damage fruit from those settings, and God has very strong words to say about that. This is a little bit of a scold here, and maybe I should temper that by telling you I've done this. I have done this many times. I am confessing to you a conviction to say that you just need to leave the subjective stuff to God and his people. I find it hard enough just to pastor this church. My hands are full right here. Yeah, you guys are difficult. You have no idea. I say that with all affection and love.

Okay, we are praising God for what he is doing. He is King. He is Lord. It may feel like your life is spinning out of control, but praise him. He is Lord of all. Just listen to Psalm 100. Don't even turn

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there. It's next, but just listen to this. For me this is a familiar psalm. It says: "Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! Serve the LORD with gladness!" When I was doing this in my devotion, this is what the Lord said: "Stop grumbling about the circumstances in your life and serve me with gladness. I have called you to be this, and this, and this, and this."

I would just say to you: Hear the Lord say, "Embrace your role, mom. Embrace your role, dad. Embrace your role, husband. Embrace it, father." Don't be full of remorse and regret about all that's happening. Say, "Okay, God, I'm going to count it a joy to serve you in this calling. You may be in the middle of a horrific trial and it's going to be a particular challenge to do that with integrity, but if we surf our way through life just wanting all of the circumstances and the people to be different, we are really not serving God with gladness. We have failed to see that he is the King! He can change your circumstances like that - just that quick. He just loves you so much that he's not doing it until his work is done. It may be even much bigger than you and your circumstances, right?"

This is a tough one for me, because when I sit down to spend time with the Lord, I see myself at the center of the page and everything revolving around it. "Maybe I'm doing something that's just so much bigger than you and you are out here on the edge but you have a part that I'm playing."

This really does offer a message of encouragement. If you are in a trial, I want to tell you this: God is in charge. He hasn't left you. It feels like he has left you. Physical pain and physical suffering and watching friends go through it is really difficult. Relational brokenness and all of the ways that we see destruction in our lives - it's so difficult. Emotionally, it feels like the presence of God has been drawn right away from us, and that God has gone and he has forgotten us.

Obviously, when we are dealing with people in those circumstances, we aren't going to beat them over the head and say, "Didn't you hear the message? God's in control. Serve the Lord with gladness. Stop your grumbling." No, that's not the message, is it? "Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!" Praise God for what he is doing. Your identity is found in him. He is King. He is Lord. Praise him for his salvation. Praise him because he rules.

III. We praise God for what he will do, verses 7-9.

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The focus on this last verse is that God is the judge. So, we are saying God is savior, God is king, God is judge. In this particular verse, we look toward the future when God restores everything and he judges in perfect justice and equity. This allows us sometimes to go back to #2 and to praise God for what he is doing, because the injustices of our lives, the injustices of our world will be made right. They will be made right, and the suffering and the pain will prove to be purposeful.

When you read the last part, he personifies creation – the mountains and the hills and the rivers praising God. We are moving toward this climactic restoration when everything will be made whole and renewed and restored. We worship God, who will judge all things perfectly. We worship God for what he has done. We worship God for what he is doing. We worship God for what he will do. He is the savior. He is the king. He is the judge. He is righteous. He is just. He is loving. He is faithful. He is powerful. He is good.

Between now and New Year's morning, I invite you to just sit down with this as a template and start with salvation. Do you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Have you received the gift of salvation? When you look back at your life, when you look back at 2018, ask the Lord for grace to see that as the foundation of all that's occurred. Then ask the Lord to give you insight and understanding into what he is doing right now in this moment -- that he rules and he reigns and that it's purposeful. And look forward with hope to his return when everything will be restored. What an opportunity we have to take a minute and reflect and prepare ourselves and to look forward. Let's bow our heads.

Father, I pray that you would help us to not resent time and the way it visits us with disappointment, difficulty. May we be more aware of you, past, present, and future, that we might worship you, and that our worship in Christ would be acceptable to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.