

Repeat the Sounding Joy

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[0 : 0 0] The Lord has come. Let earth receive her King. Let every heart prepare him room. Let heaven and nature sing.

! Let heaven and nature sing. Let heaven and nature sing.! If you're thinking it's absolute sacrilege to quote Christmas carols on the longest day of the year, you can blame, actually, whoever it was who decided that Isaac Watts' brilliant psalm should only be sung in the month of December, because that is what it is. That is why the great hymn writer wrote it, not to be a Christmas carol, but to be a version of this psalm published in a collection of hymns entitled The Psalms of David. Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord. We've seen so far in this run of Psalms 90 to 100 that that is really their big point. The Lord reigns. He is King, so take heart and rejoice in Him.

And tonight, Psalm 98 gives us all the more reasons to sing. And so, as we turn the diamond of these Yahweh Malak, Lord reigns psalms again tonight, what new angle does the psalmist give us on the Lord's reign? Well, tonight he gives us two words that sound to us like opposites, and he traces them back to their single source in God's character. Now, what does that mean? Just look in your Bible. Have a look where the psalm starts in verse 1, 2, and 3. There's a big Bible word we find repeated in all those opening verses, the word salvation. To see it, his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made known his salvation. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Here it is lit up in flashing neon lights. The Lord has saved. But have a look where the psalm ends in verse 9. What word is repeated in that verse?

The word judge. Judge. The Lord comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world. Salvation and judgment.

Judgment. We think of them as opposites. In lots of ways they are. But then, shouldn't we have two opposite responses to God in this psalm? But brothers and sisters, we are given only one response, and that's because those two seemingly opposite things, salvation and judgment, both flow from what one source in God. What's the one word repeated at the beginning and the end of this psalm, verse 2 and verse 9. The word righteousness. Righteousness. The Lord has revealed his righteousness in saving.

[3 : 3 1] He will reveal his righteousness in judging. And so, we and all the world should sing for joy to our righteous King, the Lord. That might jar with us as we come to God's Word tonight. Perhaps we're wondering, I know how I can rejoice and sing to God for his salvation, but how can I rejoice in God's judgment? How can I sing for joy in that? But that's where the psalm wants to get us. And so, let's see together how it gets us there this evening. Two points for us tonight, and thankfully, the easier one comes first. Verses 1 to 3. Sing to the Lord. He has shown his righteousness in saving his people.

Now, this psalm does the opposite of most sermons because it begins, look, with application, verse 1. Oh, sing to the Lord a new song. This is a psalm that wants to be sung. It calls us to sing because it really gives us something to sing about. And now, think about when we want to sing.

At no birthday party is complete, is it, without singing. Or we sing, don't we, for our team in the stadium, especially when they're winning? Some of the best singing that I've heard ever was at the weddings we had here last year. We lift our voices and make a joyful noise, don't we, when we have something to celebrate. We're not embarrassed, are we, to sing at a friend's birthday party? In fact, we'd be embarrassed not to sing. Well, what Psalm 98 gives us to sing about, friends, is something that we come to celebrate each and every Sunday. And when we hear what it is, how can we not sing joyfully to the Lord? For he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. What do we have to celebrate? The Lord has saved. The word for marvelous things is wonders, which is how the plagues are described in the book of Exodus and the victories that God wins for his people on the way to their home in Canaan. And so we're reminded how his strong and mighty arm, his salvation stretches way back into the history of his people. Those are ancient wonders, even for the people who first sung this psalm. But I think the psalm also has much more recent wonders in view. Remember, book four of the psalms is speaking to God's people returning from exile. That's about a thousand years after the Exodus generation. But like the Exodus generation, the exile generations had also been taken captive in another country, Babylon, until, that is, God gave the word.

And they were set free to return to God's place, to live as God's people, with God as their king. And so I think it is those new wonders that therefore call for a new song to be sung to him.

This is the salvation, even in their own lifetime, that the psalm is celebrating in verse 2 and 3. The Lord has made known his salvation. He's revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.

[7 : 25] He's remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

When we were sent far away, not only because we had been conquered by other kings, but because we had sinned against the king of kings, he did not forget us.

When he found us and our unloveliness and unfaithfulness were uncovered before him, he remembered his steadfast love and his faithfulness towards us.

He looked upon the shattered pieces of his covenant that we had broken on the ground, and he remembered his covenant promises and picked up the pieces and put them back together for us.

Brothers and sisters, we sing because God has saved us. Now, we've never been rescued from the exile as they were back then, but we have wonders still more recent to celebrate, do we not?

[8 : 34] That God, in his love and faithfulness, has rescued us from eternal exile through Jesus Christ. We had no way back because of our sin.

He would be right to cast us forever away from his presence. We could not fix what we had broken, so he sent his one and only son to be broken on the cross to fix the relationship for us.

A man dying on the cross does not look as impressive as a nation being set free from exile in Babylon, which in turn did not look as impressive as a nation being set free from slavery in Egypt.

But friends, what Jesus did on the cross is the wonder of all wonders. That the Son of God would take our sins on himself so that he could take the punishment for us, serve our sentence, die our death, take our place in the grave, so that we would be saved from eternity in outer darkness.

The exodus, the exodus, the exile, as great as those rescues were, their ancient history, you might even be sitting here tonight wondering what on earth we're talking about, but the rescue that God has done for us through Jesus lasts forever.

[9 : 58] It will not grow old or fade. It is ever new, so to speak. It is ever present. It is here for you tonight.

You can have it, that rescue. And it does not cost us anything. I wonder, did you notice the surprising way that the psalm describes our salvation?

Look at verse 2. Whose salvation is it? It's his salvation. It's God's salvation. Or verse 3. It's the salvation of our God.

Not, of course, because he's saved, but because he has done all the saving. Whose righteousness does it show, verse 2? Not ours, but his.

Whose love does it depend on, verse 3? Not ours, but his. Whose faithfulness? Not ours, but his. Friends, it is his salvation from beginning to end.

[11 : 02] God looked at us in our unloveliness, and he loved us. He saw our unfaithfulness and remembered to be faithful. He knows our unrighteousness. He knows our unrighteousness.

And he has given us his righteousness instead. Most wonderfully, most fully, and completely, finally, at the cross of Jesus Christ. What a great salvation.

We have to celebrate then, even bigger and even better than when God's people first sung this psalm. Oh, sing to the Lord a new song.

Sing it for the first time tonight. Friend, if you've never trusted in Jesus' rescue, receive God's salvation tonight through Jesus, and add your voice to the joyful noise of his people.

Jesus says there's even joy and celebration in heaven when that one thing happens, when one sinner repents. This is the millionth Sunday that you've been in church.

[12 : 07] In fact, there's never been, perhaps, a week or a month of your life that you haven't gathered with God's people to sing his praise. Do not let that praise grow old, dusty, worn in your mouth, in your hearts.

Sing to the Lord a new song. The hymn book of the church grows, does it not, in light of God's redemptive work. We keep our praise fresh as we behold the wonder of the cross afresh.

When we stand in awe of the marvelous things that he has done, then his praise is always new in our heart, isn't it? It's always new on our lips. But part of the reason to celebrate in these verses isn't only that the Lord has saved us as his people, but that the Lord has shown that he saved us to the nations.

Just see that. He's shown love and faithfulness to the house of Israel, but either side of that, in verse 2 and 3, we get a global perspective on that rescue. He's revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Now, I take it, in the psalm, that's referring to the great powers of their day, their captives in Babylonia, Egypt, Assyria, Syria, and other nations nearby, Edom, Moab, Philistia, Phoenicia.

[13 : 38] How could those other nations on the world stage not see and recognize the Lord's saving work on behalf of his people when he brought them home from the exile?

And, of course, that's much more the case today when there's barely a nation on earth where the gospel of Jesus hasn't gone. What a wonderful thing to remember that, even today, the world's most populous Muslim nation, and the gospel is present there in Indonesia, people hearing it for the first time in their lives.

What a wonderful thing. But, in particular, what God wants the nations to see is his righteousness in saving his family.

Verse 2. Now, we sometimes say, don't we, God is mighty to save. But what does it mean to say that God is righteous to save?

There's a story in the news about a year ago about an Australian man who was walking with his wife and children in North Queensland. They were on holiday together. They were there to see crocodiles in the river.

[14 : 49] It was a big adventure. But as they were walking alongside of the crocodiles in the river, suddenly the path gave way under the man's feet, and he slid down the bank towards the river.

And when his wife heard it, she reached down to him and grabbed his hand. But when the man saw that he was actually pulling her in, she was slipping as well, he let go of her hand and fell down into the river and was dragged under, and he died.

One of the man's friends wrote afterwards, Dave's final decisive act was to let go of Jane's arm when he realized she was slipping in, an act that likely saved her life.

Then in one world-shattering instant, he was taken by the crocodile. It's an awful story, isn't it? But the reason why it made the headlines was the heroism of this husband by doing the right thing for his wife and family, even though it cost him his life.

It's the kind of thing, isn't it, we'd all love to think that we would do in that position, but in our heart, we wonder if we really would. And we're in awe of this guy for having really done it.

[16 : 05] The world could not look away from his righteousness, which saved his family. And friends, I think that that is what verse 2 is getting at.

The Lord wants the world to see that he has done what is right by saving his family. He is a God who, like that husband, kept his vows even unto death.

In Christ, he has shown the world his righteousness that led him to rescue his people by leading him to the cross. Friends, if you're not a Christian here tonight, your faith isn't yet resting in Jesus.

God wants you to know that he never fails to do the right thing. And you can know that for sure because he sent his son to the cross for us.

Christ's death displays his rightness, his righteousness, in making good on his promises, even at the cost of his life.

[17 : 11] So you can trust him with your whole life. He does all things well. Whoever we are tonight, wherever we've come from, and however you're hearing this, we should be in total awe of God for what he has done.

And brothers and sisters, as we're reminded of that tonight, we can sing for joy to him, for the righteousness by which he has saved us. We can praise Christ for that one act of righteousness that has saved us from our unrighteousness.

We have someone truly righteous to sing to tonight. We have an amazing salvation to celebrate. And point two only cranks up the volume of our praise.

If we should sing to him for having shown his righteousness in saving his people, well, the psalm now says we should sing to the Lord even more because he will show his righteousness in judging the world.

At verse four, it begins that call again to sing to the Lord, but this time with massive gusto and loud music. Make a joyful noise to the Lord.

[18 : 28] All the earth literally shout or cheer to him. Break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Really sing, he's saying. Fill up your stomach.

Belt out praise to our God. Verses five and six make me really grateful for our praise team. We've got some wonderful musicians, don't we, in our church family who help us to sing like that.

Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre. That's like a guitar or a harp as we sang. With the lyre, the sound of melody, with trumpets and the sound of the horn. These are not quiet instruments, are they?

They are loud instruments. Make a joyful noise. Shout, cheer before the King, the Lord. Friends, this is a command to raise the roof.

We want our singing to be heard over the singing of Pataudri, over the TVs in the flats around. And we're going to see why the volume gets cranked up in a moment.

[19 : 30] But while we're here, again, let's not miss the application that the psalm front loads for us. What's the response God calls for? Well, it involves, doesn't it, making some noise when we come before the King.

You know, I heard something really sad the other day. Somebody said to me, some people don't sing. And they were talking about, here on a Sunday in church, some people don't sing.

Brothers and sisters, sing to the Lord a new song. If you can sing, and you're not singing, well, you're not responding to God as He calls and summons you to respond.

But can't we sing and make melody to the Lord in our hearts? Well, yes, of course, our praise should come from our hearts. It shouldn't just be words.

It's praise from within us. But if we think that that means that we can sing without making a noise, well, what do we do with this? Make a joyful noise.

[20 : 44] Break forth into joyous song and sing praises. If you were to ask maybe Christian friends in other churches, what's the free church known for?

One of the things they would say is, psalm singing. Right? We're known, aren't we? And we love the psalms. But brothers and sisters, if we love the psalms, let us not be content to be familiar with their content, but to love their style.

Let's not only take the encouragement that they offer, but let us obey their instruction. Not least, as regards our gathered worship when we come together before the Lord.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Do it with instruments. Do it loudly. Do it gladly. You know, I think we're in good voice, aren't we, as a church?

But I wonder if, with the possible exception of Angus, we all have a little bit more gusto to give. But why?

[21 : 54] Why do that? Because the Lord is going to do something so big that creation itself won't be able to restrain its voice. From mountains to seas, from rivers to land, and everything that fills them, all will find a voice to celebrate the Lord's coming righteous work.

Now, verses 7 and 8 are quite hard to picture, aren't they? And we've got to remember the Psalms are poetry. So, we're dealing with metaphors. Rivers don't have hands. The hills don't have vocal cords.

But before we write it off as only a metaphor, just symbolic, let's remember that, if anything, these verses are putting into words a reality so much bigger than these pictures can really say.

It's a reality that gets unpacked for us later in the New Testament. Remember, Paul writes in Romans chapter 8 that the creation waits with eager longing.

What is creation waiting for? Paul writes, the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

[23 : 13] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. Think of a new mum's joy, he's saying, when the baby is finally born.

just like that, after so long waiting, longing, groaning, finally, everything that was meant to be will come true in creation and the sea will roar, the rivers will clap, the hills will sing for joy.

Jesus says something similar as he enters Jerusalem in Luke 19. The whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord, peace in heaven and glory in the highest.

And some of the Pharisees said to him, teacher, rebuke your disciples. He answered, I tell you, if these were silent, the very rocks would cry out.

In the presence of the one who comes to lift the curse and set his creation free from sin, corruption, and death, how can the very earth itself keep from singing?

[24 : 36] And so those lines in verses 7 and 8, they are pictures, friends, but they are pointing, aren't they, to something that's so big we can barely even imagine it. Something that the psalm even struggles to put into words.

that there will be a great and awesome day when the Lord Jesus comes again. On that day, Mount Everest and the Pacific Ocean will dance and sing for joy.

Every knee in heaven and on earth and under the earth will bow, and we, his people, will join our voices with all creation and his whole church in praising him.

what is so big, so great, that all these things will respond like this to the Lord. Verse 9, for he comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity. This is what the whole crescendo of the psalm has been building up towards.

[25 : 43] It is judgment day. And again, we're met with the question, how? How can we celebrate the day when the risen, exalted Lord Jesus Christ will come to judge the living and the dead?

How can we not fear or dread that day? And again, brothers and sisters, it's because we are met with that word righteousness. He will judge the world with righteousness.

Friends, this psalm, and indeed the rest of the Bible, isn't worried about that day. Far less is it embarrassed by it. Indeed, it celebrates the coming judgment of the king who only ever does what is right.

It's really hard for us, but we have to grasp this about God, that he cannot do wrong. He cannot do wrong. It is impossible for him to sin.

We struggle to understand that because it is so far outside of our experience. No one had to teach us, did they, how to lie, steal, bully, manipulate.

[26 : 58] That's just what we started to do from the age that we were able to do it. But friends, the Lord does not know how to lie, steal, bully, manipulate.

He does not know how to do evil. His word even says he cannot even be tempted by evil. It's as alien to his nature as it is at home in ours.

There's a famous saying, isn't there? Absolute power corrupts absolutely. It doesn't come from the Bible. A man called Lord Acton said that. But I wonder if even unconsciously, unconsciously, we have begun to think of God through the lens of that saying.

He is all powerful and that makes us nervous, suspicious. But the Bible says it is not power that corrupts us.

It is us that corrupts power. Power doesn't make us do wrong. We use power to do what is wrong. And so as inevitable as it is that fallen human beings like me and you will misuse power, it is even more certain that a righteous God will only use his power to do what is right.

[28 : 19] Which is a long way of saying that if we are anxious about the Lord's judgment, it is because we doubt his righteousness. Or verse 9 uses another word, equity, which just means fairness.

Friends, the psalmist is saying that the Lord's judgment on our lives will be so plainly right in the end that not even the biggest toddler among us will be able to say it's not fair.

And so, brothers and sisters, if you have been saved and you praise God for his righteous rescue of you, then you can praise God for his righteous judgment too.

He is done right by you in keeping his promise to save, and he will do right by the whole world when he keeps his promise to rid it of corruption and free it from sin.

We do not have to worry that he will get it wrong. He will not pass one more or less sentence than is fully deserved.

[29 : 25] He will not be one degree harsher or more lenient than is absolutely right. Peter says in his second letter that according to his promise we're waiting for a new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells.

So, friends, think of it, the product of his righteous judgment is a righteous world where we who have saved people will live with him forever. The 24-hour news cycle will finally come to an end because there will be nothing bad anymore to report on.

And so now, as on that day, we can joyfully sing to him the words of Revelation chapter 19 in the New Testament alongside the words of Psalm 98 in the Old.

Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God for his judgments are just and true for he will judge what corrupts the earth with its immorality and he will avenge the blood of his servants.

Our praise to him now is just a drop in that eternal ocean of worship that will rise to him on the day when he comes again to judge the earth. But friends, if you've not yet received his righteous rescue, well, how can you rejoice in his righteous judgment?

[30 : 52] That's still the question for you. And the answer is you can't. You can't. Not if you think that when Christ judges the living and the dead, that means you too.

We've seen a resurgence, haven't we, the last few years in what's sometimes called cultural Christianity. Some very famous people have decided that Christian values are worth keeping.

The Bible is right on some things at least. But friends, even if you agree with God's verdict on what is right and wrong, but you haven't asked God to cover and forgive and deal with the wrong in you, you will be judged along with everything that you condemn.

What could be sadder than to long for a righteous world, but not be let in on that day, because you have not turned and put your trust in the righteous Lord who judges and saves.

So won't you do that tonight and be covered by Christ's perfect righteousness ready for that day, and tonight lift your voice in praise to him with us.

[32 : 08] Friends, our singing this evening is just the warm-up for the final act, when the church with all creation will sing for joy to our righteous King, the Lord. God, and so let's just take a moment to bring ourselves to God in prayer, before we do make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.

Let's pray together. Father, how we thank you for your righteousness.

Lord, every other compass is skewed, every other measuring line is frayed, but your standard is perfect, you are just and pure, you are holy.

Lord, there is none like ye. And Father, therefore, we thank you so much that you have revealed and provided for us a salvation of your very own, out of your love and faithfulness and grace, that you have indeed covered us with your perfect righteousness of your Son, if our trust is in him.

And so, Father, we pray that you would help us who have received that salvation to sing to you with joy this evening. And Father, we pray for those who as yet have not, and who look on your righteous works, your judgment with fear.

[33 : 35] Lord, take away that fear by providing a peace to them with yourself, by covering them with your spotless righteousness. Take away the crimson stain of sin.

Lord, by your Holy Spirit, do this, we pray, for our dear friends. Give us a new song, we pray. give us a joyful noise to make to you now, for we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Let's stand together. Amen.