

“The Mission of Praise”

Psalm 96

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(Lord’s Day Service, July 7, 2019)

Psalm 96

Worship in the Splendor of Holiness

¹*Oh sing to the LORD a new song;*

sing to the LORD, all the earth!

²*Sing to the LORD, bless his name;*

tell of his salvation from day to day.

³*Declare his glory among the nations,*

his marvelous works among all the peoples!

⁴*For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;*

he is to be feared above all gods.

⁵*For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols,*

but the LORD made the heavens.

⁶*Splendor and majesty are before him;*

strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

⁷*Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,*

ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!

⁸*Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;*

bring an offering, and come into his courts!

⁹*Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;*

tremble before him, all the earth!

¹⁰*Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns!*

Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved;

he will judge the peoples with equity.”

¹¹*Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;*

let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

¹²*let the field exult, and everything in it!*

Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy

¹³*before the LORD, for he comes,*

for he comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world in righteousness,

and the peoples in his faithfulness.

Introduction

Thailand is a country that our church has sent teams to about three times. There are 70 million people in the nation of Thailand. Out of the 70 million, 1.3% are believers who follow Christ – only 1.3%. This nation, as well as many other nations around the world, are daily and generationally raising up idol-worshippers – they declare the greatness of these idols, and they bow down, worship, and give offering.

In our trip to Thailand, those statistics became a soul and those numbers became a name. Her name is Nat as you can see on the screen. I met her along with the team that went to Thailand in 2017, she was one of the students that we invited. Currently, she's one of the leaders or officers at the ABAC University club called UiC or United in Christ, a Christian organization that we've been partnering with. She helped our team learn Thai and she helped organize things for our camp and for our workshop. Not only that, but we became good friends with her. I and a lot of the girls on our team befriended her, so we really consider her as a sister, as my younger sister. The only thing about Nat is that she was actually raised up as a Buddhist, and she's currently still a Buddhist. In this clip of her, we went to a temple and she took some time to worship and pray to this Buddha idol statue. Afterwards, out of curiosity, a lot of our team members asked her "What did you pray for?" She said "I wish and I prayed for a good life," and she gave an offering. As the team members witnessed Nat worshipping this idol it broke their hearts. A lot of them were in tears because the statistic of 70 million people in Thailand became a soul and the numbers became a name. What God taught us through this whole interaction is that with God, every soul is personal. He cares about all 70 million people. It's not a statistic, every person has a name. Not only in Thailand, but in Champaign. Not only in China, but in every corner of this community. This is what Psalm 96 is about.

A short summary of Psalm 96, God takes personally how He desires all peoples in all places to praise Him. However, when we look at Psalm 96, we must couple it with Psalm 95, which we read in our responsive reading today.

Psalm 95 is about how Israel rejected God, even though God loved them. In Psalm 96, we see the response of God – calling and reaching Israel and the world through praise. Before we get into it, I want to define what praise is. A lot of people think praising is only singing. Singing is part of praising, here the psalmist puts an emphasis on singing. But I think it's important to get the bigger picture. We'll see through Psalm 96 that as you praise with singing, it makes us declare the greatness of God and eventually live for God. So praise is all of it. It's singing, it's declaring, and it's living. Whether it's singing worship songs, studying, working, raising children, evangelizing, discipling, going abroad, or staying here. Our singing and living should go hand-in-hand – our singing empowers our living, and our living exemplifies our singing. Whether singing about the Gospel or living out the Gospel, both are means to praise God. That's the definition of praise, and we sing, we declare, we live until all peoples in all places are praising the Lord. Psalm 96 can be outlined in three parts: the command to praise (singing), the reason for praise (declaring), and the mission for praise (living).

I. The command to praise – Singing [1-2]

¹*Oh sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth!*

²*Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.*

We are commanded to praise and sing. Verse 1-2 repeats three times sing, sing, sing. So it's an imperative, it doesn't matter how we feel, we must sing. So, what does that entail? Four aspects of this command –

A. The object of our praise – to the LORD [1-2]

¹*Oh sing to the LORD a new song;*

sing to the LORD, all the earth!

²*Sing to the LORD, bless his name;*

tell of his salvation from day to day.

The first part is the object of our praise. When we praise and we sing, it is always to the Lord. Verse 1-2 doesn't just say "sing" but it says "*sing to the Lord,*" and it repeats three times. The object of our praise is the Lord, so it is a command, not a condition. Singing is not only when we feel like it, or when we have pitch-perfect tune. Whether we're at morning prayer with five people or the last night of Revival with a thousand people. We don't get a choice. Whether we have positive emotion, negative emotion, good or bad experiences, we are commanded by the object of our praise, always to sing to the Lord.

B. The nature of our praise – a new song [1]

¹*Oh sing to the LORD a new song;*

sing to the LORD, all the earth!

The object of our praise is to the Lord, the nature of our praise is a new song. Verse 1 says, "*Oh sing to the LORD a new song.*" We are to sing a new song to the Lord. Now, does that mean we need Hillsong to keep coming out with new albums? Not necessarily. We have to understand the bigger picture – that for every Christian, God has given us a new nature through Jesus Christ. We have the birth of the Spirit's nature, meaning that now, you and I have the ability to sing a new song. The implication is this: that we can sing the same song every single day, but there can be a freshness and newness. Why? We have a new nature that Jesus gives to us.

Some of you here are small group leaders and co-leaders. You're given the amazing task to lead praise – to play the guitar. The problem is, you can only play 2-3 songs all year for Bible study. But here you go! This verse can be your Biblical basis – "Hey small group members, you have a Spirit's nature. Even if I only sing 2-3 songs, you can be getting revival." There is a very Biblical place for new lyrics, new compositions, new melodies, and new styles because that is what God created music and song to do, to capture the affections and the expressions of our hearts.

However, as Christians we don't have to wait for new Christian albums to drop in order to sing a new song to the Lord. But a new song comes from our renewed nature to praise Him, a renewed perspective, a renewed appreciation of the Gospel and the works of God in our lives. As we grow and fight in our Spirit's nature, we will daily have a new song to sing. Every day, you can actually wake up singing a new song to the Lord. If you can only play 2-3 songs, this is your motivation to grow. As you learn more songs, as your fingers get all bloody, it is an affectionate expression of your members' hearts for the Lord. As they grow in their love for the Lord, a song captures it in a new way. That's why it's important to grow in that aspect. So, the command to praise entails the object, the nature, and next, the content of our praise.

C. The content of our praise – tell of his salvation [2]

²*Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.*

In verse 2, the content of our praise is to “*tell of his salvation.*” To tell of His salvation means that only God can save, that only God can fix, and that only God can change. Praising the Lord removes us as the savior and reminds us that Jesus alone can save, that only Jesus can fix my situation and change my circumstance. This is why we command our hearts to sing even when we don’t feel like it. We know that if we even sing one song, it can heal us and fix our broken families. Even one song can set us free from so badly wanting to change ourselves to our own picture. When we praise God, even when we don’t see change, the content of our praise brings us contentment as we tell of His salvation. The command to praise entails the object, the nature, the content, and also the frequency of our praise.

D. The frequency of our praise – from day to day [2]

²*Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.*

Verse 2 says, “*from day to day.*” The frequency of our praise is from day to day. In other words, our praise should be never ending. Putting it another way, we ought to have a reason to praise God every day. Everyday, we should wake up with the sense that there’s a reason to praise. This should encourage those of us that are faint-hearted, that are hopeless, because this is a promise of God that’s in Scripture, that God will give you a reason to praise Him every single day of your life. No matter how mundane your life is, you can wake up with this purpose – as the sun comes up, it’s a new day dawning, it’s time to sing your song again. That whatever may pass and whatever lies before me, let me be singing when the evening comes. That is our reality every day. This is the command to praise – it is to the Lord, with a new song that tells of His salvation and we are to praise Him day to day.

Application: Praise all the time to God

In short, the application is this – praise all the time to God. Sing to God no matter what. So what is one area in your life this summer where your praise has been conditional? For me, every summer I love going on our Summer Missions Program (SMP). But, one thing that is really hard for me is the humidity. I went to two places this summer, Myanmar and Thailand, some of the most humid places in the world! I went in the month that is most humid and I am the one who schedules this. When I’m there, all of a sudden, I don’t feel like praising, I don’t feel like singing. But what this passage is saying to me and to us is we are to put our praise on it. We’re to sing to the Lord a new song and to tell of His salvation no matter how we feel because it is a commandment to praise. Now as we do this, what is our reason for praise when you don’t feel like singing or praising? What if you’re going through a circumstance where it’s hopeless and there’s nothing in you that wants to sing to the Lord? What if we feel that we have no new song to sing? What does Psalm 96 say ought to be the reason for our praise?

II. The reason for praise – Declaring [3-6]

³*Declare his glory among the nations,*

his marvelous works among all the peoples!
⁴*For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;*
he is to be feared above all gods.
⁵*For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols,*
but the LORD made the heavens.
⁶*Splendor and majesty are before him;*
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

A. The greatness of God [3-4, 6]

³*Declare his glory among the nations,*
his marvelous works among all the peoples!
⁴*For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;*
he is to be feared above all gods.
⁶*Splendor and majesty are before him;*
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

Psalm 96:3 – ³*Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!*

Psalm 96:13 – ¹³*before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.*

Psalm 96:2 – ²*Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.*

The reason for our praise is to declare the greatness of God. Verse 3 says, “*Declare his glory;*” verse 4 says, “*For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;*” verse 6 says, “*Splendor and majesty are before him;*” We are to declare the greatness of God, “*for great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised.*” So whenever we don’t feel like singing and praising God, the reason for our praise is to declare the greatness of God. But what makes the Lord so great? Maybe you’re not a Christian and you’re wondering “What makes the Lord so greatly to be praised? Why are all these people worshipping God amidst their circumstances?”

Verse 3 tells us, “*Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works.*” Again Psalm 96 must be coupled with Psalm 95. Psalm 95 is about how Israel rejected God. Psalm 95:10-11 – God said, “*For forty years I loathed that generation and said, ‘They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways.’*” ¹¹*Therefore I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’*” There was a judgement upon Israel for rejecting God. However, there will be another judgement to come for you and I here on this earth. Psalm 96:13 says that God will come to judge the earth, that “*He will judge the world in righteousness.*” How will He judge? Verse 13 says He will judge the world in righteousness. Righteousness basically means those who are right with God – who believe in Jesus’ marvelous work, that he died on behalf of our sins on the cross. The marvelous work of God through Jesus Christ, that though we have rejected Him, He comes to have relationship with us, to give us His righteousness through Jesus Christ.

And this is why God is greatly to be praised. He did that with Israel, He will do that with you and I. Even though we reject God and we want nothing to do with God, He comes to us. He's on missions for us, He wants a relationship with us, and He wants to give the righteousness of Christ to us. So, our response is to bless His name. Psalm 96:2 says, "*Sing to the LORD, bless his name.*" John Piper says "when we bless God, we sing that song all the time, 'bless the Lord, oh my soul.'" When we bless God, it does not mean that God is better off or more glorified when we bless Him. Rather, when we bless God, it is an expression of our gratitude towards God, a declaration of His goodness and greatness. We sing "bless the Lord, oh my soul, worship His holy name; sing like never before. I'll worship your holy name."

This is the reason for our praise – to declare the greatness of God. What is your reason for praise? When do you give praise to God? Is it when you get what you want? Is it only when the picture of your future is coming to take place? Or is the reason for your praise because of the greatness of God, the marvelous works of Jesus Christ? This passage also talks about another reason for praise.

B. The false greatness of idols [5]

*⁵For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.*

Psalm 96:7-8 – ⁷Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! ⁸Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts!

Verse 5 says, "*For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols.*" The word idols in Hebrew is actually the word *elilim*, which means worthless. It's the opposite of the Hebrew word for God, which is *Elohim*. *Elilim* – worthless idols, *Elohim* – worthy God. So verse 7 says to this worthy God, to *Elohim*, we are to "*ascribe to the LORD.*" The word ascribe means to attribute, to credit to God His greatness. Verse 7-8 repeats three times, "*Ascribe to the LORD,*" give credit to the Lord, not to these worthless idols. Only God is worthy, not the *elilim*, the worthless idols.

We are not to ascribe glory and strength to idols. Instead, we are to ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name. Yet, we live in 2019 in a world where many are still declaring the false greatness of idols. I got to spend two weeks in Myanmar visiting one of our CFC alums, they've been out there about 7 years. Myanmar is just like Thailand. There are thousands of pagodas all over the country. No matter where you are, you can see these places of worship.

This next video clip is a video of one of these pagodas that we were able to visit, where hundreds and thousands of Myanmar come to gather to ascribe greatness to these idols. In these pagodas, 24/7 365 days a year, every single day, people are going, offering money, worshipping, bowing down. 99% of people in Myanmar give false greatness to these idols, they give worth and value to them.

Not only that, we got a chance to visit these monasteries where monks live. These monasteries take in orphans, children, and all peoples and are raising them to become future monks. In other words, to lead the next generation of Myanmar people into believing in the false greatness of these idols. So there's a nation here, and many nations across the world, where they are raising up generations of idol-worshippers, not Jesus-worshippers.

However, even in the midst of all of this, this still gives us reason to praise. Why? Because God is working to declare His greatness amidst all this, and that is the movement of God across the world. These idols are being exposed. As people in Myanmar sing out about how empty and dead these idols are, we've seen Myanmar people coming to the Lord, being saved and transformed and changed. No longer part of this generation that is raising idol-worshippers, but part of a generation in Myanmar raising up Jesus-worshippers. So, we have even more reason to praise.

Lest we think – this is an issue only overseas – in America, we may not have pagodas and temples, but we bow down and praise many things that we think are great and worthy and valuable. The *elilim*, the worthless idols of our culture, are captured in this article. I ran across this article where they interviewed 50 very successful executives. They were asked at the age of 70, “If you could relive your life, what are things you would prioritize differently?” These are the 8 things that they said: “I should've taken charge of my life and set my goals earlier. I would have taken better care of my health. I would've managed my finances better. I would've spent more time with my family. I would have spent more time on personal development. I would have more fun. I would have planned my career better. I would have given back more.”

None of these things are bad, they can be very helpful. However, they can also be harmful idols. These are good things we can pursue, but if we make these the reason for our praising God, that's where they become idols. If our attitude is, “God, I will only declare your greatness if my goals are met, if my health is good, if my family becomes the way I see it and picture it.”

We as followers of Christ have different reasons for praise. Even if none of these happen, we will still declare the greatness of God, and only then will we truly expose the false greatness of these idols. We are no longer in bondage and enslaved to these idols like in Myanmar and Thailand. But even if God gives us nothing, none of our goals are met, our family is a mess, we have no wealth, we got no vacations, He is still worthy of our praise because there is no one like our God. Therefore, we declare His greatness.

Application: Praise to declare all of God

So, Psalm 96 is about this command to praise and sing no matter what. It's to sing all the time to God. It gives us the reason for praise. The reason why we praise God is not that God will give us everything that we want, but it is to declare the greatness of God through Jesus Christ, and that the false greatness of these idols does not hold us down.

III. The mission of praise – Living [7-13]

*⁷Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!*

⁸*Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts!*
⁹*Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth!*
¹⁰*Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!
Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity."*

¹¹*Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;*
¹²*let the field exult, and everything in it!*
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
¹³*before the LORD, for he comes,
for he comes to judge the earth.*
*He will judge the world in righteousness,
and the peoples in his faithfulness.*

The mission of praise is to praise until all praise is gone. We not only sing, we not only declare, but we live. Our singing is not only individual, but it's missional. Our living is not just personal, but it's global. As we sing and declare, it's for a greater kingdom purpose, for the world to sing and declare the praises of God. That's the kingdom dream and our goal as kingdom workers. We see this in Psalm 96. We are to praise until all peoples in all places praise God.

A. All peoples [7-10]

⁷*Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!*
⁸*Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts!*
⁹*Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth!*
¹⁰*Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!
Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity."*

Verse 7 says, "*Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,*" and verse 9 says, "*Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!*" Verse 10 says, "*Say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns!'*" Although Israel rejected God, God used that to reach all Gentiles in the world, because God takes every single soul personally. To God, it's not a statistic, every soul matters. God will not rest until all peoples will ascribe to the Lord, will worship the Lord, and will say "The Lord reigns." But you and I, when we're honest with ourselves, we only care about a few people. Maybe a certain slice of society or certain people that are around us. But God wants all peoples to praise His name, the mission of praise is for all peoples.

Who is God calling you to this summer? And yes, it is Biblical for us to be strategic and focus on a few. Absolutely we must care for and focus on our families and coworkers. But what this passage is reminding us is that we still need to always be multiethnic, macroscopic, and theocentric. And I pray that CFC will not only care about CFC people praising the Lord, but we will care for all peoples. That we will not only care about what is going on overseas in Myanmar, and Jordan, and with S and K who are in Vietnam praising the Lord. But we will care about what is going on at CFC summer school, Sunday School, Salt & Light, our local schools, and also vice versa. That we're not only caring about what is going on here, but we care about the world, because the mission of praise is for all peoples.

B. All places [11-12]

¹¹*Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;*

let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

¹²*let the field exult, and everything in it!*

Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy

Verses 11-12 say, “*Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; ¹²let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy.*”

In other words, verses 11-12 talk about all the various places around the world. The heavens, the earth, sea, fields, forests. The mission of praise is for everywhere, all places, every corner of the earth. This mission of praise is not only for missionaries abroad in certain places where it might be less than 1% Christian, but for us who are missionaries across our cubicles. Your place in the classroom and research lab matters. Your place in your home matters, your place in your work matters because that is your mission field of praise. You are called to that place until that place praises God. So do not be the person to be worshipped there, but make it a place of worship. John 12:24 says, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*” In other words, when you get on the mission of praise, the question God has for you is – where is your ground? Where is your place where God is not being praised? Go there and live out the Gospel, be faithful and joyful, deny yourself until praise bears fruit in that place. When you do that, there is no mundane living. You can go into your work for five, ten, fifteen years and there is purpose there until that place praises the Lord. The mission of praise is all peoples, all places, and lastly, we do this until the whole world praises God.

C. All praises [13]

¹³*before the LORD, for he comes,*

for he comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world in righteousness,

and the peoples in his faithfulness.

Verse 13 says, “*for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world.*” Why keep singing? Some of you here, you're going through daily personal struggles, situations, circumstances. Why keep singing to the Lord a new song, why fight for a new song every day, why keep declaring the greatness of God when you're not getting what you want? Why wake up everyday and declare

“You are good. You are great”? Why keep living missionally versus selfishly? Why not just live every day doing whatever you want? Because Jesus will come again. That’s what verse 13 is saying. Because God will come again soon to judge who is right with God, who has the righteousness of Jesus Christ, who is praising God with singing, declaring, and living. God will come again soon. We don’t know when, but the Bible says Jesus will come again soon.

Application: Praise until all praises God

Until all the world praises, CFC, we have more kingdom work to do. We have more kingdom living to do. Until all peoples all places are singing, declaring, and living for Christ we need to keep going. Is He worthy of this? That’s the question that keep ringing through my mind as we’re reading Psalm 96. Is He worthy of all blessing and honor and glory so that every people and tribe, every nation and tongue will praise the Lord? And I think what Psalm 96 is moving us to respond is yes because Jesus is coming soon. So let us be on a mission of praise.

Conclusion

At the end of our Thailand trip, we met Nat and the other leaders and officers that we worked closely with for a farewell dinner. In this leadership group of Thai students, half of them are Buddhist and half of them are Christian. Nat, as I shared with you, she’s a Buddhist. At the farewell dinner, this leadership group surprised us by singing us some songs.

In this clip you will see that Nat, though she’s not a Christian she sings praise songs to our team. Nat, as well as the other leaders, sang us two songs in the end: I Can Sing of Your Love Forever and 10,000 Reasons. I think we all know the lyrics to those songs. Nat, who is a Buddhist, sang these words, “10,000 reasons for my heart to find. Bless the Lord, oh my soul. Worship His holy name, sing like never before. I’ll worship your holy name.” As our beloved friend, Nat, who is a Buddhist, sang and declared the greatness of God with her lips, what it did to our team is it blessed us and it moved us deeply, to the point of tears.

The reason why I am sharing this is – how much more as Christians, who have the Spirit’s nature, are we able to sing a new song every day. When we sing even if we don’t feel like it, when we declare the greatness of God even if we don’t get what we want, and when we live out the Gospel to all peoples and all places. As we praise God in this way, how much more will all the peoples and places be blessed and moved to praise God with their lives, and to be touched. So pray for Nat that she will one day not only sing with her lips, but with her life. And I pray that every single one of us will keep praising until the whole world praises God because Jesus will come again.

What we see in this passage is a clear promise of God, that He will give you a new song to praise Him from day to day. You can bank on it. It’s a promise of God that you will daily declare the greatness of God and daily live for Christ. A lot of us, when we look at our lives or our summer or our year, you realize “I can’t do that. The only song that I can sing are old songs. My heart is old. I have circumstances and situations that make me feel like not singing.”

But the promise that we see in the Scripture is that the greatness of God will do this. That He will resurrect and renew your heart so that your heart and your life will bless His name, will exclaim and

declare that “God is good, and God is great, and God will do this. For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised.” God will do it for His glory. God will do it because He is great. So our response is to sing to the Lord daily, declare His greatness and live out the Gospel in the places that God has called you, until the world sings and declares and praises His name. And my response and the Psalm 96 response must be “What a life and what a joy!” So in this moment before we close with a song, praise Him in your heart now, and sing a new song to Him, declare your affections and your expressions, even if you have nothing. Say, “God, renew my heart. I want to sing a new song to you.”