**Joyful praise in the Lord**

Text: Psalm 47

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**Scriptures:** Ephesians 4:4-10; Psalm 47

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 84, 47, 321, 427

**Series:**  Kingship Psalms (#2)

**Theme:** The Sons of Korah call for loud songs of joyful praise to the LORD God who is the exalted victorious King who rules over all the nations.

**Proposition:** Sing Joyful praise to Christ, the victorious exalted King!

**Introduction**

My wife Jenny once relayed some very sad news to me which I found hard to cope with and to accept. In her desire to reach out to me and to offer help to me in my pain she said: “*What do you need now?*” My reply was just one word: “hope”.

To live this life well, we all need hope. There can be times in our lives when it can seem to us that there is little, or no hope left. God’s powerful Word is a profound source of hope, as I hope (!) you’ll see as we open up Psalm 47.

1. **A psalm of the Sons of Korah**

You may well have heard of the Australian band with the name ‘Sons of Korah’ who have sought to express the Biblical songbook with a ‘dynamic and emotive new musical expression’ through their contemporary style of music which is informed by the theology and composition of the psalms themselves. You may also know that the leader of this group, Matthew Jacoby, studied at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong.

The title of Psalm 47 “To the choirmaster. A psalm of the Sons of Korah” refers, not of course to the contemporary Australian music group, but to the Old Testament people referred to as the “Sons of Korah”. There are 10 other psalms attributed to these composers (Ps 42, 44, 45, 46, 48, 49, 84, 85, 87, 88). During the reign of King David, some of the descendants of Korah became leaders in choral and orchestral music in the tabernacle.

Heman, the author of Psalm 88, was a grandson of Samuel the prophet (1 Chronicles 6:31-38; 1 Samuel 1:1,20) and a descendant of Korah. Korah himself lived seven generations prior to Samuel. He was a Levite – the tribe which the Lord had set apart to serve in the tabernacle (Num 16:9).

Korah gathered a group of 250 men together to challenge the right of Moses and Aaron to the priesthood (Num 16). The Lord then spoke to Moses commanding him to separate the community in the desert from the rebellion of Korah and his associates because they would come under his fierce judgement. In challenging God’s appointed leaders, they had ‘*despised the Lord*’ (Num 16:30). As a result, “*the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods. And fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 250 men*” (Num 16:32,35).

However, the children of Korah, who may perhaps have been too young to understand their father’s rebellion, did not die (Num 26:11; 1 Chron 9:19). God had a purpose for the line of Korah. One of the characteristics of the Psalms attributed to Korah’s descendants is the expression of great gratitude and humility before an awesome mighty God. Their psalms convey a keep longing for the Lord and a sincere devotion. For example:

* “*As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God*” (Ps 42:1b).
* “*Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love!*” (Ps 44:26).
* “*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*” (Ps 46:1).
* “*How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!*” (Ps 84:1).

In the English language we have an idiom “a skeleton in the closet”. It conveys the idea of a human corpse kept concealed for so long that the flesh has decomposed leaving only bones. This phrase describes an undisclosed fact about someone which, if revealed, would damage other people’s perception of them. Many families have “skeletons in their closets” – dark secrets of past events which they would like to remain hidden. The Sons of Korah had a dark history because of the rebellion of Korah himself, yet this was no secret. Scripture clearly reveals both the sin of people, as well as God’s fearsome judgement. However, the Bible also clearly reveals God’s grace in working good in families even when there is great sin, loss, hurt and shame in the past.

Psalm 27 is a psalm of the Sons of Korah, it is also a psalm of joy in the Lord’s victory.

1. **A psalm of joy in the Lord’s victory**

We are familiar with clapping our hands as an expression of applause, often for a musical or dramatic performance. In Scripture, clapping hands conveys a range of meanings, including rejoicing and approval but also mockery, judgement or praise, depending on the context. For example:

* Rejoicing: “*Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together*” (Ps 98:8).
* Mockery: “*All who pass along the way clap their hands at you; they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem*” (Lam 2:15).
* Judgement: the east wind “*claps its hands at him and hisses at him from its place*” (Job 27:23).

It’s very clear from the opening words of our text that this is a psalm of joy: “*Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!*” (v1). This joy is in the Lord’s victory over the enemies of His people Israel when Canaan was conquered and occupied. This land was the promised inheritance of Abraham’s descendants (17:18); in this psalm referred to as the ‘*pride of Jacob*’ (v3). The complete victory of the Lord in his work of conquest on earth is signalled by the phrase “*God has gone up with a shout, with the sound of a trumpet*” in verse 5. The joyous tone of this psalm is reflected in the trumpet sound.

The trumpet is a musical instrument which, in Scripture, is symbolic of a range of meanings including a call to action (e.g. Num 10:1-10), a call to assemble, or a warning heralding judgement (e.g. Joel 2:1; Zech 9:14; Rev 8:7). The feast of trumpets (Lev 23:23-25; Num 29:1-6) was an annual Memorial Day each year in the Jewish calendar. It was a time when the Lord’s victory in bringing Israel out of captivity was remembered and His future revelation anticipated.

Here in Psalm 47, the trumpet sound is a joyful, a festive noise both of remembrance and of future hope. The expression of joy in this psalm comes not only through the clapping of hands and the symbolism of the trumpet but very much in the singing of praise. If you count, you’ll find the phrase ‘*sing praises*” 4 times in verse 6, again in verse 7, in addition to the call to ‘*Shout to God in loud songs of joy*’ in verse 1. The much-repeated Hebrew verb translated ‘sing praises’ literally refers to the playing of a musical instrument in worship, usually a stringed instrument (e.g. Ps 33:2; 98:5; 144:9; 147:7) but also a percussive one (e.g. Ps 149:3). The use of this verb is frequently extended to refer to singing to musical accompaniment, as in this psalm.

This is a psalm of joy in the Lord’s victory, especially expressed through singing praises, supported by musical instruments. It is also a psalm of praise for Christ’s rule.

1. **A psalm of praise for Christ’s rule**

The Lord whose victory is joyfully celebrated and praised by the Sons of Korah in Psalm 47 is enthroned as the ruler, not merely of the Old Testament conquered land of Canaan; He is the ‘*great King over all the earth*’ (v2). He is the God who is ‘*the King of all the earth*’ (v7a). He is the One who gathers the ‘princes of the peoples’, literally the ‘noble ones’, ‘the willing ones’ so that they are part of the covenant community of the people descended from Abraham (v9a). This God is not a local mythical deity, He is the Almighty, the Most High, to whom belong the ‘*shields of the earth*’ (v9). This phrase refers to all the kings or ‘guardians’ of the different nations of the world, all of whom are subject to the rule of the Great King, irrespective of whether they acknowledge Him or not.

In the light of the New Testament, we can see that this is a psalm which foreshadows the rule of Christ, the King. He is the One who has ‘gone up’, having first ‘come down’ to this earth to conquer, not the land of Canaan, but sin and death itself. We heard of the descent and ascent of Christ from our earlier reading from Ephesians 4:4-11. There the Apostle Paul uses the Old Testament image of a victorious human king and applies this to Christ’s victorious ascent into heaven after His defeat of the spiritual forces of darkness at the cross. Whilst Psalm 68 describes the victorious One receiving gifts from men as tribute, Paul pictures Christ sharing the benefits of His conquest with those who were formally captives.

Christ is the One who has been lifted up as the Victor because of His willingness to humble Himself, becoming obedient, even to the point of death (Phil 2:8). “*Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Phil 2:9-11). Christ is the King who will be heralded by the seventh trumpet as revealed in Revelation 11:15 where loud voices in heaven say: "*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever*." This is a psalm of praise for Christ’s rule as King.

We do not know how much the Sons of Korah understood of the unfolding plan of God’s salvation. They like the other Old Testament saints “*died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar*” (Heb 11:13). Yet God caused them to write some of the inspired words of Scripture in the psalms ‘*for our instruction**that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope*’ (Rom 15:4). Despite a very dark family history, the Sons of Korah had hope that the day would come when people from all the nations would willingly come under the rule of the ascended Great King. Their hope was grounded in the past mighty acts of God. Their hope found expression in joyful praise in which they encouraged the whole covenant community to join as the clapped their hands in exuberant delight.

I think that you, like me, also need hope. Hope in Christ the Victor who rules with perfect love, wisdom and strength. Believe in Him, Trust in Him, Praise the Risen King who said: “*Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*" (Matthew 11:28-30). Sing joyful praise to the Lord.

AMEN.