**Global Evangelism**

Text: Psalm 96

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**Scriptures:** Matthew 28:16-20; Psalm 96

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 359, 22b, 96, ‘Facing a task unfinished’

**Series:** Kingship Psalms (#5)

**Theme:** The psalmist calls God’s people to sin praises to their covenant Lord, speaking daily of His salvation, declaring His glory

**Proposition:** The Lord calls us to joyful praise, worship and global evangelism

**Introduction**

There was a large crowd that day and a lot of noise as people shouted, horns and trumpets sounded, cymbals crashed together, and loud music was played on harps and lyres. In full public view, was the King over a small nation, singing and dancing, dressed in the robes of a priest. The location was the small city of Jerusalem. The occasion: when Ark of the Covenant of the Lord was brought in and set inside the tent which David had prepared for it (1 Chron 16:8-36). On that day, David appointed a song of thanksgiving to be sung with words which are similar portions of several psalms, including the focus of our attention this afternoon – Psalm 96.

This psalm is about a King who reigns but not a small king over a small nation. He is the covenant God of Israel, the God who made promises to David’s ancestor Abraham saying: “*in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*" (Gen 12:3). God’s covenant promise was global and would reach to every people group on this planet.

When words similar to Psalm 96 were sung in thanksgiving as the visible presence of the Lord, represented by the Ark of the Covenant, entered Jerusalem they acknowledged that their Lord was the King over the whole universe. You can see the cosmic scope of this psalm in the frequent references to ‘all the earth’, ‘world’, ‘the nations’, and ‘all the peoples’. We’re going to see that the focus of this psalm is declaring the Kingship of the Lord over the whole universe under three headings:

1. Declare salvation to all people
2. People, worship the Lord as King!
3. Everyone, judgement is coming!
4. **Declare salvation to all people! (v1-5)**

Back in Jerusalem that day - when the Ark of the Covenant came into the city, David appointed Asaph and his brothers to sing a song of thanksgiving to the Lord God (1 Chron 16:7). Psalm 96 calls the whole earth to sing to the Lord, to speak daily of His victory over the enemies of His people and to recount to everyone His wonderful activity as he fulfils His covenant promises. “*Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous works among all the peoples!*” (Psalm 96:1-3). To declare the glory of the Lord is to show forth His excellence, His absolute perfection.

Why such universal praise to the Lord? Because He is like none other. He is the Greatest. He is splendid, majestic, strong and worthy of reverence. These glorious truths are expressed in verses 4-6: “*For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendour and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary*”.

Have you ever told someone that you are a Christian and that your faith in Christ Jesus as your Lord and Saviour means everything to you and has radically changed your life? (or words to this effect). Have you ever had a response from someone like “*That’s really good for you. I’m glad that you have found something that works for you. I do respect your beliefs – just don’t go pushing them on anyone else*”. The worldview behind this kind of statement is that there are many different truths, many equally valid beliefs and that everyone needs to keep their own views to themselves.

Faith in the One True and Living God has always been opposed by many people because it is the exclusive truth. Only God, the Creator of the Universe who is Almighty and victorious in rescuing a people for Himself is worthy of universal praise. All other ‘gods’ are fake. They are not gods at all. In the words of this psalm, they are ‘*worthless idols*’ (v5).

The call of this psalm is to declare the glory of the Lord among the nations. The word ‘nations’ here (Hebrew ‘goy’) refers to Gentile peoples who did not know the covenant God of Israel. The call is to make known to those who do have not heard about who God is and what He has done. Old Testament Israel was not to be silent about their God but to ‘tell of his salvation’, ‘to declare his marvellous works’.

Putting this into New Testament terms, they were to be **evangelical**. As a ‘*light for the nations*’ (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; 60:3) their lifestyle of willing obedience, holy conduct and heartfelt worship of their Lord was to be attractive. This was to be in stark contrast to the wickedness, ungodliness and idolatry of the nations around them. The consequence was to be that people would be drawn to the glorious light of the Lord as His covenant blessings on His people revealed His great love, kindness, and constant faithfulness.

Well, you don’t have to read much of the Old Testament to see that Israel was a very dim light at best and she was often the same as, or worse than, the unbelieving nations around her. Jesus fulfilled the covenant responsibilities which Israel, which people like you and me, fail to do. He is the Light of the world (John 8.12).

Jesus teaches His willing subjects to be attractive to those who do not know Him by reflecting His great light: "*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 5:14-16). Brothers and sisters: the way we live can be a powerful attraction which draws people to the One we live for. Or, like much of Old Testament Israel, for most of their history, if our lifestyles are marked by wickedness, ungodliness and idolatry, we repel people and make service of King Jesus look like misery.

However, sometimes Christian think that **all** we are called to do is to live holy lives before an unholy world and our task is done. The words “*we do good…so that by our godly living our neighbours may be won over to Christ*” in Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 32 can give this impression if read in isolation from Scripture. Psalm 96 corrects the untruth that godly living is the complete ‘evangelism package’.

The word ‘tell’ in verse 2 literally means ‘gladden with good tidings’. We could translate the verse this way ‘*proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day*’. The word ‘declare’ in verse 3 means to ‘recount’. To recount is to ‘describe particular events or experiences or to tell a story’. The plain truth of Scripture is that you cannot tell the story of the gospel without using words. Godly living is not sufficient. St Francis of Assisi is reported to have said “*Preach Jesus, and if necessary, use words*." There is truth is this. If our lives don’t show the light of the gospel, then our declarations about Christ are unlikely to be well received. However, if we do not proclaim the gospel with our mouths then people will not hear the good news.

1. **People, worship the Lord as King! (v7-12)**

“Ascribe” is not a word I use every day in conversation, I doubt if it’s part of your regular vocabulary either! Look in verses 7 and 8 and you can see this word repeated three times. In Hebrew this is simply the word ‘give’. The reason that it’s translated ‘ascribe’ is because we do not actually give to the Lord glory and strength! He is already absolutely glorious and infinitely strong. There is nothing we can give to Him that He doesn’t already have and everything that we do have belongs to Him anyway! To ‘ascribe’ is to ‘state emphatically or publicly’. The call of this psalm is for people groups everywhere to state emphatically and publicly that the Lord, the covenant God of Israel, is full of glory and strength.

The call of this psalm is also for people groups everywhere to bring an offering to the God (who has no need of what we have) and to come to Him. The New Testament teaches us that we ourselves are to come as ‘living sacrifices’ to Him (Rom 12:1). Listen to verses 7-9 again “*Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! Worship the LORD in the splendour of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!*”.

In Old Testament times God’s people gathered for worship in the Temple in Jerusalem where His presence dwelt (1 Kings 5:5). His perfect holiness was represented by the sacred space of the Holy of Holies in which the Ark of the Covenant was placed. Notice in this psalm that it is **not only** the people of Israel who are called to worship the Lord ‘*in the splendour of holiness*’, it is the ‘*families of the peoples*’. This psalm is expressing in Old Testament terms the reality of the promise which the Lord made to Abraham “*in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*" (Gen 12:3). Here people from all nations are called to worship the Lord.

This is a reverent congregation who ‘*tremble before him*’. This is a joyful congregation whose gladness is reflected in the whole universe. “*Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy*”. This is a congregation who go out from their assembly and proclaim to those who do not worship with them “*The LORD reigns*” (v10). Here are three words which would be good for each one of us to broadcast after we have left this assembly: “*The LORD reigns*”. There may be some timely opportunities to say this to people you meet around the time of the upcoming general election. We would need to say a bit more to explain what this means. For example:

The temple where we worship the Lord in the splendour of holiness is not in Jerusalem. It is not in your local church building either. Jesus Christ is the new temple. He is the High Priest. He is the sacrifice. He is the King who reigns over the whole universe. This Jesus is the ultimate offering to the Holy Living God. He laid down His life so that families of peoples from all over this world could live in Him and have access to the splendour of Divine holiness. God the Father raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places and he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (Eph 1:22-24).

In the church today the reality of the Kingship of the Lord Jesus is seen as people gather together by God’s grace as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, so that they may proclaim the excellencies of him who called them out of darkness into his marvellous light. Brothers and sisters, once we were not a people, but now we are God's people; once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10).

We are called to declare this to the nations. This does not mean overseas travel! The Lord has brought the nations to us. Global evangelism starts on your street, in your workplace, at your school, university, polytech or training institution. It starts where you already are. It is an outworking of our congregational worship together. Brothers and sisters, ‘*say among the nations, “The Lord reigns”*’ How desperately people around you need to hear you say that. Will you do so? You see there’s an urgency, because the Lord is coming…which brings us to our last point.

1. **Everyone, judgement is coming! (v13)**

Here’s a question that you and I could ask people: ‘Are you looking forward to the day of judgement?’ Here are some possible replies:

* Day of judgement? I don’t believe in that old wives tale!
* Yes, I’m not a bad person, there are many worse than me, I’ve done more good than harm. I’ll be ok. God will let me in.
* No, I know that I’ve done bad things, but I just focus on my life here and keep the thought of a coming day of reckoning out of my mind.

It is interesting to recognise that apocalyptic movies and books are very popular. The prospect of a future day of global calamity fascinates people. It resonates within us. We have a sense that it is coming. The Bible says that God has put eternity into man’s heart (Eccl 3:11).Deep within us we long for a future that is better than the present. Yet we know innately that something catastrophic looms over us.

That ‘something’ is the coming of the Lord Jesus who reigns and who will sit on his glorious throne (Matt 25:31), before Him will be gathered all the nations (v32) and He will judge the living and the dead (1 Peter 4:5). It is to this future event that the last verse of Psalm 96 points: “*for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness*”. The repetition of the phase ‘for he comes’ emphasises the certainty of the coming judgement. We need to highlight this to others when we are:

1. Telling of the Lord’s salvation from day to day (v2)
2. Declaring his glory among the nations (v3)
3. Saying among the nations “*the Lord reigns*” (v10)

Evangelism without the truth of the coming day of judgement is dangerously, unlovingly, incomplete. As the Apostle Paul spoke to the Athenian Greeks who only knew about false gods, but not the Lord, so we need to speak to those around us who do know the Lord. Paul’s words give us a helpful pattern to follow: **“***The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead*." (Acts 17:30-31).

Christ, the reigning King will judge the world according to the perfect standard of God’s righteousness which is revealed to us in His law in Scripture. Christ, the reigning King will judge the world in faithfulness. He will say to those who have come to Him and entrusted themselves in faith to Him words like these “Not guilty” because my life paid for their life. My perfect righteousness is theirs! Enter into the fullness of my kingdom with me! He will say to those who have not come to Him words like these: “depart from me, you are guilty”.

People around us need urgently to hear about King Jesus. They need to hear from us about His glory, His strength, His beauty, His holiness, His salvation and His judgement. He tasked each one of His disciples with these words: "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*" (Matt 28:18-20).

If you are not yet a disciple of Christ, know that He is coming, He is coming to judge the earth. You may well think that you have done more good than harm in your life, but you have broken God’s perfect law. The consequence of this apart from Christ, is eternal death. You may think that by putting the thought of the coming day of judgement out of your mind that it will just go away. Ostriches with their head in the sand think like that! Face the reality of what is unavoidable for everyone: **“***It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment*” (Heb 9:27). Come to Christ today and be rejoice in Him. He alone delivers from the wrath to come (1 Thess 1:10).

If you are a disciple of Christ today, hear the call on your life to: Tell of the Lord’s salvation from day to day (v2); Declare his glory among the nations (v3); Say among the nations “*the Lord reigns*” (v10). Engage yourself in global evangelism here and now.

AMEN.