**The Lord marvellously saves**

Text: Psalm 98

Occasion: Lord’s Supper

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**Scriptures:** Romans 8:18-25; Psalm 98

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 98b, 335, 262, 432, 330

**Series:** Kingship Psalms (#7)

**Theme:**  Joyful praise to the Lord because has made his salvation known to the nations and Creation eagerly awaits the future coming of the Lord in righteous judgement over the earth.

**Proposition:** Sing joyful praise to the Lord because He has made His salvation widely known and He is coming to judge the earth with righteousness.

**Introduction**

Music is powerful. Familiar tunes and lyrics evoke memories and stir our emotions. Some of us used to have vinyl record collections of our favourite music, or a cassette tape library or more recently a collection of CDs. Now many people source the sounds they listen to from digital services like Spotify.

Music has a long history in the unfolding of God’s plan throughout Scripture. One of Lamech’s sons, Jubal was ‘*the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe*’ (Gen 4:21). Songs of victory feature prominently in the Bible e.g. the defeat of Pharaoh at the Red Sea (Ex 15:21); the conquest of Jabin, king of Canaan (Judges 5); the victory of Christ over sin and death (Rev 5:9-10).

Psalm 98 begins with the words: “*A PSALM. Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvellous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him*” (v1). The psalmist applies the physical human characteristics of a strong hand and arm (anthropomorphisms) to emphasise that it is God’s power alone which has won the victory. The marvellous salvation which this psalm celebrates is entirely (100%) the work of the Lord alone.

The phrase ‘sing to the LORD a new song’ is not unique to this psalm. It also occurs in Psalms 33, 40, 96, and 149 as well as in Isaiah 42:10. Why sing a new song? Psalm 40 points us to the reason where David writes: “*I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God*”.

A new song arises from a new revelation of God’s victorious, saving grace. When the book of Revelation symbolically identifies the whole number of those saved - the 144,000 who are delivered by the Lamb of God – they sing a new song (Rev 14:3).

Let’s look now at the saving grace of the Lord from Psalm 98, under three headings:

1. The Lord’s salvation has been revealed in the past
2. The Lord’s salvation is the reason for joyful praise now
3. The Lord’s salvation will be completed in the future
4. **The Lord’s salvation has been revealed in the past (v1-3)**

Morse code is a telecommunications method using different signal durations (dots and dashes) to convey information. It is named after Samuel Morse, the inventor of the telegraph. There is a Morse code sequence that many people know about. It is the emergency distress signal often used by sinking ships in earlier times: dot, dot, dot, dash, dash, dash, dot, dot, dot. The three dots form the letter ‘S’, and the three dashes, the letter ‘O’. The distress sequence is then SOS which is often associated with the phrase ‘Save our souls”

Salvation is the dynamic action of delivering others from serious peril. In Scripture it refers to the powerful work of God in rescuing His people. The words of the psalmist in Psalm 98:2-3 refer firstly to the Old Testament acts of God in rescuing Israel: “*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*” (v2-3).

When the Lord delivered the Israelites from captivity in Egypt, He did marvellous things including:

* His power was demonstrated in the ten plagues which resulted in Pharaoh eventually letting the people go.
* His parting of the Red Sea to let His people through, but stopping the Egyptians in their chariot tracks and then destroying their army.
* His guidance of His people with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.
* His miraculous provision of water and food in the wilderness.
* His victorious command of His people as they were enabled to conquer the promised land.

The Lord had earlier answered the ‘SOS signal’ of His oppressed people whose ‘*cry for rescue from slavery came up to God*’ (Exo 2:23). In Exodus 2:24-25 we read that “*God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel- and God knew*”.

When Scripture records that ‘God remembered’ (e.g. Gen 8:1; 30:22; Acts 10:31) this does not imply that before this God had forgotten. The Lord God never forgets anything. He does not suffer from any memory loss as people like me and you do at times. Interestingly the Bible doesn’t say that He forgets our sins, but rather that “*as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us*” (Psalm 103:12). When we read that ‘God remembered’ this means that He brings something to his mind in order to act upon it.

God acted to rescue Israel from slavery because He remembered his covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. His promise was to make their descendants a great nation, to give them a land of their own, to bless them and to make them a blessing to ‘all the families of the earth’ (Gen 12:3). God revealed His righteous acts so that the nations could see how marvellously He saves His people.

The Egyptians saw this ‘first-hand’ and ended up assisting God’s people in the Exodus: “*The LORD had given the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians*” (Ex 12:36). Rahab, the prostitute from Jericho, also knew of the Lord’s righteous act of saving His people, explaining to the spies: "*I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction*”. (Josh 2:9-10).

This psalm certainly looks back on God’s gracious dealings in Old Testament History, but it also looks forward to Jesus. His name, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Joshua, means ‘YWHW – the LORD – saves’. This is what the angel of the Lord explained to Joseph “*you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins*’ (Matt 1:21). Which brings us to our second point

1. **The Lord’s salvation is the reason for joyful praise now (v4-6)**

Music can convey the whole range of human emotion and mood from sad and sombre to happy and exuberant. For example, Psalm 137 is a lament of God’s people far away from the promised land; exiled in a foreign nation: “*By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion*”. Psalm 98 is a celebration of the saving work of 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!*” (v4-6). This is a call for the whole earth to come into the presence of the Great King - the Lord who marvellously saves.

Notice how the word joyful/joyous resonates through these verses. As the people who have come into the King’s presence look back on His past acts of salvation, they break forth into joyful songs of praise accompanied by a range of musical instruments. When the exiles were returned by the Lord from their captivity in Babylon, the walls of Jerusalem were restored under the leadership of Nehemiah and there was loud joyful praise. “*The singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader…. for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away*” (Neh 12:42b-43). Psalm 98 calls all those who have seen the salvation of the Lord to joyfully praise Him.

We have even more reason than the Old Testament saints to make a joyful noise before the Lord, because Christ has come! After He was raised from the dead, and before He ascended into heaven, He tasked His disciples with these words: “*you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*." (Acts 1:8). It is now geographically true that ‘all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God’. We here in New Zealand who joyfully praise the Lord, as we remember His marvellous works of salvation, are living testimony to the ongoing fulfilment of Christ’s command to make Him known far and wide.

It is good that we sing together as we celebrate Lord’s Supper. As we remember the death of our Lord, bringing His sacrifice on our behalf to mind, we act in joyful praise to the King. We are assisted by gifted musicians from this church who accompany our congregational singing.

The songs which we sing have been approved either by the wider body of our Synod or our South Island Presbytery. The principles of our church music are helpfully set out on pages 14-16 of our green ‘Sing to the Lord’ psalter hymnals and I would encourage you to read them if you have not already done so. These five principles are as follows:

* The music of the church should be Biblical, reflecting the Christian experience as revealed in Scripture and centring upon God and His works.
* The music of the church should be catholic – it should not be restricted to one human culture or period of history, but reflect the unity of the church throughout the world and from all ages.
* The music of the church should be confessional – it should communicate our Reformed understanding of the doctrinal truths of Scripture.
* The music of the church should be pastoral – the words of the songs we sing should be understandable and able to be sung by the congregation. It should meet the needs of the young and the older.
* The music of the church should be beautiful – it should reflect the holiness and beauty of the Lord with good ‘balance, unity, variety, harmony, design, rhythm, restraint and fitness’.

The Lord’s salvation is the reason for joyful praise now as we look back to His marvellous works of deliverance. Today we look back to the cross at Calvary. We remember that Christ has conquered sin and death. We bring to mind that His body was given, and His blood shed for the complete forgiveness of our sins. We also look forward, proclaiming His death until He comes (1 Cor 11:26). Which brings us to our third point:

1. **The Lord’s salvation will be completed in the future (v7-9)**

‘Death metal’ is an extreme variety of ‘heavy metal music’. It is typically characterised by the use of heavily distorted guitars, harsh vocals that are low-pitched and/or growled, morbid lyrics, fast-paced rhythms and melodies, and unconventional song structures. Death metal bands have names like ‘Morbid Angel’, ‘Possessed’, ‘Obituary’, ‘Carcass’ and ‘Suffocation’. The very existence of ‘death metal’ as a contemporary music genre testifies to the truth which we heard earlier from Romans 8:22 “*The whole creation has been groaning together*” (Rom 8:22).

Today we see the environmental effects of a world filled with greed, carelessness and a disregard for faithful stewardship of this planet. For example: More than 1 million seabirds and 100,000 marine animals die from plastic pollution in the ocean every year; 8 to 14 million tonnes of plastic enters the world’s oceans every year; Fresh water is becoming an increasingly scarce resource in many parts of the world as rivers are polluted with chemical fertilisers, agricultural pesticides and domestic waste; Even high hills are affected by human carelessness – there is an estimated 30 tonnes of rubbish which has been left by climbing parties on Mount Everest.

In contrast to the state of the world today, Psalm 98 looks forward to a new earth with a pure environment. A time when this creation ‘*will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God*’ (Rom 8:21). Psalm 98 anticipates the future return of the King who has marvellously saved in these words: “*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*”. Not only has the Lord God rescued a people who were held captive to sin and death, He will rescue the whole world from bondage to decay when Christ the King returns to judge the world with righteousness and perfect fairness.

On that day of final judgement it will be clear to everyone that for Adam and all his descendants it is true that "*None is righteous, no, not one*” (Rom 3:10). On that day of final judgement it will be clear to everyone that Christ alone is Faithful and True (Rev 19:11). He is the Righteous Judge who will judge the world, that is every single person who has ever lived.

You and I will be there on that day. We will personally experience the reality of the Lord’s coming when **“***God will bring every deed into judgment, withevery secret thing, whether good or evil*” (Eccl 12:14). Each person’s eternal fate will ultimately depend, not on how far they fell from God’s perfect standard of righteousness, but on how they responded to the King Jesus when they lived on this earth.

Jesus said: “*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him*” (John 3:36). He also said "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (14:6).

As we sing joyful praises to the Lord now for His marvellous salvation in Jesus, we look forward to Christ’s second coming with hope for what we do not yet see, and we wait for it with patience (Rom 8:25).

AMEN.