

THE SPLENDOR OF HIS HOLINESS

Psalm 96: 1-13 and Psalm 29: 1, 2, 11 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

This past month I received a beautiful portrait card, with a painting by Thomas Moran called Grand Canyon With Rainbow. This oil on canvas painting is beautiful. The card came from the President of Circle of Grace, a precious intercessor for us and our Intermountain West District, Ruth Dutton. She wrote, “Dear Pastor Rich and Jinny, I know how you both love the glorious masterpiece that is our God’s world. I pray this scene will bless you and fill you with encouragement to keep pressing on. God is good. I send my love and am so thankful for your friendship and our bonds in Jesus. Ruth.” Beloved, some people’s lives seem to exude with praise to God and joy in the Lord. Not everyone has the same approach to life. This week I read about a bishop or we might call him in our heritage, a district superintendent. This superintendent, as I do, doubled as a pastor in his city. Pastor Will Willimon shared this story:

It was the end of the day when he decided to visit a member of his congregation who was a lawyer. He dropped by the lawyer’s office and everyone had gone home but this lawyer. He was working late. Starting off the conversation, Pastor Willimon asked him, “What sort of day have you had?” The lawyer replied: “A typical day...full of misery. In the morning I assisted a couple to evict their aging father from his house so they could take everything he has while he is in the nursing home. All legal, not particularly moral, but legal. By lunchtime I was helping a client evade his worker’s comp insurance payment. It’s legal. This afternoon I have been enabling a woman to ruin her husband’s life forever with the sweetest divorce you ever saw. That’s my day. How has your day been?” Sometimes it seems that the idea of a happy Christian life or a blessed life is almost oxymoronic to many people. Perhaps it is because of how they are living their lives. So many folk equate life with unhappiness. Oxymorons are self-contradicting phrases. The word itself comes from “oxus” which means sharp and “moros” which means dull. We smile at some of these oxymorons such as jumbo shrimp, freezer burn, white chocolate, plastic silverware, sanitary landfill, truthful tabloids, and professional wrestling, to name a few. But did you know that the worship of the Lord often has words that accompany it that are drastically opposite of what it is meant to be? Words we use for worship can be oxymoronic. Dull worship, boring worship, or wearisome worship. If a lawyer can be legal and not moral, can we sing to the Lord and yet not be worshipping Him? Sadly, we can.

Today, I call us as a flock of God to sing to the Lord a new song—to worship Him—the God who is greater than all the gods in the splendor of His holiness. What would it mean in our own lives if we took Psalm 96 seriously and found a way to

sing to the Lord a new song? God is calling me to help us define three terms in Psalm 96 that the psalmist calls us to understand—(1) What Is A New Song To Sing To The Lord? (2) What Is The Greatness of the Lord Above All Idols? (3) What Is Worshipping God In The Splendor or Beauty of His Holiness? If we can understand these three terms, perhaps we will be well on our way to entering into and experiencing awesome worship of our God who reigns above all gods, as we worship Him in the splendor of His holiness. What do these three terms mean?

WHAT IS A NEW SONG TO SING TO THE LORD? (I.) Turn with me to Psalm 96: 1-3. “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 marvelous works among all the peoples!” Do songs have to be brand new—just written to be new songs sung to the Lord? Do old hymns have to be sung to new tunes to be new songs sung to the Lord? Even if we are to sing the psalms, they are thousands of years old. Can they be new songs to Jesus? What is a new song to sing to the Lord? The Hebrew word for new is chadash. Chadash means fresh, renewed. Makes me think of sour dough. If you want to know how Jeremiah used the word in Lamentations 3: 22, 23, Listen! “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are chadash—new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. God hasn’t called us to homogenize or pasteurize or nicefy His Psalms. No, have you noticed how very current the psalms often seem? They are just what we need for our day today. They have a freshness, a rawness, and they speak to us of life and death and storms and trials and in the middle of it all, we are to sing to the Lord a new song. That is, it is not to be going through old ritualistic motions. But what God wants is psalms, hymns and spiritual songs that we have made our own—songs that come fresh from our hearts to God. God wants no worship ruts from us. No, but what does the Lord want in a new song?

The Lord wants a song that can be sung the world over. It’s not a song that we can get away with in one spot and not another. Notice the psalmist says, “O sing to the Lord a new song; Sing to the Lord, **all the earth**. There are a couple definitions of a new song. (1) A new song is universal and global and awesome wherever we go when we sing it to Jesus. Notice that the psalmist had a theme going—v. 3 “Declare His glory among the nations, among all peoples.” Notice v. 7 – “Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, in essence, O nations of the whole world. Notice verse 9—“Tremble before Him, all the earth.” A new song ought to be a song we can sing in any culture, a song without a lot of I, me, and my, but rather a lot of You and Yours, sung to the Lord. It’s a song for the nations—all the earth. I have started reading through the entire Bible in a new translation—the NLT. Sometimes as I read I just sit and cry. I love God’s blessing to Abraham in Genesis

12: 1-3 from the NLT. I read there, “The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.” (That’s your family and mine.) I wept as I read those words because Abram believed God and though his descendants sometimes almost lost this new song, just looking for blessings for themselves, despite being so self-absorbed, somehow, the song, God’s new song made it down to you and me. Despite Jonah’s rebellion, God through a big fish, got the new message, the new song to Nineveh, and the Gentile Assyrians. Jesus ventured as a Jew north, leaving Judea to go up into Caesarea Philippi, Gentile territory. There Jesus made it come clear in Gentile territory as to who He was. There is where He let the disciples know, by their spokesman, Simon Peter, that He truly was Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God. He didn’t first declare this in the temple in Jerusalem. And before Jesus ascended as the resurrected Christ, in His Great Commission, in Matthew 28:19, He said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”

A new song is universal and global and awesome wherever we go when we sing it to Jesus. A new song to the Lord cannot be confined to our church only, on to one ethnic group or tribe. The DNA of a new song is that it is for all nations. Back in 1994, I took my eldest daughter Amy to Russia, Moldova, Romania and Hungary. Wherever we went, we sang a new song Amy taught to me from Acts 1: 8. We never changed the words from country to country. We sang, “Ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and Samaria, and the ends of the earth.” I cried for joy before the Lord as I remembered—“Witnesses, Jerusalem, witnesses, Judaea, witnesses, Samaria and the ends of the earth.”

There is something wonderful (2) in a new song that speaks of the wonder and glory and marvelous works of the Lord—among all peoples. v. 3. A new song is a worship song that refocuses our lives so that we are responding in praise to the awesomeness of God, who He is and what He is doing. A new song is not about us. If a song is narcissistic, it doesn’t qualify as a new song. A new song can be personal and about us, but if it doesn’t give God the glory, it doesn’t qualify. If we want to sing about our trials, our dog, our pick-up truck, a crawdad hole, our latest breakup or how proud we are to be an American, it’s okay. That’s not a sin. But fine as such songs may be, they aren’t a new song to the Lord. It’s fun to sing songs like that about ourselves and our lives and our issues and our struggles and our romance. But the psalmist is telling us there’s a new song out there waiting to be sung -- and it’s not really about you or me primarily. Sometimes I like to sing

songs like “Country Road, Take Me Home To The Place I Belong, West Virginia,” or “I Can’t Stop Lovin’ You, I’ve Made Up My Mind, To Live in Memory Of The Lonesome Times, I Can’t Stop Loving You, It’s Useless To Say, So I’ll Just Live My Life In Dreams Of Yesterday.” Those songs are fun songs, but they don’t qualify for a new song to the Lord. Many songs we like are nostalgic, romantic, self-focused or down-right sad. We all know that often the more we sing those songs, the sadder and more frustrated we get. Beloved, when we focus afresh on the Lord and what He is doing in this world and even in our own lives, the more He heals our lives. Now we know about a new song to sing to the Lord. 2ndly,

WHAT IS THE GREATNESS OF THE LORD ABOVE ALL IDOLS. (II.)

This is part of what makes up a new song to sing to the Lord, but it opens the door to this second question. For the answer, let’s turn to Psalm 96: 4-8. “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. Splendor and majesty are before Him; strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. 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!” Now be aware that what I am going to preach, the world hates. This truth isn’t tolerant or politically correct. Jesus said in John 14: 6, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me. The greatness of the Lord is that He is exclusively God and God alone, which means our new songs to Him are all about this exclusivity. Notice v. 4, 5. The Bible here acknowledges that there are rival deities, or gods or idols out there—like Allah or Buddha. Paul says we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places—Ephesians 6: 12. But the psalmist tells us, they are worthless, impotent though the Lord is omnipotent. He made the heavens. These gods are either idols we make or fallen angels God created and threw out of heaven in Lucifer’s rebellion.

The made up “gods” are gods only over the sun, the moon, a river, a forest, a wilderness, or a house, but Psalm 96: 5 tells us God made all the world, all the heavens including those rivers and forests and sun and moon that little god deities are supposed to be over. Matt Redmond understood this as he wrote a new song acknowledging God’s exclusivity. He wrote, “King of endless worth no one could express how much you deserve. Though I’m weak and poor all I have is yours, every single breath... I’m coming back to the heart of worship and it’s all about you all about you Jesus. I’m sorry Lord for the thing I’ve made it when it’s all about you, All about you Jesus.” Talk about exclusive—that’s the One we worship. Only the Creator of everything is worthy of our praise. The psalmist here is saying,

“Ascribe or give to the Lord, v. 7—O families of peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.” The Hebrew word for ascribe or give is **yahab**. It means ya--God and hab is give or ascribe. It means give to God His due. Bring Him the glory, v. 8 that is due His name, bring an offering, and come into His courts.

What is this offering God is calling for-to Him, our exclusive God? The Hebrew word **minkhah** means a bloodless sacrifice, which is a thank offering. It was also called a meal-offering. Isaiah used this word in God’s rebuke in Isaiah 1: 12, 13, saying, “When you come to appear before Me, who has required of you this trampling of My courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to Me.” So what is a meal offering today? It always was an offering that was pleasant and sweet to God with no reference to an offering for sin. The four types of offerings were (1) uncooked floor ground by a mill stone, (2) bread baked in an oven, (3) bread prepared on a griddle, or (4) bread cooked on top of a stove in a pan. All I can say for sure is that such an offering of ourselves to God or to His people comes from our lives as we have gone through the mill of suffering and temptation. The husks of pride and prejudice are gone. These are gifts that come from our identifying with others because of what God has brought us through. It could be a willingness to give God help in the nursery or in teaching children’s church, because we know how much we needed help when we had young children. It may be giving of our tools or our time in helping work on a car for someone who is unable to pay or helping with a sewer or drain that is too hard for someone else to unplug, because someone helped us. And as we give to Jesus’ Bride, He would say to us, “Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these, my brothers, you have done it unto Me.” (Mt. 25: 40) I even see our tithes and offerings when we put them in the offering plate or come forward to give them as a reminder to God that “You gave me this job. I remember when I was looking for a house, a car, a job, a spouse, and everything I have is because of You. This is my bloodless sacrifice, my offering, as I thank You for shedding Your blood for me. Something about such an offering involves a costly sacrifice, and never throwing God a few bucks or loose change. No, this offering cost us. Do we give our gift to our exclusive God above all gods? 3rdly,

WHAT IS WORSHIPPING GOD IN THE SPLENDOR OF HIS HOLINESS?

(III.) Notice lastly, Psalm 96: 9-13. “Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth! Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; He will judge the peoples with equity.” 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 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.” I

believe this figure of speech is multifaceted, (a five-some). It literally means holy attire. (1) Holy attire or holy array or priestly garments means that we come to worship God, but never carelessly. Not for a moment does this mean that a man or woman getting off work cannot come in his work clothes or scrubs to church to worship God. No, God tells us that “man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.” (I Samuel 16: 7) I almost left the ministry in 1974 when as the result of an A-strain flu , I was left unable to wear a suit and tie. I felt I was unqualified to preach without a tie on, as I always wore one to preach. God slowly and painfully corrected me. So outwardly, what is holy attire? It means that we do not come to church carelessly as if we were going fishing or hunting or going to work. It means, if we are able, and have time to bathe, and time to put on clean clothes, we do. Casual clothes may be our best, but those clothes are far different from careless clothes. Holy attire also has nuances of meaning including modest apparel. Is our dress trying to draw attention away from the Lord to us—or to draw others into temptation? Such apparel is not holy attire to wear before the Lord.

Holy attire includes worship of God in the beauty or splendor of a holy life. (2) Paul tells us in Colossians 1:10-11, “...walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy.” What’s down in the well comes up in the bucket. If you are living a holy life, the way it helps you worship is a total beauty and splendor to God whether you kneel, lift your hands, say Amen, or whatever you do. Holy attire is our clothing within, and we cannot fool God. This attire includes, v. 9, “trembling before the Lord.” Holy attire includes the beauty and splendor of holy speech. (3) Notice v. 10. Paul adds to the words of the Psalmist, in Col. 4: 6—“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that your may know how you ought to answer each person. (4) Holy attire includes the beauty and splendor of a holy disposition. Notice the “let us” verses in v. 11, 12. Even the disposition of God’s earth, the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all that fills it, the fields and the trees of the forest are called to sing for joy. God calls all His creation to worship Him and obey His voice—even as He calmed the sea—The sea’s uproar must obey Him. Psalm 19: 14 gives us our disposition, saying, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. (5) Holy attire means the beauty and splendor of a holy longing and welcoming of the coming of the Lord. v. 12. A church without a longing for the coming of the Lord, no matter how well dressed or how harmonizing in worship is still worshipping substandard to the splendor of holiness. A worshipping church in holy array is anticipating the return of Christ. Repeat v. 13. God give us a new song to You, our exclusive and only God and may we worship you in the beauty and splendor of Your holiness. Amen.