

You’re singing along in Psalm 149,

“The Lord takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation”

Amen! Lord, you love the humble!!

“Let the godly exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their beds” –

Yes, Lord, I love to sing on my bed as I’m going to sleep!

“Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands,
to execute vengeance on the nations...”

Uh...

Huh?

Did I just sing that?

I daresay that there are not too many churches that sing Psalm 149 very often!

Or at all.

But Walter Brueggemann warns us:

“If this psalm becomes too dangerous to sing in our more bourgeois liturgies,
then we may want to consider how such liturgy becomes innocuous
and cuts God off from God’s deeply rooted social intention”

(Brueggemann in Goldingay, 743)

A church that has no place for singing Psalm 149 in her liturgy
is a church that has redefined God into a figment of their own imagination.

God’s purpose in history is to subdue the nations under the rule of his beloved Son!
In a very real way, I think that these texts become more clear in the light of Revelation.

When we see the *end* of history more clearly,
it makes more sense of what the *middle* is all about.

I have called Psalm 149, “A Song for the Godly.”

The term “godly” is used three times – and three key junctures in the Psalm.

Verse 1 – “his praise in the assembly of the godly” (at the beginning of the psalm)

Verse 5 – “let the godly exult in glory” (at the center of the psalm)

And Verse 9 – “this is honor for all his godly ones” (at the end of the psalm).

The word translated “godly” is the word “hasidim” –
which is closely related to the word *hesed* – often translated “steadfast love.”

The word is used 32 times in the OT – 25 of which are in the Psalms!

The reason why it gets translated “godly”

is because God is chiefly characterized by *hesed* –
and so the *Hasidim* are those who reflect God in their lives!

The *hasidim* are those who are steadfast in their loyalty and faithfulness to God.
Centuries later, there would arise a group that called themselves
the “hasidim” – as they supported the Maccabean revolt
against their Seleucid rulers!

They took Psalm 149 rather literally –
as they praised the LORD on their beds –
and with two-edged swords in their hands,
seeking to bring vengeance against the Seleucids!

They weren’t necessarily wrong.
When you read the account of the Maccabees –
they rebelled against some pretty serious injustice.

If the only way to love your neighbor as yourself is to kill him –
then you need to love him in that way!

That may sound odd – but when your neighbor comes at your kid with a knife,
and if you just stand there, then he will kill your child –
well, it is neither loving nor right for you to stand there
and let him murder someone!
(Nor is it right or loving for you to fail to defend your child!)
Sure, if you can disarm him peacefully – that’s great!

But if you can’t – then both the laws of man and of God allow you use lethal force
to *love your neighbor as yourself*.

Truly – you are loving him.
I *hope* that if some fit should ever seize me –
and I was about to murder someone –
I hope and pray that God would send someone to love me enough to kill me
before I became a murderer!

And what is true on a personal and local level
is also true on a societal and communal level.

To use a non-controversial example –
when the Philistines invaded Israel,
it was an act of love for God and neighbor,
for the Israelites to fight back.

Indeed, David was *loving* Goliath well when he cut his head off!
Goliath had repeated taunted the armies of the living God –

and had repeatedly taken the LORD's name in vain.
When David confronted him and warned him of the LORD's verdict against him,
Goliath just laughed.
He didn't repent and believe the gospel –
he continued in his assault.

So the only way for David to love his neighbor was to cut his head off.

I hope that you never find yourself in that situation!
I've talked to many who have been there –
and they all testify that it is *not* pleasant.
But sometimes it is necessary.

And that is why we *need* songs like Psalm 149.

1. A Song of Praise for the Assembly of the Godly (v1-4)

Praise the LORD!
Sing to the LORD a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the godly!

Psalm 149 is a song of praise for the assembly of the godly –
the church of the faithful ones.
(assembly is regularly translated “ecclesia” – assembly –
which gets translated as “church” in the NT)

It is a “new song” – which as we have often seen, does not mean “a new composition” –
but a song about *new things* – a victory song about the mighty deeds of the LORD.
(If “new song” meant “new composition” –
then this song would be telling us that we shouldn't be singing this song –
we should be singing a new composition!
And if it *really* meant a new composition,
then any time we sang a song more than once,
it wouldn't be a new song any more!)

But a “new song” is a song about new things (just like a “sad song” is a song about sad things).
And we sing this song about new things
in the assembly of the godly.

When the faithful gather together, we should sing the praise of our God!

Like all of these final hallelujah songs (Psalms 146-150),
there is a particular emphasis on *praise* (hallel).

Indeed, as we keep going in this final doxology,
there is less and less emphasis on the *why* – and more and more emphasis on the *how*!

² *Let Israel be glad in his Maker;
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King!*

We've seen in the last couple weeks from Psalms 147-148
that the language of creation is woven together with the language of redemption.
When the Psalmist says, "Let Israel be glad in his Maker" –
it reminds us of Genesis 1 – when God made man;
but it also reminds us of the Exodus from Egypt – when God made Israel!

But then the second half of the verse connects with Zion – with Jerusalem – with David!
"let the children of Zion rejoice in their King!"

Israel had rejected God as king –
and so the LORD rejected Israel, and chose David to be king –
to be the one who would succeed where Israel failed.
(Of course, David and his sons failed too –
and so they needed Jesus just as much as we do!!)

That's why the ESV capitalizes "King" –
reminding us that the Son of David is also the eternal Son of God –
our Maker is our Redeemer!

So verse two tells us *who* is to praise the LORD – and *who* is the LORD that we should praise!

But then verse three tells us *how* to praise the LORD!

³ *Let them praise his name with dancing,
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!*

I know that some people try to say that this is *not* talking about the regular worship service –
but that won't fly here – because verse 1 told us this was the *assembly of the godly* –
which is the regular worshipping assembly!!

There are others who would say that we should introduce "dancing" into worship –
and then they bring in girls in tights doing wild gyrations –
which can get rather awkward...

Part of the challenge that we face is that *dancing*
has a very different cultural meaning in modern America than it did in ancient Israel!

Think of how David danced before the LORD
as the ark of the covenant was brought into Jerusalem.
His physical motion was designed to praise the LORD for the great salvation
signified in the coming of the ark to Jerusalem.

I would suggest that we *could* improve in this area –
but we *do* already dance in worship!
When we come forward for communion, we dance down the aisle –
like the Bride as she comes to her Redeemer!

Of course, we're rather overwhelmingly European in our movement patterns –
so our dancing isn't very rhythmic...
in fact, most of the time, it looks rather like walking!
But I'm going to tell you that *to me* it looks like you are dancing down the aisle to Jesus!

And I can also tell you that:

⁴ *For the LORD takes pleasure in his people;
he adorns the humble with salvation.*

If we have seen the what, the who, and the how of praise in verses 1, 2, and 3,
verse 4 tells us *why*.

Because the LORD takes pleasure in his people.
He adorns the humble with salvation.

This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.
That's what the Father said about Jesus.

It's what the Father says about *you* when you trust in him!

We heard this in Psalm 147, verse 11 –
“the LORD takes pleasure in his those who fear him –
in those who hope in his steadfast love (his *hesed*).”

The LORD takes pleasure in *you* – when you hope in him.

I know...

Some of you are thinking – but do I really trust him?
Do I really believe in him?
Is my hope really in his steadfast love?

If you are asking those questions –
Good!
But don't stop with the questions!

Humble yourself before the LORD!
Say to him, “Lord, have mercy on me!”
Lord, help!

“Make haste, O LORD, to save me! O LORD come to my aid!”

Because he is *faithful* – he shows steadfast love to those who call upon him!
And he adorns the humble with salvation!

Those who humble themselves before him – he raises up from the ash heap!
Just like he raised Jesus from the dead!

2. Let the Godly Sing from Their Beds and with Their Swords (v5-9a)

Then we come to center of the song – and the second and central use of the “hasidim”!

⁵ *Let the godly exult in glory;
let them sing for joy on their beds.*

⁶ *Let the high praises of God be in their throats
and two-edged swords in their hands,*

The godly are to exult in glory – in the honor that God will give them.

Remember verse 4 –

when the LORD adorns the humble with salvation –
that is when the godly should exult in glory!

Let them sing for joy on their beds!!

I don’t know if that sounds odd to you –

but many commentators have noted that this is, in fact, very odd.

Throughout the OT, the *bed* is a place for the wicked to plot (e.g., Ps 36),
or for people to lie awake, tossing and turning (Job 7) or depressed (1 Kgs 21),
or weeping (Ps 6), or lying down and fasting in repentance (1 Kgs 21).

Meditating in the watches of the night is also possible...

But singing for joy on their beds?

There really isn’t a parallel in all the OT!

But that’s where the picture of the *humble* stays with us!

Because remember where we are at the end of the Psalter!

Israel is no more.

Judah is a mere fragment of Israel –

sort of restored from exile –

but still weak – helpless – a tiny speck of a country,

surrounded by – and ruled by – foreigners who care nothing for the LORD!

Yet the Psalmist sees with the eyes of faith –

a faith that would seem sheer lunacy –

excited for what has happened in the last 2500 years!

And so the Psalmist encourages the *faithful* – the *godly* – the *hasidim* –
to sing for joy upon their beds!

We may be a group of nobodies and nothings with very little wealth or power –
but we have song of joy – a song of glory – that will overcome the world!

And so:

⁶ *Let the high praises of God be in their throats
and two-edged swords in their hands,*

⁷ *to execute vengeance on the nations
and punishments on the peoples,*

⁸ *to bind their kings with chains
and their nobles with fetters of iron,*

⁹ *to execute on them the judgment written!*

There are lots of connections in this section of the Psalm with Psalm 94 –
the Psalm that starts, “Mighty LORD, the God of Vengeance...”

Psalm 94 is very clear that *God* is the one who takes vengeance!
Vengeance is mine, says the LORD, I will repay!

And we have seen repeatedly that the reason why God says this
is because we – fallen sinners that we are –
have a bad habit of doing vengeance very poorly!!

But when God takes vengeance,
he uses means.

To understand what Psalm 149 is doing, we need to see what this language means.

The idea of a ‘two-edged’ sword is rooted in Isaiah 41:15 –
where God is speaking to “Israel, my servant” –
and says that those who war against his servant Israel
“shall be as nothing at all”

“Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel!

I am the one who helps you, declares the LORD;
your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.

Behold, I make of you a threshing sledge, new, sharp, and having teeth;

[literally, being two-edged – the same word in Psalm 149]

you shall thresh the mountains and crush them,

and you shall make the hills like chaff;

you shall winnow them, and the wind shall carry them away,

and the tempest shall scatter them.

And you shall rejoice in the LORD; in the Holy One of Israel you shall glory.”

Isaiah had said that “Israel, my servant” would be his instrument in winnowing the nations –
in turning the nations to chaff before the wind!

We need to be careful here –

because this *could* simply degenerate into “Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition!”
Just because Christians may need to take up arms in self-defense
does *not* mean that we should cite Psalm 149
as a reason to go to war to punish the bad guys!!

At the same time, we need to be equally careful not to dismiss the need to punish bad guys!
God *does say* that the godly are to be his means for executing judgment on the nations.

Many commentators (both Jewish and early Christian)
have seen this in the Maccabean revolt – where the godly *were* in fact
the means God used to punish the Seleucids.

If we ignore the plain meaning of the words,
then we neglect the justice that God himself commands!

It was *right* to defend Europe against Hitler.
And whatever complications there may be in the Middle East –
it was right to put an end to the Islamic State.

There are lots of murky questions when it comes to war –
but Psalm 149 says that there are times when the godly need to go to war!

If we deny that Psalm 149 has anything to do with war,
then “we leave people to make war without taking any notice of the Scriptures.”

As one commentator puts it,

“There is a clear marker that distinguishes
the violence that takes hold of God’s kingdom
from that which wreaks destruction in our world –
a difference between the saints’ violence,
always conjoined with God’s high praise,
and the unholy violence that rings as shrill mockery in God’s ears....
Every kind of godless violence is directed at getting something or holding on to it –
power, oil, satisfaction, vengeance, personal or national security.
But the battle of the saint is always fundamentally directed toward giving praise to God.”
(Davis in Goldingay, 744)

But....

You won’t be surprised to hear me say that scripture itself demands that we see *more*
than just the “literal” meaning of this vengeance.

Hebrews 4:12 uses the same word as the LXX when it says that the word of God

is living and active – and sharper than any two-edged sword.

And, perhaps most pointedly (pun intended!) –

Revelation 1:16 describes Jesus – “from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword.”

We’ve just been seeing in the morning service how Jesus bound Satan with a chain,
so that he might not deceive the nations any more!

In other words, right now, the nations generally don’t need to be executed.

With Satan bound, now is the time for plundering the strong man’s house!

Now is the time for rescuing the nations by preaching the gospel –
the Word of God that is *sharper* than any two-edged sword!

But when Satan is released – and he again deceives the nations –

then will come the time for the vengeance of God to be executed

(which will be brought by fire from heaven – Rev 20 –

and by the sword that comes out of the Lamb’s mouth – Rev 19).

Psalm 149 can apply equally well to spiritual warfare as to physical warfare.

And this especially so – because Psalm 149 is the second to last Psalm.

In other words,

it the mirror image of Psalm 2.

The second Psalm spoke of the Son of David – the Son of God –

who would rule the nations with a rod of iron.

The second Psalm ended by saying, “blessed are those who trust in him.”

Now, in the second to *last* Psalm –

those who put their trust in him now join him in exercising rule and authority –
just like Jesus says in Revelation –

that those who are faithful unto death – the one who conquers –
will reign together with him!

And that’s why Psalm 149 concludes:

3. The Honor for His Godly Ones (v9b)

This is honor for all his godly ones.

Praise the LORD!

The *hasidim* – the godly ones – those who are faithful to God

will be given the honor of reigning with Christ forever.

The end of the book of Psalms and the end of Revelation are remarkably parallel!