

Psalm 47

A Psalm of the King

Intro: Psalm 47 is a challenge for us. As you know, the Psalms are the expressions of the soul before God. They contain the language of religious emotion: joy for the Lord's salvation, gratitude for the Lord's blessings, sorrow because of sin, laments because of great trials or a sense of alienation from God. These are all emotions that we can easily understand, and we love the Psalms for this reason: they give us words for our own praises and prayers.

But Psalm 47 is a bit of a challenge because we are culturally ill-equipped to access it. It's an enthronement Psalm, written as a celebration of God's reign as king. But that doesn't resonate with us the way it would with the original audience. As Americans, we don't really "get" kings. Our existence, as a nation, began with a rejection of King George and the whole idea of royalty.

- **Authority:** We believe in government by the consent of the governed. Kings rule by consent of their family lineage or their own military power. Their authority in no way rests upon your consent. You do have a choice – you can consent and live or refuse and be put to death.
- **Status:** For most of the history of the world, there wasn't really a "middle class". At least not much of one. There was royalty – they had money, power, resources and privileges like leisure and travel. And then there was everyone else. Kings lived so far above the common man that it didn't seem like a stretch to count them as gods. Their unmatched power and wealth allowed them to live as though they were. Now, while that certainly bred some envy and discontent – the opulence of the king was a source of civic pride. When we see opulence, the super-rich, we tend to think of inequity. When they saw the opulence of their king – it was wrapped up in national identity.
- **National Identity:** The King stands for the nation as a whole. For instance, Solomon's splendor wasn't primarily about Solomon – it was a statement about Israel as a nation. The fact that kings and queens from around the world came to marvel at Solomon's wisdom and wealth was a source of tremendous civic pride and joy!
- **Safety:** The world of 1,000 BC was a threatening place. There were marauding bands of criminals roving the countryside. Ambitious kings of other lands routinely gathered their armies and set out to expand their kingdom. Each year there was "war season". *"In the spring of the year when kings go off to war."* (2 Sam 11:1) And the locals paid the price. They would have their land confiscated, their homes destroyed. Their wives and children taken into captivity. So having a strong king who could protect you was a tremendous blessing!

Let me try to illustrate it this way. Some of you are aware that there is a bit of a rivalry between Michigan and Ohio – specifically relating to their respective Universities. But imagine if Ohio was different country, an enemy country and it was really a matter of life and death? What if we actually lived in constant danger of invasion and desolation by blood-thirsty Buckeyes? We would rejoice in a king who could conquer our vowed enemy and protect our lives with the shield of his military might. You would dearly love this king. You would revel in his power and rejoice in his glory! You would be ecstatic about his military accomplishments.

That’s how an Israelite would feel about their king. And now you can sense the enthusiasm behind an enthronement psalm!

All these things together – the sovereign authority of a king, the exalted status of the king, and the national identification of a king, and the practical necessity of having a strong defender – highlights the incredible significance of the king to ordinary life. And helps us to understand the joy of celebrating a great king. And that’s precisely what Psalm 47 is about. It is a celebration of the greatness of Israel’s King – the Living God of heaven and earth!

I. The Call

“Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!”

This is clearly an invitation that borders on a command - a command to rejoice in God!

A. A Command to Rejoice

Clapping is universally equated with gladness. Little children will clap their hands when they are so full of excitement and joy it has to be physically expressed. Clapping is also a way of showing tribute – deep appreciation and gratitude. When you hear a fantastic concert – you almost can’t help but leap to your feet and applaud. The beauty and majesty and power and truth of the music force you to respond with clapping and shouting!

That’s precisely what is being pictured here – people leaping to their feet with shouting, and clapping – rejoicing in the great beauty and majesty and power and truth of the Lord!

B. A Command to All

Notice, this isn’t a call only meant for Israel. The psalmist calling only to fellow Jews to celebrate their king. He’s inviting and commanding the whole world! The psalmist envisions a vast throng of people, all the nations, all the peoples, gathered together before the King to worship and rejoice.

Now, this would have struck the surrounding nations arrogant and odd. The nations all had their own gods and their own kings. The Philistines had Baal – the Fertility god, the Egyptians had Rah - the Sun god. The Assyrians had Ashur. That’s how the world worked. And when it came to war – may the best god win. People boasted in their respective gods - they recognized that their god was their god – and they expected the other nations to boast in their own deities.

But the Psalmist is calling all the nations to rejoice in Yahweh! He's commanding all the peoples of the world to come and celebrate the God of Israel. That's really bold! On what basis can he possibly make this command?

The answer is astounding in its simplicity – The God of Israel is the King over all the earth.

II. The King

A. His Identity

² *For the LORD, the Most High, is to be feared, a great king over all the earth.*

The universal command to rejoice in God is rooted in the universal reign of God. And he is no empty figurehead of a king. He is the King of which every earthly king is but a tiny, shadowy reflection. The greatest kings of earth are held in his sovereign hands and disappear by the breath of God's Almighty word.

The sheer reality of God as God and his consequent right to be worshiped and obeyed is critical for our witness in the world. I just read an article this week that showed that millennial Christians are much more leery about evangelism. They feel this awkwardness – what right do we have to tell Muslims or Buddhist that they need to change religion? What right do we have to tell them they are wrong and we are right?

And the answer of course is, we have no right at all – unless we are messengers of the King! We have no authority or right in our selves. But we were never meant to go to this world in our authority, but with the authority given to us as ambassadors of Christ! As messengers of the King we not only have the right – we have the obligation to trumpet God's claim over this earth and everyone in it!

“We are Christ's ambassadors, God making his appeal through us – be reconciled to God.”

Christians are those who, by the grace of God, have come to recognize that there actually is an Eternal God, and he is holy and sovereign and good and terrifying. And much of evangelism is simply calling men to bow before the sheer, glorious reality of God!

Men desire to live in unreality – to live as if there is no sovereign King, to live as if we have sovereign rights over our own life, our own body. The entire abortion ruling is predicated on the idea that a woman has sovereign right over her own body. It's fantasy. God alone has sovereign rights over your body and he most certainly has sovereign rights over the baby in the womb. Why? Because he created both!!

“The Lord Most High is to be feared”. God is to be acknowledged and revered as the sovereign, reigning, watching, judging God that he is. There is nothing worth fearing more than the God who created you. He can create and he can destroy.

And then the Psalm gets really bold. The psalmist doesn't rest with a depiction of Gods' being. He commands the nations of the earth to rejoice in God's victory over the nations.

B. His Victory

³ *He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet.*

Isn't that great?! The writer wants all the nations to clap their hands and rejoice in their defeat. He wants them to delight in God's victory over them. He calls to the Egyptians and says, "Come, clap your hands and exalt in God's devastating destruction of Pharaoh and his mighty deliverance of Israel."

He even wants them to rejoice in Gods' sovereign choosing of Israel to be his own people and the act of giving them the land of Canaan.

⁴ *He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves. Selah*

He wants the peoples of the land of Canaan to celebrate Gods' utter desolation of their nations when he brought Israel into the land. He wants the Philistines to rejoice in the victories of Israel's God over them.

Why?

1. Because the worship that honors God is worship that acknowledges him as God.
2. Because the victories of God are victories over the kingdom of darkness. God's judgements on the land of Egypt and Canaan were not simply God having compassion on Israel – they were a part and parcel of God's judgment on the Devil and the rebellious kingdom of this world.
3. Gods' victories are good news for the world. As God brings divine justice on all that is evil, he is, at the same time, restoring his good creation and bringing his grace to undeserving creatures. Israel's redemption was all grace. And that grace spilled over – Rachel, the prostitute in Jericho saw it and believed. Why would a woman rejoice in the victory of God over her own nation? Because the victory of God over evil is salvation for the world.

On a more personal note, the victory of God over your own rebellious self was the necessary path to your own salvation. God had to destroy your pride with his law, devastate your self-justifications with his truth, ruin you as a proud, self-dependent, self-reliant person – so that you could be saved.

Gods' victories are good news. His kingly reign is the hope of the world - and we should celebrate it!

III. The Coronation

- 5 God has gone up with a shout,
the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.
- 6 Sing praises to God, sing praises!
Sing praises to our King, sing praises!
- 7 For God is the King of all the earth;
sing praises with a psalm!

In verses 5-7 the psalmist records the triumphant ascension of God on His Throne – and the appropriate response. Sing Praise. In the Hebrew, ‘sing praise’ is one word and, repeated 5 times in two verses, has the sound of a chorus, of a congregation shouting their joy in God. Praise. Praise. Praise. The thunderous anthem swells as the nations gather to worship the King of all the earth.

IV. The Consummation

- 8 God reigns over the nations;
God sits on his holy throne.
- 9 The princes of the peoples gather
as the people of the God of Abraham.
For the shields of the earth belong to God;
he is highly exalted!

The psalm closes with a view to when the vision of universal worship will become a reality. When the princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham. Here, in the Old Testament song, we see a prophecy of New Testament realities. God’s purpose from the beginning was to gather the nations to himself. He chose Abraham for himself – but intended, through Abraham, to bring blessing to all the nations of the earth.

And of course, that is exactly what took place in the coming of Christ. The seed of Abraham became the great blessing of the nations. In him, all the nations, including stubborn Dutchman, are invited to come and worship the Sovereign King of the earth.

God is not the “Christian” god. He’s the single, sovereign Lord of the universe. Let that give you great comfort and courage. Jesus reigns today. The shields of the earth belong to him. All power is in his hands. We have nothing to fear.

What does it look like to answer the call of Psalm 47? What are we actually supposed to do?

Trust Him.

Celebrate his victory. Engage in joyful, exuberant worship.

Everyday praise in thanksgiving and confidence in God.

Calling others around us to come and worship their God!