

“Praise and Proclamation”

by Pastor Jason Van Bommel

Psalm 96

Oh sing to the LORD a new song;

sing to the LORD, all the earth!

² *Sing to the LORD, bless his name;*

tell of his salvation from day to day.

³ *Declare his glory among the nations,*

his marvelous works among all the peoples!

⁴ *For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;*

he is to be feared above all gods.

⁵ *For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols,*

but the LORD made the heavens.

⁶ *Splendor and majesty are before him;*

strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

⁷ *Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,*

ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!

⁸ *Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;*

bring an offering, and come into his courts!

⁹ *Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;*

tremble before him, all the earth!

¹⁰ *Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns!*

Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved;

he will judge the peoples with equity.”

¹¹ *Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;*

let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

¹² *let the field exult, and everything in it!*

Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy

¹³ *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.

Giving What is Due

On July 4th, Joey Chesnut achieved something unmatched in history, as he won his 15th Nathan's Famous hot dog eating competition. He hasn't lost since 2015 and no one else even gives him serious competition, Joey Chesnut holds 55 world records in eating competitions, and if you accept competitive eating as a sport (and I don't), then Joey Chesnut is the most successful athlete in the history of sports. You may be fascinated, disgusted, or completely disinterested in the accomplishments of Joey Chesnut, but you have to give him his due. He's done what no one else has ever been able to do, though many, many people have tried.

Giving someone their due is something still respected in our society, mostly. If someone accomplishes something remarkable, you feel obligated to recognize the significance of the accomplishment. Yet, in some cases, giving someone their due is a reluctant thing – as it is for many people in the case of Joey Chesnut, or as it was for me in the case of Tom Brady.

Psalm 96 is a psalm that is calling on God's people and on all people throughout the world and on all creation to give God His due – and not in a half-hearted, reluctant, capitulatory way, but in a joyful and enthusiastic and celebratory way. And because of who God is in Himself and what He has done, is doing, and has promised to do, giving Him His due wholeheartedly is what He is due. It is what is fitting with that character and creative and redemptive action of God.

1. Praise: From the people of God to the whole world

Psalm 96 follows Psalm 95 – obviously – and the two clearly belong together as a pair. The arrangement of the psalms is very intentional and is an important part of how God has structured His word. Psalm 95 is a call to the people of God to worship God because we are His people and He is our God. Psalm 96 expands that call to worship to everyone in the world and to all of creation –

*Oh sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth!*

²*Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.*

³*Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples!*

⁴*For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;*

he is to be feared above all gods.

⁵*For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.*

⁶*Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.*

Verse 1 calls on “*all the earth*” to sing to the LORD, to sing to Him a new song. A new song is an excellent song of salvation, a sincere and fitting song of praise and thanksgiving for the excellence and saving work of God. But how is “*all the earth*” to sing a new song to the LORD - to YaHWeH – if they do not know Him? This is why verses 2-3 call the people of God to –
tell of his salvation from day to day.

³*Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples!*

One of the best books ever written on missions is *Let the Nations Be Glad* by John Piper, and the opening of the book is brilliant:

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.

Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions. It's the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God. “The Lord reigns, let the earth *rejoice*; let the many coastlands *be glad!*” (Ps. 97:1). “Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations *be glad and sing for joy*” (Ps. 67:3–4).

But worship is also the fuel of missions. Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching. You can't commend what you don't cherish. Missionaries will never call out, “Let the nations *be glad!*” if they cannot say from the heart, “*I rejoice in the Lord*”; “*I will be glad and exult in you*; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High” (Pss. 104:34; 9:2). Missions begins and ends in worship.

“Worship” here is not referring specifically to a gathered worship service but rather glorifying and enjoying God from the heart for who He is and what He has done. Such worship is done

privately and in families and in the gathered church, but it's only genuine worship that pleases God and blesses us if it's worship in spirit and in truth.

But why should we worship God and then call others to join us? What makes God worthy of adoration, glory, and eternal delight? Verses 4-6 tell us –

⁴ For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;

he is to be feared above all gods.

⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols,

but the LORD made the heavens.

⁶ Splendor and majesty are before him;

strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

I've been to the Great Wall of China. I had to climb over 1,000 steps to get to it. Once I reached it, I walked along two sections of it and visited two of the garrison guard towers. No one would visit the Great Wall of China and walk along it and say, "Meh, whatever. I'm not impressed." It is a great work, a great accomplishment, and is truly worthy of great admiration. I've never been to the Grand Canyon, but people have told me it's a place that must be visited in person to appreciate it; pictures do not do it justice. I imagine you'd have to be pretty cold and hard-hearted to stand on the edge of the Grand Canyon and say, "No big deal. Can we go now?"

And yet how much greater is the One who holds the Grand Canyon and the Great Wall and the Himalayas and the depths of the Mariana's Trench in His hands, who created the whole world and universe by His powerful word and who upholds and governs all things by His holy will? The LORD is truly great, the absolute definition and standard of great, and He is above all else greatly to be praised.

Verse 6 puts together 4 attributes of God in highlighting His greatness – splendor, majesty, strength, and beauty.

Splendor and majesty are before him;

strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

The Hebrew word translated "splendor" in verse 6 is often translated as glory, and it can be understood as the beautiful radiance of glory. Majesty is a closely related glory word that seems to highlight the kingly reign of God in His glory. So, God is enthroned in glory and He shies in splendor and reigns in majesty in that glory. These attributes are before His presence. If you were to come before God, you would be overwhelmed by the greatness of

His glorious splendor and majesty. In His sanctuary, in His dwelling-place, are strength and beauty. God is strong and beautiful.

I wonder if you think of God this way. I wonder if someone asked you what God was like, would you say He is strong and beautiful. Three of these four words – splendor, majesty, and beauty – all communicate the compelling, glorious, radiant beauty of God. How could the Creator of all things bright and beautiful – hummingbirds and flowers and butterfly wings and sunsets over mountains and sunrises over oceans – how could He be anything but stunningly radiant in beauty?

But God is also infinitely and unopposably strong. He is enthroned in beauty and rules with almighty strength. Diamonds are known for two things, their dazzling sparkle in the way they refract and reflect light and their incredible strength, as they can be used to cut anything. God is infinitely excellent in both of these areas: He dwells in unapproachable light and no one may see His unveiled glory and live because of the intensity of His beautiful holiness and nothing is impossible for Him. His arm is not too short to save and He does according to all His will in heaven and on earth.

2. Proclamation: Our invitation and message to the nations

The focus of verses 1-6 is on God’s praise, whereas verses 7-10 focus more in the proclamation, on the call to come and bring God the honor He is due. Verse 3 calls God’s people to proclaim God’s glory among the nations, and verses 7-10 show us God’s people doing just that –

*⁷ Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!*

*⁸ Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts!*

*⁹ Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth!*

*¹⁰ Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns!
Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity.”*

“Ascribe” has the same root meaning as “give,” but obviously we mere mortals don’t give to God glory and strength. Rather, we give Him the honor He is due for His glory and strength. All families of the peoples – that is, all the tribes, tongues, peoples, and nations of the world – are called to ascribe glory and strength to the LORD.

The LORD's glory and strength stand in stark opposing contrast to the gods the families of the peoples worship, the idols of the world. We're told in verse 5: "*all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols.*" "*Worthless idols*" is a translation of a single word in Hebrew which could be translated as simply "nothings." It's "the Elohim of the peoples are elil" – Which is an emptied out form of Elohim – they are non-gods or nothings. They may be called Elohim but they are just a hollow shell. They're like the toy plastic food children play make-believe kitchen with. You may call it an apple, but it's hollow plastic, and you really shouldn't try to eat it because the most it can do is make you sick. That's the truth of the world's gods.

What are the gods of the people today? Well, what do people pursue, thinking attaining it will give their lives meaning or happiness. What are people willing to sacrifice for? What do they consider worth a sacrificial investment of their time, money, and devotion? Where do they rest their hopes? And what do they fear? These are the kinds of questions that help us identify the real idols of our age – pleasure, success, wealth, autonomy, sexual fulfillment, "finding yourself," celebrity, prestige, political victory, whatever. As long as people are chasing them, hoping in them, sacrificing for them, and thus treating them as gods, they are nothings.

We have an obligation in our proclamation to the nations, in declaring Christ to the world, to call them to give the LORD the honor He is due and also to realize that all the gods of the nations are nothings. That thing you're chasing so hard because you think attaining it will make your life complete – a romantic partner, a successful career, respect, influence, whatever – it's not worthy of your devotion. It's an empty plastic apple when compared to the glory and strength of the LORD!

Here's how you can know that difference for real: The gods of this world demand that you sacrifice to them, that you pursue them, that you give to them as much as you can, and they promise to give you fulfillment in return. But if they have so much to offer, why do they need us to give so heavily toward them? The one true God, the LORD, is known not by what He demands from His people but by what He gave and gives to His people.

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life. – John 3:16

But God shows His love for us in this, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:8

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? - Romans 8:32

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. – 1 John 4:10

The one true God is the One who overflows with fullness of love and grace. He created the world out of the overflow of His creative love. He gave His Son out of the overflow of His redeeming love.

In return for all that He gives us, abundantly and freely, He asks us to give Him the honor due His name, which is ultimately what is best for us. He asks us to stop worshiping and serving those things which, by nature, are not gods, and to worship and serve Him, the one true God. For to know Him is to love Him and to honor Him, and this is eternal life.

He doesn't ask us to sacrifice for Him; He sacrificed for us. He doesn't demand that we give, and then promise to give back to us. He gives first and far more than we could ever repay, and to the extent that we do "repay" Him in praise and trust, this actually enriches our souls and our lives forever!

3. Unexpected Joy: All creation rejoices in God's judgment

And then, at the end of verse 10 and in verses 11-13, Psalm 96 does something similar to Psalm 95, in that it takes an unexpected turn in the final section, a turn toward a message of coming judgment –

he will judge the peoples with equity."

¹¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;

let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

¹² let the field exult, and everything in it!

Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy

¹³ 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.

But whereas the message of judgment at the end of Psalm 95 was a sobering warning, the end of Psalm 96 is a heightened message of joyful celebration. Here, it is not only the peoples of the earth but all of creation who rejoice enthusiastically, and it is the coming judgment of God that makes them rejoice.

To the extent that this joyful celebration of judgment surprises us, it shows how little we understand God and His creation and the goodness of His coming judgment. Romans 8 helps us here –

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. – Romans 8:18-24, ESV

Ever since the Fall of Adam and Eve, creation has been laboring under the curse of futility – waste, disease, savagery, death. The creation is profoundly broken, as are we! When Jesus rose again from the dead, the firstfruits of the resurrection, the firstborn from the dead, the New and Better Adam, began to reverse the curse in His own resurrection body – created by God but absolutely free from all the futility of the fall. And now creation is waiting for Him to come again to judge the earth.

The proclamation of the glory and strength of God needs to be worldwide, universal to all peoples, because the coming judgment is unmistakably universal –

he comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world in righteousness

Similar to what we saw several weeks ago in Isaiah – “the earth” here could be a reference to the land of Israel, but “the world” is necessarily global, universal worldwide judgment.

We live in a world that imagines regional deities or personalized religions, where each group of people gets to have their own god – the Muslims have Allah and Muhammed his prophet, Hindus has Krishna and hundreds of other deities, Buddhists have Buddha, etc. But there is one God who is coming, the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, and He will judge the whole world when He comes. And this will cause all of His creation to rejoice, because His coming judgment will mean the final and perfect removal of the curse of sin and death and the freedom of the children of God for all creation forever!

Do we confidently rejoice in and proclaim the greatness and just judgment of God?

I have a question for us as we come to a close: Does our praise and proclamation of the LORD look like Psalm 96? Do we joyfully exult with a new song in our hearts and on our lips at the greatness of God, at His matchless strength and beauty, His glory and majesty? Do we proclaim to our neighbors and the nations that this LORD is the one true God who reigns over all, whether they acknowledge Him or not? Do we call them to give God the honor He is due? Do our hearts rejoice in eager anticipation at His coming to judge the world? Do we realize that this is what the whole world is waiting for, and are we waiting eagerly with them?

Don't let your understanding of God and His Gospel be shaped by our culture into some self-centered life-improvement self-help plan – “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life!” “Your life will be so much better if you just try this new product called Jesus!”

Jesus is LORD. He reigns over the nations. He is beautiful beyond all imagining and absolute in His strength and power to rule. He is good, and He is as great as He is good. Rejoice in Him, Cherish Him. Then, you can commend to others as the one true Lord the One your heart has come to know and cherish. And look forward to that day when you will see Him face to face!