

Exalting Christ as Reigning and Returning (Ps 96-98)

U.S. Olympic diver David Boudia first won gold in 2012. He wrote: 'there is something much more desirable than a gold medal. Psalm 19:10 states about the truths of the Word of God, "*They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold.*"...[he says more valuable than my golden medal was my] golden moment where God was conforming me to the likeness of His Son, through His Word ... The Word of God is "more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold" – even the gold of an Olympic medal.'¹

This year David Boudia won the synchronized diving silver with Christian teammate Steele Johnson then told an NBC national audience: 'our identity is in Christ, and we're thankful for this opportunity...' Johnson agreed. '... knowing that my identity is rooted in Christ and not what the result of this competition is just gave me peace...If something went great, I was happy. If something didn't go great, I could still find joy...' Boudia's Twitter feed: Follower of Christ, Ps 115:1. Husband. Father. Olympic Champion Diver [Ps 115:1 says *Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory...*]²

That's really the message of Ps 96-98, giving all glory to God so the nations will see it's from Him, through Him, and to Him, to God alone be the glory. U.S. swimmer Maya DiRado told Yahoo Sports: 'I don't think God really cares about my swimming very much. This is not my end purpose, to make the Olympic team.' She said in an interview:³ 'I came to know and follow Christ...I grow and see him shaping me in new way...Knowing that I'm a child of God and that his love for me is determined by nothing I can achieve or do on my own has given me a quiet confidence...there are so many more important things in life worth doing. Swimming...can't be my whole world'

Alyson Felix, who has the most medals of any U.S. track and field runner ever, is another Christian athlete whose dad was my professor at seminary, and she gives God glory. Simone Manuel last week became the first African American woman with an individual swimming medal and said on TV after the gold: 'All I can say is all glory to God...' A U.S. runner was asked what moved her to help a fallen runner she said 'it was the spirit of God in me.'

The South African runner who shattered the record in 400m tweeted 'Jesus did it' and had written on his shoe 'Jesus, I'm all yours, use me.' When they interviewed him after his race he said 'the only thing I can do now is give God praise.' I find it refreshing when athletes see more important than their standing on the highest platform is using the platform to give God all glory.

That's really the message of Ps 96-98, giving all glory to God. Picking up on the imagery of games, Ps 98:1 says the Lord won the greatest victory for Himself (NASB). The nation of Israel celebrated the Lord as a hero greater than any nation does a world champion when the psalmist says *'we will sing for joy over your victory...we will set up our banners'* (20:5 NASB). In Ps 119 we're to come to God's Word as a runner with a big heart chasing the prize: *'I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart!'* (v. 32). Ps 19 compares the sun to *'a strong man ready to run his race'* or *'from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course.'*

The ancient Olympics began in OT times and continued over a millennium through the times of the NT where its games are used as spiritual analogies:

- track and field image before a great crowd of witnesses, whatever holds us back or entangles, put off to run with endurance, eyes fixed on Jesus, not looking back but looking forward upward to the goal; Heb 12, Phil 3
- Paul uses Greek verbs from athletics like *athleo* (strive), or *gymnazo* (as gymnasium-trained Olympians we're to be disciplined spiritually), or *agonizo* (strive like an agonizing athlete). Like Greco-Roman wrestling that is still one of the sports to this day, Paul says we wrestle spiritually (Eph 6:12). He speaks of *'wrestling in prayer for you'* (Col 4:12 NIV).
- 1 Cor 9:23 *'I do all this for the sake of the gospel...'²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown [or today a medal] that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.²⁶ Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air.²⁷ No, I beat my body and make it my slave'* (NIV)

The day-to-day Olympic updates from the past two weeks have told of the greatness of athletes, names of winners are lifted up, the national anthems of nations are played, and all the earth sings praises of reigning champions. Ps 96 points us higher to heaven's champion who reigns over all: *'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.'*

The ancient Olympics were dedicated to gods, which are actually false idols as v. 5 says. Today some make sports their god, or approval or accolades of others their idol, but some in sports give the true God glory to the nations.

The ancient Olympics began when Jonah was a missionary to a Middle East nation. The games began in the time of the birth of Isaiah who would write much of God's plan for all the nations, and it's fitting that in them some are declaring God's glory among nations, praising His mighty work, not theirs. As I think of families of peoples all over the world watching the Olympics, I think of those applying v. 7. I like the NKJV wording of Ps 96:7: *Give to the LORD, O families of the peoples, Give to the LORD glory and strength.*⁸ *Give to the LORD the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come into His courts.*⁹ *Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth.*¹⁰ *Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns; The world also is firmly established, It shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously."*¹¹ *Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad...*

This text calls all to praise the Lord far more than any world champion and to talk more about His amazing deeds, to replay them and rejoice in them, to give all glory, laud, and honor in lifting up His name. The greatest athlete may reign in a sport for a few years, Jesus reigns forever. Olympic judges may not always get it right, but this Judge will always judge all righteously. Paul said finishing his last lap of ministry: *'I have finished the race, I have kept the faith...the righteous judge will award to me on that Day...'* 2 Tim 4

This language ultimately looks forward to the last day when Jesus gives out awards to all those who love His appearing, but in turn all will cast crowns at His feet. On the last day Jesus alone will stand on the podium, only His name and banner and song will be raised up, not some national anthem of Israel, but an international new song to King Jesus who won and is judge.

96:13 *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.*
97:1 *The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!*² *Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.*³ *Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around.*⁴ *His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles.*⁵ *The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth.*⁶ *The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory.* That's 2nd coming language in book of Revelation –the Lord who reigns is the glorious Lord Jesus who returns and all will see **98:8** uses language from prophets: *Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together*⁹ *before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.*

I'm not going to unpack every verse in Ps 96-98, I'm not going to unpack all of the details of events before or after the 2nd coming, nor will I if after the service you ask me about those details. But if you want the big idea it's right behind me on the wall banner: the risen Lord now reigns and will return. Ps 93-99 as a whole focus on the fact the Lord reigns *now* in the present tense, even though His return is *not yet* in the future sense of the fullness of what's promised to David and the prophets. Look at Ps 96:10 for the clear message *Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge [future tense coming to judge world]."* Ps **97** starts '*The LORD reigns*' [present tense] and Ps **98** ends '*he comes to judge, he will judge the world*' [future tense for the coming judgment, 98:9]

99:1 *The LORD reigns* [not will reign, the Lord does reign]. If the Lord Jesus reigns, how should we respond? **99:5** *Exalt the LORD our God; worship ...*
² *Exalt the LORD our God and worship...* we're to exalt the Lord in worship as the Lord who will come in the future and in Ps 96-98 now reigns in this present age. We exalt Christ as enthroned and in charge as He sovereignly sits. Ps 93 sets the theme as 1st of these royal psalms, **93:1** *The LORD reigns*

Big idea: The Lord reigns and will return. That should change us in 3 ways:

1. This should change our witness

Ps 96-98 starts on this note of witness with a new song, that's a salvation or redemption song, and if you look at Ps 96, v. 2 says: *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!...*¹⁰ *Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!..."* [and v. 13 closes with His coming to judge]

Because an exalted Christ is coming to judge the world in v. 13, we're to tell the world of His salvation day to day, as v. 2 says. The NKJV has '*proclaim the good news of His salvation...*' Because He is gloriously sovereign over the nations who can't see it yet, we declare His glory among that nations and the good news of His salvation because we want them to see it now before it will be too late when all the nations see His glory in 2nd coming judgment:

97:3 *Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around.* ⁴ *His lightnings light up the world [Rev 8]; the earth sees and trembles [Rev 11?]*
⁵ *The mountains melt like wax before the LORD [Rev 16:20], before the Lord of all the earth. The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory [Rev 18-19, it also says His 'coming...every eye will see,' 1:7]*

In Ps 2 'nations rage...against the Lord and his Christ'; at the last trumpet of Revelation it says '*nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged,*' (Rev 11:15, 18), that's the time of wrath, resurrection to judgment. Ps 2 talks about kings of the earth uniting against Christ (like Rev 19:19), and in Ps 2 the Father says to the Son about the nations: '*You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel*' (Revelation quotes that as a 2nd coming prophecy, 19:15, 2:17). Ps 2 applies it to witnessing: '*take warning...worship the LORD with reverence And rejoice with trembling...For His wrath may soon be kindled*' (NASB).

Ps 110, another one we studied this summer: '*The Lord...will shatter kings on the day of his wrath* [same phrase in Rev 6:17]. *He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses...over the wide earth* [Rev 19]. Another psalm says this: '*You will make them as a blazing oven when you appear. The LORD will swallow them up in his wrath, and fire will consume them...*¹³ *Be exalted, O LORD...*' (21:9). Again the response is to exalt the Lord in worship now so you don't experience consuming fire of Revelation. Another one says He '*comes...before him is a devouring fire...that he may judge...The heavens declare his righteousness* [same language as Ps 97:6], *for God himself is judge...call upon me...I will deliver you*' [Ps 50:3-6, 15]
[the message is: everything will burn, flee the wrath to come]

John the Baptist and Jesus spoke like these psalms in evangelism. In Acts 2 Peter used end time judgment in witnessing, starting with Joel's prophecy of the day of the Lord and how the heavens will warn of it, but all who call on the name of the Lord Jesus can be saved from His wrath. Peter gave the core message of Ps 96-97, he declared Jesus as the Lord reigning at the right hand of the heavenly throne, but who offers salvation to all people who will repent of their sins. Peter's next witnessing recorded in Acts 3 also included end times: '*Repent therefore and be converted...heaven must receive [Jesus] until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the ... holy prophets*' (v. 19, 21 NKJV). All things restored includes nature, Ps 98.

That wasn't just a Peter thing. Paul also included the second coming in his witnessing in Acts 17: '*He is Lord of heaven and earth...all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness*' (v. 24, 30-31 NASB). That's word-for-word from Ps 96:13 '*He will judge the world in righteousness.*' Witnessing includes 3 R's:

- Rulership or Lordship of Christ
- Righteous judgment will come on sin
- Repentant faith is your only hope

Lawson: "Let this message--'the Lord reigns'--be declared far and wide to all nations...[He] is enthroned in the heavens and reigns over all ... May this God-exalting truth be proclaimed to all the earth...the theme of his universal reign should promote a missionary zeal throughout the earth. There is no conflict between divine sovereignty and worldwide missions. The former fuels the latter. Both Scripture and church history substantiate this fact. This psalm demands that all believers participate in global evangelism in one way or another, whether by going, praying, supporting, or training. It is incumbent upon the church to take this message of God's supremacy into all the earth and say 'The Lord reigns...bow down...in repentance and faith'"⁴

Jesus as Lord now reigns and will return, this should change our witness...

#2. This should change our worship

Ps 96:10 says the Lord reigns and will come in glory as the holy judge, but right before that and in light of that, Ps 96:9 says '*Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!*' Worship is not to be trivial time, we should tremble at times. The goal of worship isn't a seeker's comfort level or our service being all cool and casual, the goal is conviction as well. 1 Cor 14:24 says when the church gathers and prophetic preaching is going forth, '*and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all,*²⁵ *the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.*' The biblical goal of worship there is an unbeliever or outsider feels convicted, called to account, and convinced that God is really among us. His Word comforts the afflicted but it will also afflict the comfortable. It's a sword that cuts, convicts, then heals. Do we tremble at God's Word?

We're not to worship sloppily or slovenly, but in the splendor of holiness, or your Bible may say '*in holy attire.*' We should bring our best and not look like we just rolled out of bed, but to come in the way we come to things we consider important. But beyond the outward, the inward attire or attitude of the heart is key to come humbly and focused on Him, the beautiful Savior in holiness that we should reflect in worship. When v. 9 says '*all the earth,*' it's like the hymn lyric 'let every kindred, every tribe on this celestial ball, to Him [Christ] all majesty ascribe and crown Him Lord of all.'⁵ Ps 96:8 says: '*Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come...*' When you bring an offering as you come to church, when you give in the offering box, are you doing it to give glory to the Lord? The glory due His name is greater than we can give, but do you give back from what He gives

you as a thank offering? Do you come into His courts with praise, a cheerful giver, and do you bring yourself as a living sacrifice for His glory? We're to give to the Lord's work, but we're also to give our lives to His work. Do you come to worship mostly to give, or do you come for what you hope to get? Do you come to serve, and do you serve the Lord with gladness, like v. 11?

Notice v. 13 connects all this with His coming. It mentions joy '*before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth...*' It's all because He's coming in v. 13: 'for he comes' is the ultimate culmination of our worship in v. 7-12 and cause of it. It's not just that 'God is love' but that 'God is judge.'

If your worship needs to change to match the rejoicing and gladness at the end of Ps 96, keep reading. Ps 97:1 helps us: '*The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad! ² Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.*' Lawson says the sovereignty and "supremacy of God over all...is the center of gravity of all Christian doctrine ... the sun around which all the lesser planets of subordinate truth [orbit, God's]... sovereignty... is the continental divide of all theology. One drop of man-centered thought runs down the other side of the mountain into creeks, streams, and rivers, ultimately to pour into an ocean of man-centered worship, living, and ministry. Yet...one drop of...truth that is rooted in this statement--'the Lord reigns'--flows down [and] empties into an ocean of God-centered worship, living, and ministry"⁶

The Lord is on His throne and He is reigning sovereignly, that's the basis for rejoicing and being glad. We don't trust the judgment of our Supreme Court or justice system - there's a lot in America that doesn't seem right - but we need to remember there is a righteous reigning Lord who will right wrongs. Some seem to escape justice, but rejoice that the Lord we worship comes to give justice: ³*Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around.* Boice: 'the only complete fulfillment of [Ps 97] must be the eventual return of Jesus Christ and the reign of Jesus in his millennial kingdom at the end of this age. Only then will perfect justice come to this earth. There is no such thing as perfect justice now...But when Jesus returns there will be perfect righteousness. The helpless will be defended, liars confounded, and the guilty judged. This will be grounds for great rejoicing by the righteous'⁷

If you realize your worship needs to change to tremble more, Ps 97:4 helps us: ⁴*His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles.* ⁵*The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth.*

Ps 46:6 *The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts...* ⁹ *He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire.* ¹⁰ *“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”* ¹¹ *The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

Knowing mountains will melt before Him at the uttering of His voice, that should make our hearts melt, trembling at His Word (Isa 66:2, 15-16). If we believe the earth will tremble before Him then, it should move us to tremble now. If we really believe He is coming in fire and judgment, eyes blazing in holiness, it should change how we worship Him in the splendor of holiness.

That’s the 2nd result of 2nd coming, 3rdly finally: **it will change our world**

The reality of the reigning and returning Lord Jesus not only *should* change our witness and our worship, it *will* change our world. There’s future grace for Israel and the nations before the end and future changes even in creation. Ps 98:3 *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* [that’s a prophecy in Isaiah (52:7), v. 7 here:] *Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it!* ⁸ *Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together* ⁹ *before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth*

...

We sing ‘kings and nations tremble at his voice, *all creation rises to rejoice*. Behold our God...’ Ps 19 says the heavens declare the glory of God with their voice, Ps 98 says poetically one day ‘*heaven and nature [will] sing.*’ The Puritan Thomas Chalmers surveyed the Reformed views of Ps 98 in the 1600s and concludes: ‘It may have been written on the occasion of a great national triumph at the time; but may, perhaps, afterwards be taken up at the period of the great millennial restoration of all things. The victory here celebrated may be in prophetic vision[he connects to Revelation]. Then will salvation and righteousness be openly manifested in the sight of the hostile nations. Israel will be exalted; and the blessed conjunction of mercy and truth will gladden and assure the hearts of all who at that time are Israelites indeed. Godliness will form the reigning characteristic of the whole earth.’⁸

Ps 98 is prophetic language of future grace in Isaiah 55:12: ‘*you will go out with joy And be led forth with peace; The mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, And all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thorn bush the cypress [tree] will come up...*’ In other words, there will be a renewal of the earth and removal of the curse.

Rom 8:19 *'creation waits with eager longing for the revealing...For the creation was subjected to futility...[but it says in the future] creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom...'*

I think of how C.S. Lewis described Aslan creating Narnia with singing and even the trees and creatures joined in, but after evil Jadis entered Narnia, the whole land was cursed and covered with winter for a long time. But faithful believers looked for the return of the lion-king, and when he came, the curse of winter began to be reversed, and the land and its life was renewed back to its original intent, and at the end of the last battle is like the end of the Bible

The ultimate joy to the world will come when 'the Lord is come' again 'and heaven and nature sing.' Isaac Watts wrote that hymn not just about the 1st coming of Jesus at Christmas, it looks to the 2nd coming of Jesus at the end:

No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow, Far as the curse is found ...
Joy to the earth! the Saviour reigns; Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains, repeat the sounding joy⁹

Jesus said the flowers of the field showed His glory and if men didn't praise Him, the very rocks would have to cry out. Jesus also spoke of a *new world* or *regeneration* when He'll sit on His glorious throne, judging takes place and followers receive a hundred fold what was left in this world (Mt 19:28).

Wesley: Come divine effectual power, Fallen nature to restore;
Wait we for thy presence here, Long to see thy throne appear;
Bid the new creation rise, Bring us back our Paradise...
Ruined now by sin and curse, Speak it fairer than at first.¹⁰

The Lord Jesus now reigns and will return and will change the world and it should begin to change our world now as we look forward to His coming. It should change the way we witness and change the way we worship. Let me leave the last word to the last words of God's Word: *He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come [Maranatha], Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. [And all said] Amen.*

¹ <http://blogs.faithlafayette.org/church/david-boudias-testimony-more-desirable-than-gold/>

² <http://www.christianexaminer.com/article/boudia-and-johnson-proclaim-christ-on-national-tv-after-winning-silver/50949.htm>

³ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/august-web-only/olympic-swimmer-maya-dirado-faith-freed-me-to-dream-big.html>

⁴ Steve Lawson, *Psalms 76-150*, p. 118-119.

⁵ Edward Perronet, "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name."

⁶ Lawson, p. 122-23.

⁷ James M. Boice, *Psalms*, 2:793.

⁸ Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, n.d., Ps 98:1.

⁹ Isaac Watts, "Joy to the World."

¹⁰ Cited by Horatius Bonar, *Prophetical Landmarks*, chapter 5.