

Psalm 97

Christ's Government Speaking

The psalmist picked up the theme in 96:13 and described the King coming to judge His enemies and reward His people. In Psalm 95, the emphasis was on God's people, in Psalm 96 focused our attention on the nations of the world. This psalm is unique in that it combines both themes and tells us that Jehovah is "the Lord Most High" in heaven who has all things under His control. We as believers today see Jesus as God's exalted King.

This enthronement psalm reveals the Lord's kingship (verses 1-6) and enunciates its effect on both the wicked (verse 7), and righteous (verses 8-12).

The psalmist, though recognizing the Lord's universal rule at the present (verse 9), anticipates a new coming of the Lord to judge the earth. The imagery of the Lord's presence may, in fact, be the basis of some New Testament passages' descriptions of the second coming (compare Matt. 24; Rev. chapter 19). Special emphasis is also placed on the Lord's totally righteous judgments on the world in His kingdom, as well as His obliteration of false religions.

Though many have been made happy in Christ, still there is room. And all have reason to rejoice in Christ's government. There is a depth in his counsels, which we must not pretend to fathom; but still righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne. Christ's government, though it might be matter of joy to all, will yet be a matter of terror to some. But it is their own fault that it is so. The most resolute and daring opposition will be baffled at the presence of the Lord. And the Lord Jesus will before long come and put an end to idol worship of every kind.

This Psalm continues in the thematic attitude of the preceding psalms glorifying God by bringing attention to His character, might, and works. It employs many figures of speech to emphasize the awesomeness of His power. It also presents a few settings wherein He interacts with His creation, which is done to help the us identify with God's care.

God, in this Psalm identifies two distinct groups of people in the world. One group is "Zion," His people: including the "daughters of Judah" (v8). The

other group is “all they that serve graven images, and boast themselves of idols”, which are those that evidently claim no relationship with God (v7).

We see that though both divergent groups are written of as seeing the glory of God, they interact with Him in entirely different manners.

Psalm 97:1 “The LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad [thereof].”

“The Lord reigneth” is the watchword of this Psalm - simply meaning Jehovah reigns psalm (47:8; 93:1; 96:10; 99:1; 146:10). It is the foundation of God’s kingdom and will be the fulfillment of the millennial kingdom. His saints draw comfort from these words.

When I think about the Lord reigneth - I think of this from Charles Spurgeon:

- He Who stood before the judge,
- He Who received the blows,
- He Who was scourged,
- He Who was spit upon,
- He Who was crowned with thorns,
- He Who was struck with fists,
- He Who hung upon the cross,
- He Who as He hung upon the wood was mocked,
- He Who died upon the cross,
- He Who was pierced with the spear,
- He Who was buried,
- Himself rose from the dead, the Lord reigneth.

Multitude of Isles”: Refers to all the continents, as well as islands of the world (compare Isa. 42:10; Dan. 2:34-35, 44; Zech. 14:9).

“Isles be glad”, just means all the nations everywhere, even though they are across the sea.

Jesus has come and set up His kingdom, and all the earth should rejoice and be glad. Jesus brings perfect peace to the nations of the earth. All power has been given to Him in heaven and earth. That at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, and every tongue confess. The Christians will rejoice with great joy. The only ones who will not be happy with this will be the ones who have totally rejected Him. This is when there will be peace throughout all the land.

Psalm 97:2 “Clouds and darkness [are] round about him: righteousness and judgment [are] the habitation of his throne.”

“Clouds and darkness”: Such a description emphasizes the terrifying effect of the Lord’s presence, both in the past (Exodus 19:16-18), and in the future Day of the Lord (Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15; Matt. 24:29-30).

This passage should teach us the impertinence of attempting to pry into the essence of the Godhead, the vanity of all endeavors to understand the mystery of the Trinity in unity, the arrogance of arraignment the Most - High before the bar of human reason, the folly of dictating to the Eternal One the manner in which He should proceed. Wisdom veils her face and adores the mercy which conceals the divine purpose; folly rushes in and perishes, blinded first and by and by consumed by the blaze of glory. C.H.S.

Jesus is the Light of the world. Whether this means that He is a Light in a darkened world, or whether it means that a cloud must surround Him, I am not sure. We do know that in this wicked world, there is great darkness surrounding the church on every side. The church has the Light of Jesus. It has always interesting that even Moses, coming from the presence of God, had his head so bright that he must have his head veiled to keep from blinding the people. We know that the Light of Jesus is so much brighter than that.

Light of Jesus must be seen from the cloud to keep us from being totally blinded by His brightness. We also know that in heaven there is no need for the sun and the moon because Jesus is the Light. Whatever the case, the brightness of His glory displays His righteousness and His judgement. God dwelleth in thick darkness to conceal Himself from mankind, lest man be consumed.

Psalm 97:3 “A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about.”

“Burneth up his enemies” The Lord will destroy His enemies in the future Day of the Lord (compare Zech. 14:12).

We know that our God is a consuming fire. We know that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a fire that burns, out the evil and leaves the good. Whether we are to take this literally or not, I cannot say. We also know that the baptism of John was water, and that the baptism of Jesus was of fire of the Holy Ghost.

In the spiritual realm, it would not be too far wrong to say, that the words of the Lord Jesus going before Him could burn up all the evil before Him and leave just the good. Jesus fights with the two-edged sword that proceeds out

of His mouth. The Word set on fire of the Holy Ghost could be what is spoken of here. In the individual life, God will purge the floor with fire.

Psalm 97:4 “His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled.”

“His lightning”: This is perhaps a reference to the Lord’s awesome and public coming to rule the world (Matt. 24:26-30).

This again, is probably speaking from the spiritual standpoint. We do know that lightnings and thundering’s proceed from the throne of God.

Revelation 4:5 “And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thundering’s and voices: and [there were] seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.”

Matthew 28:3 “His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:”

It is from the light of Jesus, that the gospel has grown around the world. We know that the source of all Light is Jesus. You cannot even look at the sun directly, so you know the sun pales in comparison to the Light of the Son. You can easily see how a look at the source of all Light would frighten you.

Nothing ever caused such a shaking and commotion as the proclamation of the Gospel; nothing more majestic than its course; it turned the world upside down, leveled the mountains and filled up the valleys. Jesus came, He saw, He conquered.

When the Holy Ghost rested upon His servants, their course was like that of a mighty storm, the truth flashed with the force and speed of a thunderbolt, and philosophers and priests, princes, and people, were utterly confounded, and altogether powerless to withstand it. It shall be so again. Faith even now sets the world on fire and rocks the nations to and fro. C.H.S.

Psalm 97:5 “The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.”

“Hills melted”: At the coming of the Lord, the mountains will fade away (compare Isa. 40:3-5; Zech. 14:4, 10).

Again, I would say, I do not know whether this is speaking of literal mountains that will melt like wax at the presence of the source of all Light, or whether this is speaking of mountains of problems that will disappear at His presence. We do know that this light is so great that nothing can withstand it. I would tend to believe that this is speaking of problems, that will disappear when the knowledge of God fills the earth.

Psalm 97:6 “The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the people see his glory.”

His justice in punishing his enemies. The lightning and the thunder in the heavens, the tokens of his wrath, and instruments of it. His wrath itself, which is revealed from heaven (Rom. 1:18). Or the inhabitants of heaven, as Aben Ezra. The angels of heaven; so, the Targum. “The angels on high (or of heaven, as in the king’s Bible), declare his righteousness” (see Rev. 16:5). It is true of the ministers of the Gospel, who are Christ’s angels or messengers. Men of heavenly gifts and grace, whose work it is to declare the justifying righteousness of Christ. Which is revealed in the Gospel from faith to faith, and which is therefore called the word of righteousness, and the ministration of it (Rom. 1:17).

“And all the people see his glory”: The glory of his justice in the destruction of his enemies. The glory of his power and grace in the salvation of his chosen. The glory of God in the face of Christ. The glory of Christ himself, as the only begotten of the Father. The glory of his person, office, grace, and righteousness, in the glass of the Gospel. The glory and honor he is now crowned with in heaven. And all the people, even all the chosen, redeemed, and called people, shall behold his glory to all eternity. It seems chiefly to respect the revelation of his glory, and his people’s view of it at his first coming (see Isa. 60:5).

Man’s sin has brought near destruction to the whole earth, and this is possibly speaking of the truth of Almighty God restoring the earth and its people. Even now, before all of this has been revealed, we have nothing to do but look into a clear night sky and see His glory all around us. The order of the entire universe speaks of His great righteousness and wisdom.

Psalm 97:7 “Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all [ye] gods.”

“All ye gods”: No false gods or religions will be allowed in the kingdom (compare Zech. 13:2-3).

The gods of this earth are nothings. They too, must bow down and worship the Creator of this whole universe. When the Lord reveals Himself to all the people, there will be many who will be terribly embarrassed that they worshiped the false gods of this earth.

Psalm 97:8 “Zion heard and was glad; and the daughters of Judah rejoiced because of thy judgments, O LORD.”

“Zion” (see note on Psalm 87:2).

“Because of thy judgements”: A major reason for joy and well-being in the kingdom will be the perfectly righteous judgments of Christ on the peoples of the world (compare verses 1-3; also, Psalm 48:11; Isa. 11:1-5; Zech. 8:3).

The literal Zion will greatly rejoice because He will dwell in Jerusalem. The spiritual Zion, the church will rejoice, because we will reign with Him as His subordinates. Daughters of Judah is each individual believer.

Psalm 97:9 “For thou, LORD, [art] high above all the earth: thou art exalted far above all gods.”

Above all the inhabitants of the earth. He is highly exalted above every name, men of the greatest name that is named in the world. He is made higher than the heavens, and the inhabitants of it; and has all power in heaven and earth as Mediator. And as a divine Person, he is the Most-high God, as the word “Elion”, here used, signifies. And all this lays a foundation for joy and gladness in the saints. Even the dignity of Christ’s person, and the exaltation of him in the human nature.

“Thou art exalted far above all gods”: Not only the fictitious deities of the Gentiles, or the greatest potentates upon earth. Being made higher than the kings of the earth, who are called gods, but also than the angels in heaven. He is set down at the right hand of God, where they are not, and never were nor shall be. Angels, authorities, and powers, being subject to him (Heb. 1:13).

This will be so evident when the reign of Jesus begins upon the earth. Just the fact of Jesus appearing in the eastern sky, will be evidence enough of who He is. This is not just a local thing. He is not just a ruler in Israel, but in all the earth. We have discussed before that idols and false gods are nothings. The Creator of everything and everyone will rule over His creation.

Psalm 97:10 “Ye that love the LORD, hate evil: he preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked.”

“Preserveth the souls of his saints”: Here the doctrine of eternal security is stated. Gratitude for such grace should motivate believers to holiness.

This is for all who truly love the Lord. The Scripture above says the same thing. Whatever denomination you are, you are acceptable to God, if you love the Lord. The believer (saints), belong to Him. We have been purchased by His precious blood. He protects His own. He delivered us from the curse of sin, and He will deliver us from our enemies. We believers hate evil because we know evil separates a man from God. God will destroy evil. We hate evil because our Jesus hates evil.

Psalm 97:11 “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.”

“Light is sown”: This is a poetic way of describing the ultimate triumph of righteousness and the righteous (compare Isa. 58:8, 10; 60:19-20; Mal. 4:2).

The righteous love the light because they have nothing to hide. The Light of Jesus will light our path that He has chosen for us to walk. We can stay in the path easier if we can see where the path is. Gladness fills our very being, when we are satisfied that we are doing the will of God. This is not just for one believer, but for all who love His appearance. There will be joy unspeakable when we are in the presence of our blessed Lord Jesus.

Psalm 97:12 “Rejoice in the LORD, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.”

In the word of the Lord, as the Targum. In Christ, the essential Word, in his person, the greatness, glory, and fullness of it. In his righteousness, and in salvation by him, and that always (see Phil. 4:4).

“And give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness”: Of his essential holiness, as a divine Person, in which he is glorious, and which appears in all that he has done. And of the holiness of his nature and life, as man and Mediator, which are imputed to his people for their justification. And at the remembrance of that holiness which they have from him and are made partakers of in sanctification. And at the remembrance of that perfect holiness which they shall have with him in heaven to all eternity. Holiness may also signify his faithfulness in the discharge of his work and office as

Mediator, and in the fulfilment of his promises to his people (see note on Psalm 30:4).

Be ye holy for I am holy, is a very interesting statement of God to man. We are not holy, and never will be. Those of us who are saved are righteous. We have taken on the righteousness of Christ. Notice in the last part of the verse above, it is His holiness. He set the perfect standard which imperfect man cannot do. Praise God! There is a standard of excellence. We know we can trust Him completely because He is holy and cannot lie. There would be no good news of the gospel, if we could not depend on every word to be true. He is holy and will set up His reign of holiness on this earth, bringing perfect peace with it. Won't it be wonderful to have no fear at all, because the holiness of God will reign? The word holy means separate and apart. He is not part of the universe; He is the Creator. God is not part of the creation. It is His property. He can restore it or destroy it whichever He chooses.

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