

Worshipping, Witnessing, Waiting - Psalm 96

The best salespeople are always those who love their product. They are convinced that you cannot really enjoy life unless you have what they are selling. And while sales and evangelism are not completely analogous, the most effective witnesses are those who are captivated by the greatness of God and His salvation.

John Piper - *Let the Nations be Glad*: “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.” “The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God.” He is right that worship is the goal of missions. but it’s also true *that worship is the basis for missions. If we are not fervent worshipers of God, we have nothing to tell the nations.* Psalm 96 is a call to tell the nations about God’s glory and His great salvation.

Psalm 96 - written by David and/or Asaph as a part of a longer psalm that was used when David brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, which appears in 1 Chron. 16:23-33.

There are the three themes in Psalm 96: worship, witness, and waiting expectantly for the day when the Lord comes to right all wrongs. The overall theme of Psalm 96 is this:

Because the Lord is the only great and glorious God, we should worship Him, witness of Him, and wait expectantly for His coming to judge the world.

There are two “worship and witness” sections (1-6, 7-10) followed by the final “waiting expectantly” section (11-13).

I. Worship and witness (cycle 1): All the earth should worship God and witness of His salvation because He is the only great and glorious God (96:1-6).

A. The call to worship and witness: All people should joyfully worship God and witness of His salvation among the nations (96:1-3).

The psalmist repeats his theme, “Sing to the Lord,” three times. *The first time* he tells us to sing to the Lord “a new song.” *It refers to a song that celebrates the mercies of God, which are new every morning.*

The second exhortation to sing to the Lord is directed to “all the earth.” The last part of the psalm will tie back into this by calling all creation to praise the Lord. *It shows that the scope of God’s praise is as wide as all the earth, which He has created.*

The third call to sing to the Lord is followed by three imperatives: bless, proclaim, tell.

—To bless God’s name means that we should praise and thank Him for all that He is or His glorious attributes. “Day to day” shows that the good news of His salvation must go forth continually, until the whole earth has heard.

Since Israel was prone to interpret “all the earth” to mean “all the Jews”, the psalmist specifically states that he means the Gentile nations (96:3). God’s glory and His wonderful deeds here (96:3) are poetic parallels to His salvation (96:2). *God’s salvation displays His glory and His wonderful deeds.*

Paul refers to “the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). When God broke into his darkness with the gospel, he says that He (2 Cor. 4:6) “has shone into our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

B. Why worship and witness: Because the Lord is the only great and glorious God (96:4-6).

Why should we get excited about worshiping God and go to all the trouble of telling the nations about His salvation? Because the pagan world is marked by their fear of the spirit world.

The psalmist here says that the only one we should fear is the Lord, who made the heavens (96:5): “For all the gods of the people are idols.” So, don’t fear manmade idols, which are nothing. Fear the Lord, who alone is great and greatly to be praised! (Psalm 33:6, 8-9)

II. Worship and witness (cycle 2): All the earth should worship God and witness of His salvation because He is the only great and glorious God (96:7-10).

A. The nations should worship God because of His glory and strength (96:7-9).

The threefold “ascribe” parallels the threefold “sing” that opened the psalm. *Ascribe* is literally *give*. It does not imply that we can give God something that He is lacking. Rather, the idea is that *we are to offer God worship that is commensurate with His infinite majesty and glory*.

Since the cross, when Christ offered the perfect and final sacrifice for our sins, the only sacrifices that we can bring into His courts are praise, thanksgiving, and good deeds (Heb. 13:15-16). To “worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness”, refers to the fear that Isaiah experienced when he saw the Lord, with the seraphim proclaiming, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isa. 6:3), which is reinforced in v 9. If we got just a glimpse of how great God is in His glory, strength, and holiness, we would quickly join Isaiah on our faces, exclaiming that we are ruined for we had seen the Lord of hosts! (Isa. 6:5)

As Isaiah spontaneously experienced, *you cannot get a glorious vision of God without at the same time getting a greater understanding of your own sin and depravity*. You immediately sense that God isn’t your good buddy in the sky! He is altogether separate from you. You shrink into nothingness in comparison with Him.

But, as soon as Isaiah lamented his own impurity, the Lord immediately sent an angel to purify him and tell him that his sins were forgiven. (Isa. 6:6-7; see Psalm 130:3, 4, 7)

B. God’s people should witness to the nations about His sovereign rule (96:10). Even though at present God permits the nations to rage against His Messiah, He still reigns. (See Ps. 2:1-3; V 10 reminds us of Isaiah 52:7). Although at present, Jesus’ enemies are not all under His feet (1 Cor. 15:25-28), He is coming again in power and glory, to rule the nations with a rod of iron (Rev. 19:11-16). He came the first time as the humble Savior, to die for our sins. But He will come again to rule and judge.

He is the risen, sovereign, righteous King of kings and Lord of lords, who is coming with all the armies of heaven, with His sword coming out of His mouth to strike down the nations. “He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty” (Rev. 19:15). Sinners can either bow willingly before Him now, or they will bow forcedly when He comes. Don’t give lost people the idea that Jesus is a wimpy weakling! He is the sovereign Judge!

III. Waiting in hope: All creation will worship God when He comes to judge the world (96:11-13).

God’s judging the peoples with equity (96:10) leads the psalmist to call the inanimate creation to break forth in praise. Romans 8:19-22 - creation presently groans under the curse, waiting for the day of redemption when it will be restored. The Lord’s coming to judge the earth refers to the coming of Messiah, who is God.

Three terms describe this future judgment: equity, righteousness, and faithfulness (96:10, 13).

—*Equity* means that God’s judgment will be fair. No one will be judged unfairly. Everyone who does not receive mercy will receive perfect justice.

—*Righteousness* refers to God’s perfect standard, which is Himself. He has revealed His righteousness in His Word. He will not judge on the curve of human goodness, but according to the absolute standards of His own righteous nature.

—*Faithfulness* can also be translated as *truth*. It means that He will not be arbitrary or whimsical in His judgment. He will judge each person faithfully and truthfully.

God’s righteous judgement will either be a source of great joy (those who have received Christ) or a source of great terror (those who have rejected Christ and His salvation and forgiveness). (Rev. 6:16) For those who by faith in the shed blood of that Lamb have been clothed with His righteousness, the day of judgment will be a time of great joy (Rev. 18:20, Rev. 19:6b-7).

Summary

To sum up the message of Psalm 96 and apply it to us, three things should be true of us:

If the glorious God is our Savior, we will be a worshipping people.

If the glorious God is our Savior, we will be a witnessing people, both here and abroad.

If the glorious God is our Savior, we will be a watchful people as we wait for Christ’s coming to judge the world in righteousness.