

Psalms for a Summer Season (5)

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[0 : 00] What is the oldest song we still sing today? They say it may well be the children's rhyme, Ring-a-ring-a-rosies, A pocket full of poesies, A tissue, a tissue, We all fall down.

Allegedly, this dates from the days of the great plague of London in the 1660s, where the symptoms of the plague were a rosy rash, poesies of flowers were carried around to protect yourself, and a cough was another symptom, and finally the plague suffered or fell down.

True or not, perhaps this is the oldest song we still sing today. But there is one which is older still.

The words to which we sing Psalm 100 were written in 1650, but the tune we traditionally sing it to, called Old 100th, you know, all people that on earth do dwell, was first composed in 1562.

It's nearly 500 years old, and it's still one of the commonest tunes Christians sing today. Most songs go to fashion within just a few years, but Psalm 100, sung to the tune Old 100th, has and will never go out of fashion.

[1 : 31] It'll never go to fashion, not just because it means so much to us, but because of what it tells us about God. Behind Psalm 23, Psalm 100 is the best-known song in the Bible.

For a song with only five verses, it is the gospel in miniature. The gospel in miniature. And although the name of Jesus is not mentioned, he is written large across every line of this psalm.

For the Christian who wants to learn about who God is, and how we are to respond to God, Psalm 100 is a perfect place to start.

There are two themes in this psalm. The first, the truth we proclaim, and second, the God we worship.

The truth we proclaim, and the God we worship. Let Psalm 100 be the song, not just that we sing together, but the song of your own heart.

[2 : 41] Your song of praise to God. This song might be quite new to you, but the old truths it proclaims will never go out of fashion.

So, first of all then, the truth we proclaim, the truth we proclaim. In the mid-16th century, evangelical Christianity was unknown in Scotland.

The first people to introduce it were from the northeast, just north of Dundee, and they had travelled to Germany, and they had been influenced by the Reformation preaching of Martin Luther.

And they returned to Scotland, fired up to tell our forefathers the good news of salvation by faith alone, in Christ alone. But they faced a problem.

The ruling authorities in Scotland had banned evangelical Christianity, Lutheran theology, from being preached. These first Scottish evangelicals got round that problem by taking the tunes for common Scottish songs and changing the words, nursery rhymes, and common Scottish songs.

[3 : 56] It would be like us today, using the tune to Flower of Scotland and changing the words so that they weren't full of Scottish nationalism, but full of gospel truth.

So, early Scottish evangelicals and Dundee and Montrose and Arbroath and places like that could then sing their songs filled with new truths about the Christian gospel without being arrested by the authorities.

So, they sung their songs in the marketplaces. And in doing so, they spread the gospel to the people. The Scottish Reformation really began by singing common songs and nursery rhymes filled with biblical truth.

Psalm 100 is filled with truth. Truth of which we are not ashamed, but truth we want to proclaim to today's Scotland. Who knows?

Perhaps it shall be by singing the truth, not just preaching the truth. God shall usher in a new reformation in our land. There are three fundamental truths we can proclaim from Psalm 100.

[5 : 10] Who God is, what God is like, and what God has done. Who God is. In verse 3, the writer proclaims, know that the Lord, He is God.

There is no other God than Him. All other gods are imaginary and created by human beings. So, we take a block of wood and we use half of it to start a fire and then the other half we carve into an image we've got in our minds of what a God should look like.

And we place that wooden carving in a special place and then we bow down to worship it. We declare ourselves followers of a God our minds have conceived and our hands have carved. or we construct a system of rules and ceremonies designed to reach up to a God we know nothing about. We diligently follow these rules and observe these ceremonies trying to attain to a greater knowledge of God.

Anyone who does not follow our system is condemned. But all the time, it is we who have constructed these rules and ceremonies. They are mere inventions of the human mind.

[6 : 40] By contrast, the writer of Psalm 100 insists that the only God that is the only God that is the Lord. You'll notice the name Lord is given in capital letters.

It's God's personal name. The name Yahweh. It wasn't a name humans dreamt up to call God. It was a name God gave to us to call him by. He revealed himself as the Lord Yahweh to Moses on Mount Sinai during the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.

Human beings did not invent the name the Lord. God revealed it to them. This is the name of the only God there is the Lord.

We don't invent names for each other. We ask each other what is your name? And the only God that is has revealed his name to us as the Lord.

The Lord is not a figment of our imaginations. He's not a construction of the human mind. He is who he is. If anyone says to us who is God we can answer he is the Lord.

[7 : 56] he is not the God of world religions. He is the Lord we Christians worship. This is important because it means that it's not for us to tell God what he must be like.

It is for us to listen to what the Lord tells us he is like. Take him or leave him but this is who he is.

The only God that is the Lord who God is. But it also tells us what God is like. What God is like.

In verse 5 the writer gives us information this time about what God is like. For the Lord is good. His steadfast love endures forever. His faithfulness to all generations.

These three words describe him so perfectly. Goodness. Steadfast love. Faithfulness. We do not believe in a God who is filled with hate and selfishness.

[9 : 10] The only God that is the Lord is good loving and faithful. That is what God is like. To talk of him as good is to say of him he is morally perfect.

All perfection and goodness in our world come from him. He is the fountain of every perfection and every goodness. In him is all life and truth all wholesomeness and perfection.

But to talk of him as being good is also to say of him that in him is all beauty. and wonder anything beautiful in our world is a reflection of the beauty of its creator.

God is not coldly clinical in his moral perfections. He is gloriously wonderful in his beauty. There is only one God and the one God that is the Lord is both morally and aesthetically good.

God to talk of his steadfast love is to dig deep into the essence of God. God's heart is filled with love. It bursts full of love.

[10 : 29] He is infinitely eternally and unchangeably full of love. He is not capricious or apathetic toward us. He loves us committedly steadfastly and so very inventively.

the only God that is the Lord is love even as the apostle John will later say God is love. If anyone asks us what is God like we say God is love.

To talk of his faithfulness is to describe his dependability trustworthiness his reliability. The God of promise who never fails to keep his promise.

Never insincere. Always worthy of our trust. Not saying one thing and doing another. He is true to his word. Always loyal to his people. They may lose their grip on him.

He never loses his grip on them. once we are his we are always his and he will never let us go. This is what the Lord the only God that is is like.

[11 : 44] Full of goodness steadfast love and faithfulness. You know the truth is the human imagination is incapable of inventing a God who is so good so loving and so faithful.

This is the truth we proclaim that the only God there is is like this. But then thirdly here the third truth is what God has done what God has done at the heart of this psalm at its very centre are the most

wonderful words in verse three.

It is he who made us and we are his. We are his people the sheep of his pasture. God does not sit idly waiting for us to do things for him which is the kind of God all the other religions worship. Rather in faithfulness in love and in goodness he does things for us. First he made he made us he created all that is the heavens and the earth all that fills them he made the sun and the stars and the oceans and the land the birds and the fish the trees and the animals and he made us from the dust of the earth he formed us and he blew into our nostrils the breath of life as we saw from Psalm 8 the universe in all its immensity complexity and all its awe and all its wonder it's the work of his hands he he wrote us as his divine poem not just making but filling what he made with diversity and with colour God does not draw in black and white God paints in every colour of the spectrum and beyond he made us but then secondly he saved he saved though once we were like straying sheep on account of our sin we were not his people but in goodness and love and faithfulness he made us his we are his people we hear the words of Jesus echoing here

I am the good shepherd the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep like like the shepherd in Jesus famous parable God searched for us when we were far away from him and when he found us he laid us on his shoulders and joyfully brought us back to himself the Lord our God is our good shepherd far from abandoning us in our lostness and sin he searched for us and he found us finding us on the cross where he gave himself unto death for us this is the only God that is the Lord who has demonstrated his love for us in this while we were yet sinners Christ died for us the apostle Peter puts it this way he himself bore our sins and his body in the tree that we might die to sin and live for righteousness by his wounds you have been healed for you were straying like sheep but now you are returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls because of what Jesus did we are now his people the sheep of his pasture he is the Lord who is gracious and powerful and loving he is our shepherd and we are his sheep we did not save ourselves

[15 : 45] God saved us we did not reach up to God to find him he reached down to us in Christ and found us no wonder these early evangelical Scottish Christians in the 16th century were so desperate to proclaim these truths of Psalm 100 so desperate that they changed the words tendersity rhymes to make their message known had we not read these truths in the Bible we would think they were too good to be true for they are the best news we can ever hear there is only one God the only God that is the Lord he is good loving and faithful he made us he saved us if there is better news in this world I am yet to hear it in the face of the gloom of this world we dare to proclaim the truths of this Psalm we sing them we say them we boast in them and exult in them because they are glory and our hope though all the world should call us liars we will cling to them for in him the Lord we found belonging and reality and security the truth we proclaim well secondly and more briefly perhaps the God we worship the God we worship there are many things we know which don't change anything for us or demand a response from us

I know that Lidl are selling cans of tuna cheaper than Sainsbury's but that doesn't change anything for me because I don't like tuna and therefore I won't be buying either from Lidl or from Sainsbury's a trivial example perhaps but many other things we know change everything for us and they demand a response from us my tax return is due by the end of November and I've got to make sure therefore I've got all the necessary paperwork ready for that date the truth we proclaim about God changes everything about us and our world who God is what God is like what God has done it invites it elicits it commands a response as a result most of this psalm is response and what a response perhaps this is one reason Psalm 100 has stood the test of time this psalm is bursting with the themes of joy and thanksgiving and praise and worship and gladness and singing shouldn't this be the response of our hearts to the best news we can ever hear not a response which is so much demanded but a response which is the spontaneous explosion of the human heart to the truth of who God is what God is like and what God has done we make a joyful noise to the Lord the only God that is the precise word the psalm writer uses in verse 1 shout loud cheer blow a horn I must confess to being rather frustrated with people in church who never sing I once knew a man who used to come to our church who was a season ticket holder at a prominent football club in Glasgow one of two you can take your picks he never once opened his mouth to sing a psalm or a hymn in church but the day before you can guarantee he was joining him with the songs and the cheers and the cop oh did I just say it yeah he did songs and cheers of the crowd at the football game surely if we can cheer a goal being scored we can make a joyful noise to the Lord we come not just with our mouths but with the gladness of our hearts if the Christian gospel never penetrates

beyond the surface it's no gospel to us 1650 version of the psalm hymns serve with mirth remember mirth being an old fashioned word which means joy and gladness reminds us of the angels announcement to Mary

I bring you good news of great joy who God is what God's like what God has done for us in Christ fills us with joy so like a can of coke shaken up and then opened we are no less able to contain our praise gladness and joy we enter his gates with thanksgiving here's a picture of a pilgrim entering through the gates of the temple into Jerusalem we come into God's presence with thanksgiving we're thanking those who have done something for us and our hearts and minds are filled with praise and thanksgiving for Jesus and all he has done for us on the cross and by his resurrection from the dead we thank him for the salvation of us and for the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts we praise him we worship him we adore him we exalt in him we give him thanks the word bless which is used here in Psalm 100 is a word which originates with the word for knees to bless God means to fall on our knees before him to worship to publicly and joyfully proclaim his divided infinite blessedness the man or woman who's unwilling to get down on their knees to praise God is someone who doesn't know who God is what God's like or what God's done the sheer number of praise words in this Psalm build a cumulative case all we are all we ever hope to be all our abilities all our dreams all our energy all our money all our resources all our relationships we devote them all and far more besides to the praise and worship of God we don't sing praise to God because that's what's expected of us because that's what Christians do or merely because God has commanded us to do that we sing because we want to we have an explosive force of praise in our hearts to the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us it must have an outlet we might feel that if we did not open our mouths to praise him the rocks and stones of this building would cry out in praise instead and we ourselves would explode so much praise so little time in this life so much to thank God for so little time to do it where the whole realm of nature mine would be an offering far too small love so amazing so divine demands my soul my life my all but notice as we close that the first line of this song reads make a joyful noise to the Lord all the earth it does not say make a joyful noise to the Lord all his people the praise of God in Psalm 100 verse 1 is globe shaped earth shaped covering the whole world and all its peoples

I first sung this Psalm perhaps at the age of three in the free church in Golsby perhaps there were about 40 of us oh I can't remember I do remember that everyone was very old I didn't realise it then but I think I know it now Psalm 100 has a global perspective calling upon not just a small number of people in a small highland church to praise God but calling all the peoples of the world to praise him Psalm 100 is a psalm of praise worship and mission it sets us on the path to the more ambitious of all projects to go with the good news of who God is what God is like and what God has done in Christ to all the peoples of the earth and through our mission and evangelism to bring them to a place where they too worship and praise him for themselves why did

[24 : 45] William Carey go as a missionary to India Adoniram Judson to Burma Hudson Taylor to China their great desire was to see the peoples of China Myanmar and India join in the global song of praise and worship to the only God that is who because of his steadfast love and faithfulness sent his son to die on the cross as a ransom for all peoples why did St. Patrick and St.

Ninian and St. Columba come to Scotland all those centuries ago to hear the praises of God from the mouths of our forefathers would they be content with the Scotland they see today a Scotland where the name of the Lord is used more often as a curse than as a blessing would they be content with half empty churches and a meaningless message being preached from so many pulpits up and down our land would they be content with seeing so many materially prosperous Christians who at the same time are so spiritually poor though it is the oldest song we sing today perhaps we need to rediscover the central message of this psalm for ourselves know who God is grow in our praise and worship of him go with the gospel of Jesus Christ to a needy and sinful world no grow go one day every knee shall bow before Christ and every tongue shall confess him as Lord but wouldn't it be the most audacious and ambitious prayer that we could ever make that that would happen before the day of

Christ's second coming and more even that God would use our praise and worship of him as a means to fulfill the glorious vision of psalm 100 verse 1 make a joyful noise to the Lord all the earth who knows perhaps it shall be through our singing of gospel truth not just our preaching of gospel truth that God shall usher in a new reformation in Scotland