

ALL AGE - To the Ends of the Earth

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[0 : 00] And you may like to have open the Bibles at page 450, which is that psalm, Psalm 47. And this is not going to be an Arabic service with a one-hour sermon, you'll be pleased to know.

But just a few comments about this psalm. Unlike perhaps some of you, I'm too young to remember the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

But the pictures show a magnificent occasion, and those who are old enough may well remember seeing or hearing about it all those years ago, before television, I guess.

And no doubt there were crowds lining London streets. No doubt the carriages, the jewels, the dresses, the uniforms were all ornate and sumptuous and expensive. No doubt there was huge joy and no doubt great applause as the Queen went to and from Westminster Abbey on that day.

And also, of course, the nations of the world were there. So the leaders of many countries in the world, not least, of course, the Commonwealth countries, but not only those, would have gone to England, as the Prime Minister Robert Menzies did for the coronation, to pay their respects and to be part of the gathering for the crowning of the Queen.

[1 : 15] Well, Psalm 47, in some senses, celebrates the coronation of the King of Israel. It's not King David or King Solomon. It's not any of the human kings.

But there's language in this psalm that suggests, as it praises God, it's a bit like celebrating, not so much the coronation, because God's always the king, but celebrating the kingship of God, that God is the King of Israel.

So in verse 1, clap your hands, all you people, shout to God with loud songs of joy. That's an exhortation to rejoice. It's quite exuberant, clapping, shouting.

And the reason, verse 2, for the Lord, most high, is awesome, a great king over all the earth. Now, the striking thing about these verses is, and this psalm is, that in verse 1, first line, clap your hands, all you peoples.

But it's not so much all you Israelites, your king here, let's clap and applaud, but it's all the non-Israelites as well. It's all peoples. But it's not like 1953, when the queen was no doubt applauded as the queen of England and people from other countries applauded.

[2 : 33] It's not that all you nations, well, you're welcome to come and see our sort of king and clap him. It's actually a bit more substantial than that, as we'll see in this psalm.

It's actually the incorporation of all the peoples, because as verse 2 says, God, the God of Israel, the God of the Bible, is king over all the earth.

And the language of verse 2, the Lord most high, is language that's used of the Assyrian emperors, for example, when perhaps this psalm was even written. It's saying here that the God of Israel is the king, not only of Israel, but of the whole of the earth.

And indeed, even though Israel had their own human kings at times, the real king always was God. It gives some evidence for why God is the king of the earth in verses 3 and 4.

He subdued peoples under us and nations under our feet, referring to the conquest of Egypt when Israel came out to their land, and the conquest of the land, and the nations that were in the land subdued under God's feet and under Israel's feet.

[3 : 41] So verse 4 says, he chose our heritage for us, that is, the land of Canaan, the pride of Jacob, another name for Israel, whom he loves. And then this section of the psalm finishes with the sort of shout of acclamation.

God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. And the idea is that it's as though God has gone up to his throne to rule over his people Israel, and indeed over the whole earth.

The second half of the psalm has the same pattern. So verse 6 is like verse 1. Verse 1 said, clap your hands and shout to God. Verse 6 says, sing praises to God.

Sing praises. Sing praises to our king. Sing praises. Gosh, how many praises do you have to sing? But it's exuberant and celebratory. I mean, we might think that Andrew and Helen's Arabic service of having one hour of singing might be a little bit excessive, but the psalms are always telling us to sing, to shout with joy and so on.

And so four times in verse 6, they're exhorted to sing praises, a bit like verse 1. And like verse 2, verse 7 begins for the reason for singing praises.

[4 : 56] And as verse 2 said, God is the great king over the earth. So verse 7 says, God is the king of all the earth. Sing praises again, just in case you hadn't done enough. Singing praises after verse 6.

And then verses 8 and 9 bring the psalm to a climax. God is king over the nations. God sits on his holy throne.

Now in ancient Israel, at the center of the capital Jerusalem was the temple. And in the center of the temple was the most holy place. The place where the atoning sacrifice blood was spread on the day of atonement.

And in the center of the most holy place was the ark of the covenant in which were the Ten Commandments. The ark was covered in gold. And on either end of the ark, spread out were cherubim.

Not like those sort of kitsch posters you see of baby-faced angels. These were rather fierce-looking, wings-outspread cherubim to guard the area above the ark.

[5 : 55] Because that was the throne of God. The ark was his footstool. There was nothing actually in the space between these cherubim with their arms outspread.

Because God is never represented visually by icon or image or statue, of course, in the Old Testament. But that was his throne. Above the law, in the center of the temple, and above the mercy seat where atoning blood was spread on the day of atonement.

The language in this psalm is a little bit like the language in the book of Samuel, 2 Samuel 5, when the ark is carried up to Jerusalem in the time of David.

And then under David's son, King Solomon, the temple is built and the ark is placed in the central part of the temple. Because on earth, there's a sense in which God rules his throne is at the heart of the temple.

Not denying that God is ruling in heaven, but represented on earth by the ark and the area above the ark, at least, in the center of the temple.

[6 : 57] So God is king over the nations. Verse 8 says, God sits on his holy throne. And it's a throne not just for Israel in Jerusalem, but in Jerusalem indeed for the whole of the earth.

In the Old Testament, you see, the purpose of God in choosing Israel and Israel's founding father, Abraham, is not just for their benefit to the exclusion of other nations.

God chose Abram so that through Abram and his descendants, all the nations of the world will be blessed. That's Genesis 12, verse 3, part of the original promises to Abram.

This psalm is beginning to visualize the fulfillment of that promise so that all the nations are blessed and come to Jerusalem. In the Old Testament, the purpose of God is met by the strategy of Israel being like a magnet that will attract the nations to Israel, to Jerusalem and to its God.

That was the ideal. Hardly ever see it happen. In Solomon's reign, the Queen of Sheba comes from another nation to worship God, the God of Israel. But that's about it because Israel kept failing.

[8 : 10] And because of their failure and their sin and the punishment that God brought against them, no nation was attracted to Israel. When you get to the New Testament, the purpose of God is still the same, to bring blessing to all the nations of the earth.

The strategy changes. As we heard in that reading right at the very beginning, picked up in some of the language here on this banner, Jesus' strategy for the New Testament and post-New Testament times is not for us to be magnetic to attract people, so much as to go into all the world.

In the Old Testament, the ideal is that the nations are drawn to the center, to God, centripetally, I think is the scientific word. But for the New Testament times, the strategy is centrifugal, going out to the edges, to the ends of the earth.

And of course, today, as we don't see that fulfilled in a big way yet, not until the final day of the Lord's return. But we have rejoiced that through brave people in the past 2,000 years, from the time

that Jesus said, go, there are Christians in, I think, every nation on earth.

And even here today, what an amazing mix of nations we have lived in, born in, worked in, served in, and come from. Nations all around the globe represented here today, which I think is very exciting.

[9 : 35] And I hope that you've shared some of the excitement of that today as well. Verse 9 finishes the psalm with a climactic statement. The princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham.

This is not the coronation of 1953, when the princes of the nations gathered as foreigners to observe and pay homage. These are princes. In fact, it's a bit of a put-down because they're probably kings and emperors.

But by calling them princes, it's acknowledging that God is the real king alone. But they are gathering not as outsiders or visitors, but as converts. They are gathering as the people of Abraham.

They've come to worship God. They have been blessed. That's the vision that's being pictured in verse 9, first line. And then the end of the psalm, For the shields of the earth belong to God. All power resides in him. Nothing happens on earth outside his power and sovereignty. And then the very end, he is highly exalted. Often when we envisage heaven or the kingdom of God, Or we look forward to an end to the sin and evil and destruction of our earth, Part of our motivation is perhaps selfish or human-centered.

[10 : 53] Our own ease or comfort. Our own joy and bliss. But in the end, that's a distorted vision. Part of heaven and the kingdom of God will be our joy and bliss and comfort and ease.

But it's slightly off-center for the vision. The end of the psalm is, He is highly exalted. In 1953, when the queen was crowned, All eyes were on her.

She was the object of attention. She was the focus. At the end, in heaven, When the kingdom of God is manifest perfectly and fully, God will be the focus.

All eyes will be on Him. And He will be the object of our attention. Of course, the New Testament sharpens the picture a bit. So that it's not just God most high, But we know from the New Testament, That means also the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

At His name, every knee will bow. The Lord Jesus has risen and ascended to heaven And is on the throne of heaven, As we see in the pictures of the book of Revelation. So Jesus will be the focus, When the kingdom of God is finally fully revealed, At the end of time.

[12 : 12] Meanwhile, We are part of the purpose and strategy of God for this world. The strategy is to go to the nations, Promoting the gospel, Through our giving, Through our praying, Through our sending and going.

That is, we're not to be simply local Christians, Living for our own comfort and ease. We are part, essentially, as the church, Caught up in the global strategy of God, That all the nations of the earth will be blessed, Through the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, As God originally promised to Abraham, 4,000 years ago.

And so what we've tried to convey today, I guess, Is a sense of that global mission that we're part of. As we've heard today from Andrew and Helen in the Middle East, As we keep praying for them and supporting them.

As we've heard from brothers and sisters here, Who have come from or been to, Lived in, served in, All sorts of other different countries around the world. The missionary imperative remains until Jesus returns.

And the kingdom of God is finally fully revealed, When every knee will bow before him. And so we pray, Come, Lord Jesus Christ.

[13 : 27] Amen. Well, we're going to sing...