

Psalm 96: An Advent Psalm

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Date: 01 December 2019

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[0 : 00] Welcome to the psalm we were reading a moment ago, Psalm 96, the psalm that begins, we'll sing to the Lord, a new song, sing to the Lord all the earth.

It's the words you find in page 499 of your church Bibles, the psalm that is entitled for the sermon, a Christmas psalm, because in many churches in the land today, many congregations, the first Sunday of this month, first Sunday of December, is generally recognised as the first Sunday of Advent, as we're talking to the children, the lead up, if you like, to Christmas, Christmas Day. And traditionally in our own denomination, that kind of practice was at best ignored, certainly for many years, and even frowned upon.

Now I'm not going to make any judgement at all on fellow believers, whose practice is what we generally call liturgical, in other words, you know, keeping to a set pattern of worship, a set timetable in what's preached in Lord's Day after Lord's Day.

But, you know, there is value. We do hold to the truth of Scripture. And of course, we proclaim the Lord Jesus and His coming to earth, not just in four Sundays in a year, but surely, you know, for all the year, we proclaim the Lord Jesus and His coming to earth to save His people from their sins.

[1 : 33] That truth is a universal truth. It's a truth for the whole year. And of course, not just for the four Sundays in December. But remember, as God's Word also teaches us, use every opportunity.

We use every opportunity to bring forth the message, the message of the wonder of God's love, that God should so love the world that He gave.

That He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. And it's that sending of God's Son, that sending of the Lord Jesus to deliver His people from sin and Satan and death, that sending and love that sent Jesus.

It's that love that we remember. It's that love of God that shows and tells us that Jesus was sent to live in perfect obedience to God's law.

No other could do that other than the Lord Jesus. And no other could pay the price that God's justice demanded for sin. No other but the Lord Jesus in His perfect life of obedience and in His death on the cross.

[2 : 48] No other could pay the cost for your salvation. And so we always remember, not just four Sundays in the year, but we remember and keep remembering what it costs for your salvation.

The coming of the Lord Jesus to earth. The coming of our Saviour and Lord. Last Lord's Day morning, those of you who were here remember, we remember the Lord's death in communion.

And it's only right, it's only proper, that we remember His coming to earth. In order to live that perfect life of obedience. In order to die that death on the cross.

It's only right that we continue to remember the Lord Jesus in His coming to earth. And you know, we live in a, I have to say, an ever-increasing secularized world.

You know, this time of year that's been so hijacked by commercialism and secularism. And you know, just leaving Christ out of Christmas.

[3 : 56] And isn't it then, the more necessary, that we do use the opportunities that this time of year affords to put Christ back into Christmas. That's why we'll have a Legion carol service here on the 16th.

That's why we'll have our Christmas Eve service on the 24th. That's why we'll recognize the Lord Jesus and tell of Him to others who as yet don't know Him as Saviour.

We are living in such an over-commercialized, secularized world that seems to exult in this time of year. A few days ago, or maybe evenings, I was returning from Presbyterian on Tuesday night.

I was walking down to the train station and looked over at all these amazing number of attractions now in Prince Street Gardens. And my thoughts immediately turned to John Bunyan's book,

Pilgrim's Progress, and what he described as Vanity Fair.

You know, that imagined town, a town, a representative town called Vanity. And in that town, a fair was held every year. And the pleasure principle, the key in that town, you know, summing up all the emptiness, the vanity that's outside of Christ.

[5 : 14] The pursuit of, the pleasure principle, the pursuit of pleasure, and the seeking of fulfillment out of Christ that's never fulfilling. And as I was looking down at that scene, all I could see was false beauty, false peace, false satisfaction.

And, you know, just way, way out of what's true peace and satisfaction that's found only in the Lord Jesus. And a couple of days ago, I'm reading in one of the social media posts, one of my colleagues echoes exactly the same words.

And it's no coincidence. I remember some years ago, one of my other colleagues spoke of Edinburgh, a pagan city, and it was there right before us. That Vanity Fair was right there.

It's come to Edinburgh, it's come to Scotland. And so it's so necessary to be reminded of the true meaning of Christmas that's not found in the glory of a million lights in Princess Street, but the true meaning that's found in the one true light of the world, that one who's coming we rejoice in as the Saviour of mankind.

So return our hearts to words of praise. And, of course, God's Word helps you and helps me and helps all of us to praise Him for the coming of the Lord Jesus, because we're to worship Him, we're to glorify Him.

[6 : 41] He left the glory of heaven to come to earth. He's worthy of all praise. He's worthy of all adoration because of what it cost Him for your salvation.

He's brought joy, true joy to the world. Salvation. Glory. He's worthy. Joy. And salvation.

Glory. The glory of Christ. He's worthy of all praise for coming to earth and a Saviour. The joy to the world that's expressed in His coming. These truths, we find exactly here in Psalm 96.

And that's why we use God's Word to help us, Old and New Testament, to help us to glorify God and you in Christ, because of Christ's first advent.

And so we're going to look at these themes of glory, salvation, glory, worthiness, joy. Shouldn't that be with us all the time that we come before God in worship?

[7 : 43] Thanking Him for the salvation that He's brought in Christ. That Christ came as the glorious Son of God. He's worthy of all our praise and we express joy in His coming.

Here in the Psalm, it's also here in another one of the Psalms we sang, Psalm 98. And, you know, so we can use the Psalm to help us in worshipping God, to praising the Lord Jesus, to thinking of His advent.

And, you know, there's so much happening at this time of year and different forms of worship. But there's every reason for using this Psalm. I mean, we've been, a few weeks ago, we were looking at some of the Psalms just to help us to acknowledge God, to worship Him.

And maybe in many places, Psalms might not be used so much in worship, certainly not in preaching at this time of year. But, you know, we do have God's Word before us to help us in our worship of God.

We should, you know, Psalms are there to broaden our understanding of God. And yes, to help us to see the Lord Jesus. And so we're going to look at the Psalm.

[9 : 00] Not the whole of it, because we don't have time for that. But certainly the first three verses and the last three verses. Because the more that we look at what the Psalm is saying, the more we'll see it actually points to the Lord Jesus.

It points to Him as King, as Saviour, and as Lord. And the Psalm, I pray, will help you to adore Him. You know, we sing in the carol, come let us adore Him.

The Psalm helps you to adore Him as Lord, as King. And so, you know, let's look at these words.

Let's turn to the Psalm. And, well, let's think, what the Psalm is saying here?

What's the background to the Psalm? Because, you know, it hasn't just appeared out of the blue. There's a background. There's certainly possible reasons why it was written. And, well, if we were reading the Psalm, then you could see that the Psalm was all about victory.

Go back to the Old Testament. When the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem, this was many hundreds of years before, certainly, the Lord Jesus. The Ark of the Covenant that contained the tablets of the law, the Ten Commandments, the Ark came back to Jerusalem.

[10:16] The Philistines that had the Ark of the Covenant were defeated. The Ark brought back to Jerusalem. And the words of this Psalm here are almost identical to that historic event that you read of in 1 Chronicles 16.

That part of the Old Testament that tells of the history of Israel, history under King David. And after David's victory over the Philistines, as we said, the Ark brought back to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, this precious wooden box that contained the two stone tablets that the Ten Commandments were written on, has now been returned to Jerusalem.

And there's all that symbolism going on, bringing the Ark of God back to Jerusalem. You know, it's telling us that God is King, that God is Lord, that He's the victor.

This Ark has now been brought back to Jerusalem. Jerusalem that once was occupied by God's enemies.

[11:17] But now, the Ark being brought back to Jerusalem symbolizes God's crowning victory. The Ark's back where it belongs.

And all the nations, therefore, have to respond to praise God. God is King. God is King over all the earth. And there's that call to the nations to praise the Lord.

And it's that theme of praise, that theme of praise, that's central to this psalm. This praise to the God of victory. And we can use this to point forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus because He's established His throne in the midst of His enemies.

Jesus coming to earth. He's come to establish His kingdom. And therefore, the call is for all nations to praise His name. And you see then that theme here in Psalm 96, it does connect with the incarnation of Jesus.

It truly is a Christmas psalm. Let's not be afraid to read it or sing it this time of year. Of course, we sing it any time of year. So, it's a psalm of praise.

[12:29] It's beginning to end. The psalm writers calling on the whole earth to sing to the Lord. The whole of creations to join in in praise. Why? Verse 13 tells us, For the coming of the Lord.

For the advent of the Lord. The Lord's people can rejoice. And of course, we have the full revelation of Scripture. What the psalm writers saw in part, you see in whole.

Because you know that the Lord has come. And that brought joy to God's people. And I'm going to go back to this whole theme of praise as we continue through this psalm.

But, you know, it may well be that this time of year might be anything but a time for praise. Maybe for some.

Maybe for many even. Even at this moment, there are hard providences to endure. Maybe this time of year is a time of year when it's maybe different or difficult for different reasons.

[13:40] The loss of a loved one affects your emotions. When you see the empty chair. The empty place. And, you know, when all around, all these sort of, you know, associations of festive mirth and your soul's grieving.

But remember. Remember the joy that the Christian has and continues to have. That the Lord Jesus has come. He's come for salvation's joy.

The advent of Christ then surely should evoke praise. You know, praise in your heart that you're not lost. That you're not being left to groan in misery.

The King has come to establish His reign. And you rejoice. As we all who are His must rejoice in that victory. And so praise Him.

Yes, even in the midst of sorrow. Even in the midst of hardship and difficulties. Yes, this is a time to praise the Lord for His coming to earth.

[14:47] For bringing salvation. It is people that we see here in verses 1 and 2, the theme of salvation. Sing to the Lord a new song.

Sing to the Lord all the earth. Sing to the Lord. Notice how many times we're told to sing to the Lord. Bless His name. Tell of His salvation day by day. Because Jesus has come to save.

The very name Jesus means save. It means salvation. Yeshua. Saved. He's Saviour. He's come to bring salvation to lost mankind.

And so mankind, all who are in Him, can sing that new song. A new song of hope. A new song of joy. Because the Lord has come to bring salvation.

And so there has to be a response. This response to the good news of salvation. Jesus has come by His life and by His death to win salvation for His people.

[15:48] So what's your response? We're told here, sing. Sing to the Lord. Praise Him. Praise Him. Burst forth in that harmonic praise to the Lord in the unity of heartless you.

You come before Him expressing your thanks. You'll see in the notices I have another funeral to attend this week. My late aunt, my father's sister, on Friday.

My aunt was always singing. She was always singing. Every time you were in her presence, she was always singing. Whether she was working, whatever she was doing. When she was doing the housework, she was always subconsciously singing.

It was one of the things that defined her personality. And how much more, you know, should singing the Lord's praise, even from your heart, even in the quiet of your heart, but yes, singing the Lord's praise, how much more should that define the character of a Christian?

You who are in Christ, praise Him. Praise Him for His coming to earth. Praise Him that He came in human form. Praise Him for the advent of the Lord Jesus.

[17:00] That surely should cheer the heart of any Christian. What did James write in his letter? Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

You know, even singing the psalms, even this psalm. We're singing praise, the praise psalms that help you to come before God and praise.

We've got His work here to help you to rejoice in what God has done, the Father done in sending the Lord Jesus. Jesus has come to rule and to reign in the hearts of His people.

So sing praise. Praise Him. Use these very words even in Psalm 96. Praise Him. Praise the God. Praise God who is good. That goodness, of course, revealed in the coming of the Lord Jesus when Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

The goodness of God that was revealed at Calvary when Jesus died for our sins. The goodness of God that was revealed in the empty tomb that showed that Jesus had risen from the dead. Praise Him for His goodness, the goodness that saved you.

[18:08] and continues to save you. Call others to know the Lord Jesus. And, you know, this time of year does give, the church does give the Lord's people, if you like, a window, an opportunity.

maybe even more than at any other time of year. Well, of course, Easter, of course, is another opportunity. But, you know, this time of year is such an important window for the Lord's people to tell others of the Lord Jesus.

We have these opportunities. As we said, that we will tell others of the Lord Jesus. We'll tell others, even those who might be coming into this building in a few weeks' time, who are any other time of the year, maybe apart from Remembrance Sundays, who are never in the place of worship.

Use the opportunity. Come beside them. Come alongside them. Pray that the Lord will bring those into this building to hear the message of the love of God and Christ, the love that is seen in the Lord Jesus coming to save His people.

So salvation is one of the themes here, is the theme of praise in Psalm 96. I'm sure it should be the theme of your praise, salvation, the salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

[19:31] But the other, what else do we see here? Glory. Verse 3, declare His glory among the nations. I want to think on the night of Jesus' birth.

What does Luke tell us? Luke tells us that an angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds and the glory of the Lord shone around them. Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praying God and saying, Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom He's well pleased.

And then a little while later, the shepherds, they see the Christ child and we're told again in Luke that the shepherds return glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen.

The shepherds did. Just as the psalm here commands God's people to do. When you've seen the Lord, declare His glory.

These shepherds didn't just keep that news to themselves. They told others. That's surely, you know, your witness to tell others of the Lord Jesus.

[20:42] But you might ask, Well, how do we glorify God? The shepherds glorified God. How do you glorify God? Well, it's the main purpose of a believer's life too.

As our catechism says, man's chief purpose, man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. But what's that glorifying God all about? How do you glorify God in relation to the coming to earth of the Lord Jesus?

How do you glorify God? Well, surely, most importantly, you believe. You exercise faith in the Lord Jesus, who is God the Son, the Lord who came in human flesh.

You believe in Him. That is giving glory to God by having faith in Him, believing in Him, believing that salvation is only through the Lord Jesus Christ.

and in believing in Him, in response to the promise that God gave of a Savior to come, how do you glorify Him? You worship Him.

[21 : 50] Your faith to believe in Him. Exercise that faith in believing and worship. Worship Him. Worship the God who's remembered you in your great need.

Worship Him who sent Jesus in love. Worship Him. Worship even the Savior who came in love. So you worship Him and glorify Him.

You believe in Him and glorify Him. And thirdly, you glorify Him surely by telling others the great God and Savior. Declare His glory among the nations.

Tell others that Jesus is Lord. Tell others that Christ is born in Bethlehem. Tell others that He's born to be King, born as King.

And so, yes, this month and all months, give glory to God. We're coming towards the end of another year. Tell others of the glorious God who's been with you even in this past year, this year about to end.

[22 : 54] Give glory to Him and tell others of what the Lord Jesus has done for you. Glorify Him. And in glorifying Him, in worship, when we recognize that He is worthy of all worship, as verse 9 tells us, worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness.

Tremble before Him all the earth. Now, this command there in Psalm 96, it wasn't just restricted to the people at the time, the Lord's people at the time.

I mean, this is for all the earth. This is, if you like, a vision of the whole earth praising God for Jesus. Jesus has come into the world.

God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son. So we praise Him, we worship Him, we recognize He's worthy of all worship. When the, what we popularly call the three wise men, the Magi, when they came from these, they worshipped Jesus.

You, I, we, I must worship Jesus. Worship Him as Lord, as Savior. Bow before Him in reverence and serve Him.

[24 : 05] You know, this Psalm brings out that the Lord Jesus is worthy of praise from all the nations. These Magi, these wise, so-called wise men, they came from the outside, if you like, of Israel.

These were non-Jews. They told of salvation for all people. We worship Him. He's come as Savior of the world. And you know, the coming to earth of Jesus, the incarnation of Jesus, fulfills this Psalm.

Because we're told that, you know, at the end here, there is joy. All the trees of the forest shall sing for joy. There is joy. There's joy to the world. Because the Savior has come.

And that's the response of the Lord's people to the advent of the Son. That promise that was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. So we do, as we were singing in that Psalm, the Psalm we sang earlier, ascribe glory to God.

Glory to God in the highest. Don't be silent this time of year. Praise Him through your words. Praise Him by your actions.

[25 : 15] Tell others that Christ has come. I mean, the joy that, you know, should be in your heart, it's there from verse 11 to 13. If you read it, you know, quietly to yourself, you see that joy that's expressed in the coming of the Lord.

And that advent, that advent, the arrival of Jesus. Look at verse 1. For He comes. He arrives. He comes to judge the earth.

I mean, look at verse 11 and 12 for a moment. They express the joy of all creation. The Lord has appeared. I mean, the first advent of Jesus was marked by joy.

You know, Mary sang a praise to, in her heart, in the imminent coming of the Savior by, but through her. She sang that song of joy. The angels rejoiced to tell of the, the, the Savior that has come.

The shepherds rejoiced at the good news. The good news that's for all the people. The good news of the birth of Jesus. And the first advent of Jesus. Well, joy was expressed because Jesus had come.

[26 : 31] He'd come to bring, to bring in God's justice against sin. That justice that demanded that sin be paid for by the, the blood of, blood of a sacrifice.

Even the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. The Jesus who was born in Bethlehem. He came to satisfy the perfect justice of God and, and in doing so on the cross when he, in his dying for sinners.

When, that great transaction took place. The sins of his people and Jesus. And Jesus transferring his righteousness on those whom he came to die.

and that, that righteousness given to you so that you might be acceptable in the sight of a holy God. Jesus came in, yes, in the first sense of, of judge. In other words, to bring justice, God's justice in the, in the world. And so we're saying to the children, as we'll be focusing more this evening, he'll come, the promise of his coming in his second advent when he does come as judge, to judge the world.

[27 : 46] As I say, we'll be looking at that much more closely this evening. But you see, Psalm 96, this psalm helps you to, to rejoice in the salvation of the Lord.

It, it draws you to glorify his name. It helps you to worship him in the beauty of holiness. It helps you to rejoice in his, in his coming. Is that what this time of year means to you?

We have a reminder, this brought, reminder brought before us that the Saviour has come and in his coming has brought true joy to the world. Do you have that joy in your heart this morning?

Or is there still gloom and darkness? Is there no light, the true light of Christ is shining in your heart? I pray that, you know, the opportunity that you have here, even this morning, to, to come before the Saviour, to come before the Lord Jesus, that you will come to rejoice in the Saviour when you remember that he came for you.

He came to give his life for you so that you might know true peace, true satisfaction that the world can never give. Vanity, fear can never fulfill what the heart of man truly seeks.

[29 : 03] will you come to the Lord Jesus and you will know that blessing, that eternal blessing when you give your life to him, when you give your life to the one who came, came for you, who died for you so that you might have life in all its fullness.

Amen. Let us pray. Our Lord, our Saviour, we give thanks again for the reminder of your having come to earth and that you are worthy of all praise, that you are to be glorified.

Lord, help us in our thoughts in Jesus to rejoice, to rejoice in heart and to give thanks for that great salvation brought through the Lord Jesus.

Lord, forgive us for our failure, our frequent failure to come before him, our frequent failure to tell others the Christ who has come and who promises to come again.

Lord, forgive us, strengthen us, give us that courage to speak of the Lord Jesus. Hear us, Lord, as we come before you again in song.

[30 : 25] May it truly be that we do sing to the Lord and sing with all our hearts. So continue, Lord, with us, we pray. Pardon again our many sins we ask. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, let's close in Psalm 96a again and we're going to sing from verse 10 to verse 13, page 127.

We're going to sing to the tune Bloxham, tell every land the Lord is king, established as the earth and cannot move. The Lord will judge the peoples in his truth.

Let heavens rejoice and earth be glad with joy. Let oceans ring and so on. 10 to 13 to God's praise. Thank you.