

"The New Song We Sing" Psalm 149

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[0:00] Today's reading comes from the book of Psalms, chapter 149. Praise the Lord.

I was 24 or 25. I think I was 25. I did my first big overseas trip. I went to visit some family in Tel Aviv, some family in Israel.

So I went to Montreal. I went to Amsterdam. It was the layover. I had 12 hours. I poked around the city. It was kind of cool until I got hungry and lonely. I didn't have any money to really get some good food in me.

Anyways, I flew to Tel Aviv. I took a bus up to Jerusalem to visit my uncle. And then from there, we went back to Tel Aviv. And then the next day, I had a friend who was teaching English with his wife. They were pretty well newlyweds in Istanbul. And the next day, I jumped on a plane and I flew to Istanbul. And then I flew back to Tel Aviv and like four days later.

[1:50] Anyways, it turned out that in something like three or four days, I visited five countries. And it was remarkable to me at how different these experiences were.

Again, first time I've done a big trip. I mean, we did a family vacation in Mexico when we were 11. It was cool, but it wasn't exactly where you're enjoying a new culture or experiencing a new culture. It was remarkable, especially I remember when we were crossing the Bosphorus in this ferry. I was drinking sweet tea and it was dusk.

And I looked at the horizon and it was lined with minarets. Something I've never seen before. It was a remarkable experience. And yet, in reflecting upon that, not long after, I couldn't help but realize that different cultures, different foods, different regions, different dress, so many things that were different.

And yet, the similarities of all these different cultures was this, that they were inherently religious.

[3:03] Whether it was the modern West where the arts and culture were elevated, Europe, this autonomy that is so deeply ingrained, going to the old city, seeing these centuries-old mosques.

Human beings, our default setting is that we are religious. We desire to have these incredibly deep longings met.

And we desire to connect with the transcendent in some way, shape, or form. Whether or not we can articulate this, this is what marks out humanity from any other living thing, living organism.

It's that we are religious. We are more about merely enjoying food and drink and survival. We want to have meaning.

And that meaning transcending this world. And yet, not all roads, not all religious pursuits are equal. In fact, it's not even as if there is a spectrum of some that are on the right path and some on the wrong path.

[4:31] We would say that there is only one true spiritual destination. There is only one ability to have our longings deeply and eternally met.

So the question is, can the Christian faith achieve this? Can the Christian faith satisfy our deepest longings and help us to connect with the transcendent?

Maybe put another way, is Christianity true? Does it check the boxes of what we need? We're looking in Psalm 149. And Psalm 149, as Brian read, it truly is a psalm of praise.

The last five or six psalms in the Psalter are psalms of exuberant praise. They begin and end with a praise the Lord, a declaration, a call to praise.

And in this case, it is certainly a call to praise. But I'm going to make a case through Psalm 149 that the Christian faith is actually the only faith that will really, truly satisfy our deepest longings.

[5:41] And the only faith that will truly connect us to the transcendent. I'm going to do this in two points. The text neatly breaks up into verses 1 to 5 and 6 to 9.

And the first point is this. We'll ask the question, what do we receive in the Christian faith? And then the second question, we'll ask a similar and related question.

How do we participate in the Christian faith? So what do we receive in the Christian faith? How do we participate in the Christian faith? If you have a Bible, please turn with me to Psalm 149.

Again, I may mention that there's some Bibles at the back welcome table. Feel free at any time to grab one. Phones can be distracting if you're following along on your phone. So Psalm 149.

I'll read verses 1 to 3. Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new song. His praise in the assembly of the godly. Let Israel be glad in his maker.

[6:44] Let the children of Zion rejoice in their king. Let them praise his name with dancing. Making melody to him with tambourine and lyre. So the psalm begins with this declaration that the company of God's people gather to worship him.

Our faith is indeed a very personal faith. But it can never be divorced from a corporate understanding of the faith. We come into this faith individually.

But we certainly participate and enjoy this faith. Indispensably together. An early writer and thinker in the Christian faith, Cyprian of Carthage, had this saying that became an adage of the church.

One cannot have God as father without church as mother. Which is to say, you can't truly be a Christian by yourself. You're a part of something bigger. You're a part of a family as you gather to sing the Lord's praises.

So therefore the first thing that we receive as we come to faith is a community. A family. We share a king. We recognize who made us and we praise him together.

[8:07] Looking at verses 2 and 3, we see this. Let Israel be glad in his maker. Let the children of Zion rejoice in their king. And then it goes on to say, let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.

The king. He is also a maker. So we have here a creator king. And what's remarkable about this creator king is that he does not demand loyalty from a throne afar.

As if he is some kind of tyrant. Whether or not he knows your name, it doesn't matter. You owe him your allegiance. This isn't the type of king envisioned here.

The king is not in the capital if this is an empire and we are merely provincials. No, no, no. The king is close to his people.

He rules amongst them. This creator king says that he takes pleasure in his people. That means to know them in an intimate way.

[9:13] You cannot take pleasure. You cannot delight in someone that you've never met or barely know. This king deeply knows his subjects. He's concerned with their affairs.

He takes interest in their condition. He knows their needs. He is deeply, deeply, deeply concerned with his people.

In short, we once again get the impression from last week that this creator king is this deeply relational and loving God. And because the Lord is God, the creator of heaven and earth, he knows our needs, in fact, greater than we do.

He is not a know-it-all who thinks he knows our needs greater than us. He knows our needs far more intimately than we know our needs.

He is the one with a window into our souls. So then what does he give us? If he knows our need, what does he give us?

[10:17] Look with me at verses 4 and 5. For the Lord takes pleasure in his people. He adorns the humble with salvation. Let the godly exult in glory.

Let them sing for joy on their beds. What does the Lord give? What does this creator king bestow to his people? Well, he gives them salvation.

He gives them glory. And he gives them joy. We're going to spend a bit of time on these two verses and take a look with a bit more depth of what this means. So let's look first at salvation.

What does it say? For the Lord takes pleasure in his people. He adorns the humble with salvation. Before we can consider how the Lord adorns us with salvation, we need to answer the question, how does one become humble?

Nobody is born humble. Nobody comes out of the womb as a very humble being. What happens when a child comes out of the womb? Screams for attention.

[11:18] Demands it. Now, of course, there's biological factors involved. Kids need to eat. They're absolutely, absolutely helpless when they come out of the womb. But nevertheless, our initial

reaction once we are born is not, dearest mother, how was your labor?

I'm caring so deeply about you. It is not this at all. Right? It is this immediate me. Me, me. I need everything you'll give me and then some more.

I'll even take your sleep. Give it to me. So what does it mean then to be humble? How do we become humble? It is not our default. How do we become humble? At its core, becoming humble in a biblical sense is agreeing with reality.

Not being deceived. And what do I mean by that? It means recognizing that we are not the main character of the story we find ourselves in. That we are incapable of living in complete harmony as the main character.

In complete harmony with ourselves, with those around us. And most importantly, that there is a God who created all things. He's good and loving. That he takes pleasure in his creation and yet we cannot live in harmony even with him.

[12:39] It means recognizing that there is a thing called sin. A missing the mark. A failure to extend love and charity. It means falling short of God's own standards.

And that this issue affects our thoughts, words, and deeds. And like it says in the opening bits of morning prayer, there is no health in us.

There is no spiritual vitality within us. We are proud people. It is recognizing that. It is recognizing that we need to be reality, people rooted in reality.

It is only then that the Lord can adorn us with salvation. What does it say in the book of Proverbs? That God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.

We agree with the standard of the Lord. Recognizing our need for his life-giving salvation. This is what humility is. And what does he do when he finds the humble heart?

[13:47] The heart turned to him. He adorns the humble with salvation. Adorning is a wonderful word. It's a beautiful word. Some of the other English translations use words like crown.

I guess that works very similar to adorning. I like in the King James, it says that the Lord beautifies. Something incredible about that.

He beautifies the humble with salvation. However you translate the Hebrew, there is great care and tenderness and love in how God bestows salvation.

His desire is to bestow salvation. The collect for last week, it doesn't exactly say this, but it gets to the point.

And if you remember the collect for last week, it said that God is more ready to hear than we are to pray. Maybe we could rewrite it a bit to say that he is more ready to extend salvation and to beautify us with salvation or adorn us with salvation than we are to admit our need for his salvation.

[14:54] He does not do this begrudgingly. This is what he delights in doing. He makes men and women, those who have no business even approaching him because of their sinfulness, he makes them godly.

Or he turns them into saints. So the humble become godly. But what about the next bit? So we've covered salvation. This is what God gives.

Okay? Right? This is what the Christian faith offers, salvation. But then it also offers glory. But glory, I mean, how do we approach this? We might become godly, but if God, he gives us glory.

I thought glory only belongs to God. I mean, to God alone be the glory. I mean, do we have this? Grace alone through. Anyways, it's one of the solas.

It's one of the key parts of our reformation. That God alone is the one who is to get the glory. So then how do we understand this? How do we understand verse 5 here?

[16:01] I think it's important that we take a look at two problematic ditches when we're talking about glory. The first is vanity or what we call vain glory.

This idea that we think too much of ourselves. We hold an exaggerated view of our importance and our status among those we live and work with. Our primary motivation is to glorify ourselves, to honor ourselves, to receive praise.

So we can become consumed with our appearance, with our achievements, with the things that elevate us, our standing. So our pride often goes unchecked.

Our pride often goes unchallenged. And when we are praised, we are elated. Okay? We're puffed up. When we do not get the praise, we can be smitten with just feelings of depression or anger.

How dare they not give me the honor that I deserve? In short, we have this inordinate desire for things and praise.

[17:20] And it's rooted in placing our own glory above all. So what's interesting is that amongst the saints, the saints give praise to the king.

But the one who is riddled with vain glory cannot and will not rejoice in their king being God. For they are the king on their own throne, in their own kingdom. The second ditch is a glory of perversion. Where we embrace certain pleasures and look for love in ways that are very contrary to God's good and righteous design.

They are rooted in not love, but in lust. It is not self-giving pleasure, but a self-consuming pleasure. People become ends to our means. There's an unhealthy curiosity. And ultimately, either explicitly or implicitly, we say that God's good design for humanity isn't good at all.

[18:31] But it's actually problematic. It's getting in the way. And in doing this, again, if the saints worship God for being not just their king, but their maker, somebody who has a glory of perversion can never praise God for being the maker.

Because ultimately, his design is flawed. It needs fixing. These are the two false glories rooted in overt sin.

But I think there's a third. So I said two, but I think there's a third. And I think this is maybe a type of glory or a denial of glory that is found in more pietistic circles.

Maybe more fundamentalist circles. Circles that are full of people who want to truly follow the Lord and have a desire to honor him.

But what ends up happening is Christians deny any kind of glory. It takes the form of a kind of asceticism. A counterfeit humility.

[19:42] This is what it ends up looking like. It's a denial of God's good intention for us. Often this kind of false humility is, it doesn't result in greater humility, but actually a type of covert pride.

The fact is this. We can't get around our need to connect in some kind of way with glory. Okay, so if we are trying to deny glory, we will ourselves get puffed up at how humble we are, which is just another form of pride.

Consider the religious man in one of Jesus' parables. He's at the place of worship. He is telling God with his head held high, look how wonderful I am.

I tithe, I go to the religious meetings, I do all the right things, I read the scriptures, I pray. And thank you, God, that you made me, I made me, not like this guy behind me, this tax collector.

Now what's interesting is that there's no, we assume he's saying it out loud as if the company is all around him, but I want to suggest that maybe that those words were said, maybe under his breath or in his heart.

[21:01] The fact is this. Because we are made in the image and likeness of the one true God, we are, we cannot get away from glory.

St. Augustine, in his commentary on this verse, he says, there is no one who loves not glory. There is no one who loves not glory. We were made to enjoy and pursue the glory of God.

In all of its fullness. Okay? In all of its fullness. In fact, Romans chapter 3 says, sin at its core is the failure to properly pursue the glory of God.

God bestows glory upon his people because we are made in his image.

And he delights in us. He delights in us. So on one hand, we do not have any standing to go before God and somehow puff up our chest.

[22:08] And yet, and yet God in his incredible sovereign omnipotence decides to bless us by bestowing upon us some of that glory so that we can praise him for what he has done and for who he is and how he made us.

It's really interesting that, you know, verses 4 and 5 are separate sentences, but in many respects, it's the same continual thought. So what we see here is that this glory is linked to salvation.

So verses 4 and 5, back to back, it really conveys this single thought that God in his goodness gives us his glory, and this is connected deeply to how he saves.

He makes an unglorious people glorious. And what does this result in? Well, we see, if we continue on, Psalm 149, verse 5, let the godly exult in glory, and then this is the third thing, so God gives salvation, God gives glory, but then God gives joy.

Let the godly exult in glory, let them sing for joy on their beds. The line's a bit difficult to interpret for, Hebrew scholars, it's a tough one, but some of the suggestions for translation has to do with the wicked conspire and plan rebellion, plot rebellion at night, but the godly have clean consciences, and they rest easy in joy.

[23:44] St. Augustine, again, I leaned on his commentary quite a bit for this psalm. He understands this as true worship, for the beds here symbolize the heart of a person, the most intimate area.

So here we have somebody who is able to worship God properly in their hearts. Whatever it may be, what I think is being articulated here is the soul that is at ease, and that is at rest.

And the soul that is at ease, and that is at rest, is the soul that has known the salvation of the Lord extended to him or her. And it results in joy.

I mean, if anything, you come away with anything from this morning, hear this, that the Christian faith, above all, is a joyful faith that gives joy, a deep joy, a heart joy, an eternal joy.

That's what salvation is, ultimately, to take joy and pleasure in our maker. So we see that, if we ask the question, what does the Christian faith offer, what does it give, we see a faith that gives a new family, bestows salvation, bestows upon us glory, and then ultimately a joy that is found in our hearts, that is the result of a clean conscience.

[25:09] It's a faith that is not earned, but is rightly received by faith and worship with a humble heart. It's a gift that is intended to be enjoyed.

So our longings, they're satisfied, satisfied, but what about this connection to the transcendent, right? I said, if all religion seeks to have our longings satisfied, but also to have this connection to the transcendent, where can we find that in the rest of the psalm?

Well, we'll get to our second point here, how we participate in the Christian faith. Read with me psalm six, sorry, verses six to nine. Verses six to nine. Let the high praises of God be in their throats, and two edged swords in their hands, to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the people, to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron, to execute on them the judgment written, this is honor for all his godly ones.

Praise the Lord. Is this a call for holy war? That we are now on the right side, and now there are enemies that we recognize, and we have to deal with them?

Is this what this psalm is calling us for? Is this how we participate in the Christian faith? I think the answer is both a yes and a no. But first, we need to understand something.

[26:31] We are at a bit of a disadvantage here in the West, because we are so saturated with materialism. This idea that what we see is all that there is.

That there is no spiritual realm. There is no spiritual, there's no angels, there's no demons, there's no sight unseen, there's no paranormal, there's no metaphysical.

There is just the material world. And we would never deny this, but because we can't affirm it in public, by and large, it shows us what we truly believe, and what we truly hold on to.

It is easy at church to talk about Jesus, we can talk about heaven, we can even potentially talk about angels, talk about demons, all these different things. At work, these are fine to believe, but as long as they're at home.

Leave those beliefs at home. These aren't public beliefs. We are at a bit of a disadvantage in the Enlightenment West. However, the overwhelming teaching of Scripture is that the material world is indeed important, and it exists, obviously, but that it is actually less substantial and more flimsy than the spiritual, plain, the spiritual world.

[27:59] That there is indeed one, and in fact, that is where the thickness is, so to speak, in reality. Therefore, the enemies of God and his people aren't primarily those who pull triggers or wield machetes, but rather, it's the spiritual beliefs, the spiritual influences, the spiritual powers that seek to oppose the Lord as king and maker.

And if this seems a bit outlandish, you know, consider how the Kim family gets into power, or how Mao Zedong gets into power, or how Adolf Hitler got into power.

It wasn't just a whole series of propositional beliefs, propositional points that they put forward in a rational way. No, their ideology was religious.

It was religious. There's a spiritual reality behind what we see in this material world. To deny it is not to live a humble life, right?

If a humble life, if humble living is rooted in respecting reality, understanding reality, walking in reality, then this is the way to truly understand the world we live in.

[29:27] There most certainly is a spiritual realm. And here's where the holy war comes in, where we talk about the church militant comes in. Because to recognize this does not then mean we sit idly by.

We do not sit by and fret. No, in fact, the call of the Christian faith is to participate in the work of God himself.

And this is where the connection with the transcendent comes in. Because God doesn't just give us all of the blessing of salvation, of eternal life, but then he calls us to participate in seeing his goodness and his grace and his love extend, to see his light extend and darkness expelled.

To see death itself start to diminish in the world. For it was conquered by Christ. See, Christ, he conquers death in such a way that he defeats it, hoisting it, so to speak, on its own petard.

He kills death, he destroys death by death. And then he invites us into this cleanup. We're the cleanup crew in many ways.

[30:47] If you've read The Return of the King, the last of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, the ring is destroyed. All right?

The day is won and yet the hobbits go back to the Shire and they find it in complete disarray, but they are transformed. They're no longer fearful.

The victory is already won and now they participate in the final victory of the Lord. It's called the scouring of the Shire. It's a really remarkable thing that was cut out of the movie.

Nevertheless, this is very similar to what we do when we participate in the work of the Lord. So how is it done? How do we participate in this spiritual battle?

Look with me at verse 6. Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two edged swords in their hands. Our weapon is twofold.

[31:48] It's worship and God's word. Worship and the word of God. Looking first at worship. It's very important that we understand worship is more than singing and playing instruments on a day like today when I'm leading.

That's a very good thing. It's a very good thing. Worship is more than singing and playing instruments. Clearly it involves that. We see the opening of Psalm 149.

There is singing, there is instruments, there is dancing. It's not like a crazy jumping around dance. It's more like a festive dance of some sort. Nevertheless, that's included in worship, but it's much more.

In fact, worship is the reorientation of your life towards the service and joy of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As we worship this one true God, we also proclaim that we are not worshiping the false gods of our age.

We are not worshiping the gods that promise eternal life, but could never give it, the gods that promise pleasure forevermore, but only leave us broken and weary.

[33:04] In our day, this worship of the Lord means to no longer worship or participate in the culture of death that permeates our society.

when we worship, it is very much a political act, very much a declaration of war, the worshipping of the one true God.

Now, how about God's word? Again, what does it say? A two-edged sword in their hands. Hebrews chapter 4 verse 12 says this, for the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.

piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. You see, God's word does a remarkable thing.

It convicts us of sin. It shows us, it's like a mirror showing us where the blemishes are, where the brokenness are, where's the wounds that need to be bound up by the Lord.

[34:11] Scripture also acts as a window for us to see who the Lord is, who the one true God is, to understand his holiness and his goodness.

Again, then that acts as a way of conviction of sin, but also a means of praise. And as we engage with evangelism, we proclaim God's word, and all of a sudden, what does it do?

It is like, again, a two-edged sword. It starts to cut away and hack away and pierce all of the false foundations, all the false supports of false religion, of false belief, of our culture of death.

Again, I mean, St. Augustine, some wise words, this is what he says, and I'll read the quotation at length. It says this, quote, see whether vengeance, and again, he is quoting, I believe, verses five, or commenting on verses five and six, sorry, six and seven.

He says this, quote, see whether vengeance have not been done on the nations, daily it is done. We do it ourselves by speaking the word of God.

[35 : 26] Let the sword twice sharpened go forth from you. Delay not. Say to your friend, if yet you have one left to whom to say it, what kind of man are you who has abandoned him, that is God, by whom you were made, and worship what he made?

Better is the workman than that which he works. When he begins to blush, when he begins to feel compunction, you have made a wound with your sword, it has reached the heart, he is about to die, that he may live.

See, God has enemies, but what does God do with his enemies? He makes his enemies his friends. God did not die for his friends, God sent his son Christ to die for his enemies, and in doing so, all who have humbly received what Christ has done on the cross, they are eliminated off of the chessboard, so to speak.

They are instead made into soldiers on the king's side. It's a remarkable thing how God does that. So, how do we connect with the transcendent?

Well, we get to participate. First, we know him, we connect with him, we are united to him in Christ, but then we participate in his acts.

[36 : 49] I'll close with this. Although Christ certainly does make enemies into friends, there is a final judgment as the scripture talks about, whereby there will be those who will not, will not bend a knee to the king.

At the end of the age, there will be a final judgment, and those that are not friends with the Lord God, the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, will not sing the new song, but instead will enter into eternal torment.

One of the things that we pray, if you pray morning prayer, it's a section from Psalm 95, and what it says there is this, harden not your hearts.

Harden not your hearts. Put not your trust, as we read last week, in the war horse. Put not your trust in the soldier.

Put not your trust in the things that promise to get you into eternity with joy everlasting, but can never do it. Put not your trust in those things. Instead, put your trust into Christ.

[38 : 03] you see, the end is already set. All of creation will sing the Lord's praises. The new song, in the opening section of Psalm 149, is what will be sung forever.

Why? Why will it always be a new song? Because for all of creation, salvation will be ours, it will never end, it will continue on. That's why we say world without end.

And this is the new song. Revelation chapter 5 verses 11 to 14, it says this, then I looked, this is the apostle John, then I looked and I heard around the throne, and the living creatures and the elders, the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads, thousands of thousands, saying in a loud voice, worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.

Verse 13, and I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that is in them, all of creation, singing this, to him who sits on the throne and to the lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever.

And the four living creatures said amen and the elders fell down and worshiped. Friends, harden not your hearts. Sing the new song.

[39 : 28] put your trust and hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other faith, there is no other ideology that can offer what Christianity in Christ can give.

There is no longing that you have that will not be met. There is no desire to touch the transcendent that will go unfulfilled. Put your trust in Christ. may may