

Psalm 96 Sermon Two

INTRODUCTION:

The Story of the Marathon:

In the year 490BC, the Greek army won the first of the three Greco-Persian wars on the plain of Marathon. The Greek soldier Philippides, who was the courier between the magistrates of Athens and the battlefield, was commanded to tell Athenian magistrates of the recent victory. After fighting all day, Philippides ran the entire 42 kilometer journey from Marathon to Athens before the sun had set. The distance that he ran to proclaim this victory has been the standard through the ages as the limit of how far the human body can handle running; it is the foundation for today's Olympic marathon. On the verge of exhaustion, as he was gasping for air and Philippides said: "Chairete Ninekomen" "Rejoice; We have conquered!" Before falling down dead. These words are remarkably similar to the words of our psalmist today, "*Say among the nations "the LORD reigns!" . . . let the heavens be glad and let the earth rejoice."*

But we do not usually understand the reign of Yahweh as something to be excited about. When I say to you, out of the blue, the judgement of God is coming, what emotion is most natural? Fear or uneasiness right. It seems in our thinking that judgement cannot sound sweet to the ear. Well that kind of thinking runs exactly opposite to our text this morning. Verse 12 and 13 say, "*The trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord for He comes to judge the earth.*" If we are going to get excited for when God comes to judge the world and establish His kingdom, then we need to listen this afternoon to the words of this psalm.

Outline:

These four verses command us to rejoice at the reign of Yahweh in light of three realities. *We should rejoice at the judgement of Yahweh because His kingdom is eternal in its duration, universal in its scope, and righteous in its administration.* We will look at the eternality of its duration in verse 10. The universality of its scope in verses 11 and 12. And the righteousness of its administration in verse 13.

This Psalm's Historical Context

With that in mind, Let me just refresh you on some of the historical background for our text. 95% percent of the Psalm is quoted word for word in Chronicles 16. Its author is likely David or Asaph whom we are told in Chronicles 16 David appointed to sing.

- After the death of Uzzah, David had left the Ark of the Covenant at Obed-Edom's house.
- The philistines start a head hunting party to kill David. Eventually David seeks God. Who then judges his enemies and grants him victory over them.
- He defeats the philistines and immediately has the Levites carry the Ark of the Lord back into Jerusalem. He dances with ecstatic joy before the Lord.
- He orders a number of songs to be written on that day. This psalm is likely one of the songs that Asaph lead the people in song with.
- The sermon last week told of God's glory in salvation, which we saw from verse 1-9. And now we are seeing God's glory in judgement in the last third of the psalm.
- If you're wondering here about my use of kingdom and judgement almost synonymously, it is because in the Old Testament understanding of judgement. As Derek Kidner points out, in the Old Testament judgement is not only the establishment of justice through an act of deliverance but also the maintenance of that justice. The easy example being the idea of the judges of Israel, not only did they deliver the people from the Philistines but they also maintained justice by judging the Israelites.

With that established lets dive into the text and read verse 10.

MAIN POINT ONE: God's Kingdom is Eternal

Say among the nations, "the LORD reigns! Yes the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity."

The psalmist begins this verse by imploring his audience to say something to the peoples of nations. And the rest of the verse is the thing that they are to say. They are to go to the nations and tell them that it is God who reigns and

that his kingdom shall never be moved. God's kingdom is eternal and the nations need to get in step with his sovereign purposes.

Notice two things here:

1. First who the Israelites are to go to. They are to go to the nations. Well what is the definition of a nation in the Ancient Near East? It is an empire or a small dynasty. This command is an order to begin a struggle for power. They are commanded to walk into the office of the kings and tell them: "God owns you, this little mound of dirt you've built and proclaimed yourself king over. It all belongs to Yahweh."
2. Second, notice what they are to say: They are to say "the LORD reigns!" His dominion is fixed. It is eternal because the Lord is eternal. The simple fact that the nations must be confronted with is that ultimately God and not they are on the throne. Just as we saw last week that God will have no rivals in worship, we learn this week that He will also have no rivals in government.

The Reign of Yahweh is like Trumps Election

As one would expect there has been a lot of controversy this last few months on social media. Trump's election has likely been one of the most divisive in the history of America. People all over social media have been protesting and bickering about Trump's presidential victory. And there are elements of it all that are genuine cause for concern. But here is the raw reality ballots, have been filled in and the votes have been tallied. It is not up for debate anymore, Trump is president. It is just a fact.

Likewise the Lord's reign is established and it's not up for debate. However, unlike Trump there's not going to be campaigns anytime soon for LORD of the universe. And God wasn't ever elected by popular vote. No it is more of the opposite; the fact that you are breathing right now is His grace. Because in Him we live and move and have our being. He is now and has always been the sovereign enthroned king and one day He will actualize His sovereignty by judging the world setting up His Kingdom here on earth. With it He will usher in an eternal peace and His kingdom will not pass away.

God's Glory is at Stake in the Dairy Shed

And as long as God is on the throne of the universe His people must be His advocates. We must be ambassadors for the reign of Yahweh as Paul puts it in 2

Corinthians 5. We are to implore men to be reconciled to God. So think about it, how are going to be an advocate for Yahweh to your lost co-workers as you are organizing cleaning rosters at Fonterra this week? Or as you work around the rotary diary shed. What steps have you taken to introduce your co-workers to the joy of Yahweh's reign? Do you know the spiritual state of your co-workers? Do you ask them about the struggles in their lives? Have you had conversations with them about sin and the righteousness of God? Do they know your testimony and how Christ's work has become precious to you in light of your sin? He has given us the ministry of reconciliation, we must go to the world and implore them to be reconciled to God and His kingdom. God's reign must be proclaimed in our workplaces.

The Reign of Yahweh is Good News

Perhaps you have never really thought of the gospel in this way; I must admit that I didn't think like this much prior to studying our text. And you are thinking right now, I thought the gospel was about getting saved from sin and about getting eternal happiness in Christ not embracing God's reign and Lordship. "The LORD reigns," just doesn't sound gospely enough to be the thing we are to tell the nations. Let's answer this question about the psalmist words by turning to Isaiah 53:7. It says, *"how beautiful upon the mountains, are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."*

Sharing the Good News of Yahweh's Reign

So we see in this verse that the publication of salvation is the proclamation that "God reigns." This is the good news of happiness that is carried by beautiful feet across the mountains. Our personal happiness and indeed the goodness of the good news derive directly from establishment of God's kingdom. You cannot decapitate personal salvation from the works of deliverance and judgement that undergird it. The kingdom of God and personal salvation go hand in hand. You can't be personally saved unless you are "transferred from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved son" (Col 1:13). Don't you see that the reign of Yahweh is your only means for full and overflowing joy? We cannot experience ecstasy without victory. There is no joy sustaining vision of God's glory unless we see him put the philistines to flight before our swords. David did not dance with joy before the ark of the Lord until those who sought his life had turned to begin hunting for places to hide. This I think is why

novels with David and Goliath like plots are so captivating to us as little children.

Are You Decapitating the Gospel?

Let's think here about how we preach and share the gospel. Do we try to decapitate the gospel? As I have been attempting to share the gospel to my brother I have told him repetitively that I choose the Christian life because I believe it to offer more joy, but this isn't enough. Now don't hear me wrong, I believe we are called to be Christian hedonists. But too many times we offer Christ like the free sample guys offering candy at the supermarket rather than the pharmacist who holds the prescription for the cancer that is eating men's souls. We can't offer Christ as just a kind of under the counter morphine that is just a better drug than anything else they have tried. We must show that He is an antibiotic which will get in and kill the bacteria that is plaguing their body. We must show that he is a drug that is mighty to save. You must demonstrate the enmity between the sinner and his God before the gospel will look precious to him. When he knows the judgement of God is coming then you can say to him, "Oh taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!" The beauty of the gospel is its saving efficacy.

The statement God reigns is good news for the nations because it is only the proclamation of God's kingdom that allows the nations a place of refuge so that they can flee God's wrath when He comes to judge the earth. Because it enables them to hide in the Rock of Ages the kingdom of Yahweh is indeed good news for the nations, and it is also good news for the whole universe. Let's read verses 11 and 12.

MAIN POINT TWO: God's Kingdom is Universal

"Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy"

Trees Sing Because Yahweh Reigns

You might have thought as I read these verses, this is great poetry, but we know the psalmist isn't seriously commanding inanimate objects to rejoice? What he really means is that we should rejoice. Well the answer is yes and no. The answer is no he isn't expecting the trees to sing like the ones in Narnia do

and he does expect us to sing because we are one of the things in the earth. However, the answer is also yes. It is a personification of the trees, and sea, and field. But the trees do really have reasons to be joyful if they could be joyful. They too participate with us in our salvation! But we won't understand this unless we realize that the creation is now oppressed with us by the curse and it groans under its oppression. As the apostle Paul says in Romans 8:22 *"we know that the whole creation is groaning in the pains of childbirth until now."* As a result of our sin in the garden God cursed the world he had made us stewards over. Our sin led the creation into captivity. And now the creation groans under the curse, because it was originally made good.

Earth Quakes and a Fallen Creation

I woke up one June 4 2010 from one of the weirdest dreams I had ever had. I remember thinking, in the middle of one of my dreams, that someone had grabbed my head as I was dreaming and began to shake it from side to side. I remember thinking "man this is so annoying, I am just trying to have a good dream and someone keeps shaking my head." When I realized all of this was getting absolutely ridiculous and then I woke up. When I woke up, the dream ended but the shaking did not. For about a minute I watched the house above me warp to the point I thought the roof would fall down like a playing card. Likely you too have had this kind of experience. It was a magnitude 7.1 quake. In this earthquake and its aftershocks over 180 people died. This is the groaning of creation under the curse. The world is not as it should be.

Working in a Fallen Creation

This too is why our work is frustrated. We live in a world where the creation is fallen. As a farmer, you set out to plow a field and it is going great until you hit a rock that breaks your plow. The ground is cursed. And our work is cursed so that: "by the sweat of our faces we shall eat bread." So, here outside the Garden of Eden, our work, which until this week you have enjoyed having a break from, has been frustrated by the curse. So now getting bread for our families come at the expense of sweat-breaking toil.

The great news that this passage brings is that as Christ conquers our sin He establishes God's reign over the universe again. There will be a day when the knowledge of God will fill the earth like the water covers the sea and when it comes the earth will metaphorically stop groaning and begin rejoicing because the power of the curse has been undone on a cosmic scale. There will one day be an earth where as you plant the plants for your vegetable garden weeds do not spring up.

Earth Quakes and a Kingdom that Cannot be Shaken

What we must understand is that we were made not just for a person but for a place. We were made to live with God in an unfallen world. And one day we will live with God in the new heavens and the new earth. Doesn't this bring you joy to think about. So why does God let earth quakes shake us up? Like the one the 7.8 magnitude quake that rocked Kaikoura on Sunday the 14th of November? Is not one purpose so that we would long for a kingdom that is unshakable? Long for roads that aren't going to get torn up by crevices? He wants our joy and our hope to be built on His kingdom not on earthly paradises. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also.

Trump and a Kingdom that Endures

As a foreigner over in the states it was surprising for me how seriously they take their politics. Christians were praying for years before the election that God would raise up a Christian candidate to run in the republican primaries. And God seemingly didn't answer their prayer. It is not usually wise He wanted to allow you to become disillusioned with earthly kingdoms so that you would become enthralled with the heavenly kingdom. It ought to indict us that we long and pray more for presidents and prime ministers than we do for the coming of Christ. If you find as I am speaking your lack of desire for God's kingdom weak and waning one very practical thing you could do is fast. Remember when John's disciples come and approach Jesus and asked why his disciples didn't fast? This was Jesus's response, *"Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them and then they will fast in that day"* (Matthew 9:14-15). So if you desire to see Christ's kingdom come and want to grow in putting your joy there rather than in earthly kingdoms disciplined fasting for the purpose of a hunger for God is one biblical way.

Work and Banking on a Kingdom that Cannot be Shaken

Let me get real about this with those of you have recently begun working life. What lies ahead of you now before marriage and a family are significant kingdom decisions. What kingdom will you build your family on? I urge you do not build a kingdom here! Lay-up treasure in heaven where thief cannot steal and moth cannot destroy. How can you make choices that will advance God's kingdom and make investment there rather than in earthly stocks? What will you use your money for? The quick pleasure of self-indulgence or the solid joy of supporting missions? What will you use your prayers for? Wealth and health and all the things the get rich quick schemes prosperity gospel guys are praying for or the fixed term deposit of local church evangelism? What will you use the

space in your new found home for? Netflix binges or the substantial joy of discipleship and counseling?

God is a faithful and righteous king; He will reward you. You can see His faithfulness right here in the last section of the psalmist's thought. Let's read starting in the last half of verse 12.

MAIN POINT THREE: God's Kingdom is Righteous

"Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness."

The first half of verse 13 tells us the reason for the joy of the trees. They are to rejoice because the Lord is coming to judge the earth. I said earlier that the Old Testament understanding of judgement is not only deliverance from oppressors but also the sustaining of justice.

Why Doesn't Justice Sound Good?

But likely the reason we have difficulty understanding this the coming of the Lord as a motivation for joy is that we are not really convinced that the world is unjust. We both grew up in a country where we have relatively good justice systems and low corruption. But there is a day coming when the injustice that is wreaking havoc today will be judged. One day those who have given their lives to sponsor to kill babies via abortion will be judged and abortion will be no more. One day those who are recruiting child soldiers in Sudan and getting them addicted to drugs so that they keep firing automatic weapons at their enemies will be judged. One day those who exploit over 4.5 million girls a year in the sex trafficking industry will be judged and sex trafficking will be no more. One day the blood of the holocaust victims that cries out from the ground outside Nazi death camps will be avenged. Do you see now why the judgement of God is a joyous thing?

Christmas and Kingdome Expectation

I remember as a young boy staying at my grandparent's place every year in the weeks leading up to Christmas. And every year we would have a little advent calendar that would count down the 25 days until Christmas. Each day we got a treat, which was good, but the real excitement was knowing that this treat was but a finger in the pudding of Christmas day. And as the days drew closer we would get so excited we could hardly wait for Christmas to come. One time I remember not sleeping the whole of Christmas Eve because I was so excited for Christmas and everything that came with it.

This is what our joy should be like before the coming of the Lord. God coming to judge the earth represents the establishment of a reign of righteousness where God brings all things into perfect harmony with His character. But even now there are tastes we can have of the everlasting kingdom as we see sinners trust in Christ and believers overcome sin by the grace that is in Christ. Do you remember that verse I quoted to you from Isaiah? Let me read it again to you.

MAIN POINT FOUR: Beautiful Feet and the Reign of God

Isaiah 52:7 *“how beautiful upon the mountains, are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”*

And let me ask you, do you love the reign of Yahweh? And the victories that Christ has won on the cross? Then let me ask you, are you willing to get beautiful feet in the cause of Christ? Are you willing to get feet that are cut from the jagged rocks you have taken to bring the gospel across the mountains? Will you refuse to have feet manicured by the constant pampering of comfort? Will you choose to take up the affliction of Christ and get feet like beautiful hands that still bear the scars of the nails? Turn with me to Romans 10:12.

Paul and a Kingdom to Proclaim

Romans 10:12 in Christ “there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Christ offers to the world terms of peace on the basis of his victory over sin. Because of the cross “whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what He has heard from us? So faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of the Lord.” Christ is calling for couriers in this passage. He is in need of men who will run like Philippides and shout with their dying breath “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” We need men and women who will that will run a marathon in order to share the gospel. And by the work of the Holy Spirit some of them will believe as we are bold to share the gospel. Listen to this testimony from Acts, “But when they believed Philip as he preached the

good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” So, if we preach and share the good news of Christ’s kingdom some of our neighbors and workmates and family members will believe. You Christian like the Israelites have a message to bring.

Leveraging Our Lives For Kingdom Proclamation

So let me ask you as we close, where how can you use your job to provide you a place to set up shop and say among the nation of New Zealand “the LORD reigns?” In 2008 the New Zealand bible society estimated that weekly church attendance was as low as 15%, and that was 10 years ago. There are towns all over this country that don’t have an evangelical church. How can we as a church and as individuals use our time and money to support the establishment of gospel believing churches in towns that don’t have one? And ultimately, to line up with this psalm we have to get a heart for the nations. In Norway weekly church attendance is as low as 3%. We have to get an eye for the nations because the ends of the earth are flowing across the waterfall of their isolation and into eternity without even one moments worth of joy before the coming of Christ. Let us pray,