

“A Call to Worship”

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Series: *Psalms*

Bible Text: Psalm 96

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If you have a Bible, you can be opening up to Psalm 96 this morning. It's printed in your worship guide if you need a copy of it. We are spending time this summer looking at different Psalms in the song book of the people of God, and you know this, but they have different themes. So already during this series, you saw Brandon preached a Psalm on God's justice last week. The week before, Steve preached on the fear of man from the Psalms. And so if you had to take the whole book of Psalms and sum up, what's the major theme? Probably have a couple of answers, but one of the major themes would have to be worship. And that's the theme of Psalm 96. So let's read it. And remember, this is God's Word.

O sing to the Lord a new song, sing to the Lord all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless His name, tell of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous works among all the peoples. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised. He is to be feared above all gods, for all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols. But the Lord made the heavens, splendor and majesty are before Him, strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the people, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name. Bring an offering and come into His courts. Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness, tremble before Him all the earth. Say among the nations, the Lord reigns. Yes, the world is established, it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity. Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice. Let the sea roar in all that fills it, let the field exult in everything in it. 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.

Father, would you grant to us now the ability to hear from you? Help us to be in tune with what you have to say here in your word. Give us the help of God the Spirit so that we can not only understand with our minds, but feel the way we should feel and want to go and do what we should do. You know us, Lord, we cannot make that happen, and so we pray for the help of your Spirit. We pray through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Last year, our family, we did something we've never done before. We attended a hockey game, match. We live in Georgia, so we really don't have to choose. It can be whatever it is. We went to a hockey game. It's fun, it's fast, it's entertaining, it's confusing because we live in a land where there's no ice, but I had an experience that was pretty rare. The crowd at points would break into cheers and chants and even very oddly specific collective mockery against the players on the other team at points. It's like they had been practicing. They knew exactly when it was coming, and there was no logic to it for me as a non-hockey watcher, so it was utter confusion for me. Then there was the other side of it where it's not just that I didn't know what to do. It's that I'm not a fan of that particular team. We weren't there because I've got an affinity. I couldn't have joined in if I wanted to, and I didn't really want to. Maybe you've been at a sporting event for a team that's not your team, and you felt that. There's the cheering and the singing and the chanting, but this is not your team, so what do you care? Even if you did want to care, you don't know the songs, so you can't really participate.

I wonder if we understand that that principle is happening every day on a much larger scale, that you and I, biblically speaking, live in this world where we are told that the skies and the land and the sea and the animals and the birds and the plants and even the trees and everything that exists are actually actively cheering and singing to their creator. We're not pantheists. We don't think that the trees are talking, just to be clear, but in some sense, all of creation is singing and chanting and cheering, except for one part of creation. There's one aspect of creation that is oddly, strangely silent at times, and it's us. Humans miss it. We miss the point of creation. We miss the goal of human existence, and it's to give glory to our creator.

This psalm calls us to join the rest of creation in giving glory to God. Let's answer two questions as we look at it. How and how? Why should we do that, and how do we do it? Let's get into it here.

Why? If you've been around CPC for any length of time, you've heard Psalm 96 at the beginning of a worship service as a call to worship, because that's what it is. The psalmist here calls us to sing to the Lord, to bless his name. It's a summons. It's an invitation. It's also a command. We're supposed to adore him with our affections, and we're supposed to say things that are true about him to each other and to him, and we're supposed to think about him rightly and feel rightly about him and to find ourselves identified with him, aligned with him. That's broadly speaking what worship is. But the author here doesn't tell us to do that without giving us reasons why. Let's look at some of the reasons.

Look at verses four and five. The word four gets us to the why. Worship the Lord. Why? *He is great and greatly to be praised and to be feared above all gods.* The first thing he does is start to draw a contrast between the God who is and what he calls worthless idols. Now there are gods that are some named and some unnamed, some that are from official religions that exist in the world, and some of them are just human affinities, things that we have elevated so much that they have taken on godlike status, and we love them. And he says they're worthless, and the contrast is, but the Lord made the heavens. So there is a creator, and everything else is

creation, and when we confuse the two, we delve into something called idolatry. We know from the rest of scriptures that God made, he made everything out of nothing. He spoke it into being, and we're also told that he upholds it by his word of power, which if you chase that down for a minute, means that, well, what if God were to withdraw his creative, sustained word from the creation? Well, it means that everything that exists would go back to nothing, just like that. Nothing. Not blackness or void, nothing, which is a wild thought.

He created all things, and he upholds all things. His greatness is in his creative power. Nothing else can create anything like that, right? Not those, I'm sure, my guess is you don't have small shrines in your house. If you did, we should probably talk about that, but I bet you don't, but if you did have them, they can't create anything. Some other religions might have a creation narrative, but there's nothing that has a God that creates everything from nothing. Even the gods that we have as Westerners, power, money, success, pleasure, reputation, or just yourself, none of those things can create anything. None of them can breathe stuff into existence. Even us, as humans, you have creative abilities, but you're working with material that's already there. Our creative power is derivative from the creator. We can't just make stuff happen.

He calls us to give glory to him because of his greatness as the creator, and then he starts talking about splendor, majesty, strength, and beauty. Now whatever else we might say about those words, those are words that appeal to our senses. They're aesthetic in nature. Those are words that we use to describe creation. Splendor is what you might say in describing a sunset. Majesty is a word for what you feel and sense when you look at mountains.

My wife makes fun of me that as an Appalachian mountain boy, the first time that we went and I saw the Rocky Mountains, that by the end of the day, I had given myself almost a migraine because my eyes had been so wide the whole day just trying to take in the enormity of the mountains we were driving through, and I was looking for a bighorn sheep perched on a mountainside somewhere, but I couldn't take it in. The word for it is majesty.

That's what we're looking for. The psalmist wants you to know that that's great. There is splendor. There's majesty. There's beauty in the creation around you, and it's nothing compared to the creator himself. He is splendor, majesty, glory, beauty. They say that in the United States, one of the only things that doesn't disappoint is the Grand Canyon. Many of you have been there, and when you show up there, you're not underwhelmed. You don't go up to the Grand Canyon and say, yeah, that's all right, and you just don't do that. It is what it says it is. It's impressive, and the psalmist wants us to understand the God that he is describing to us. The God who created us and calls us to worship is impressive. He has not been undersold. He has not been represented wrongly, and when we actually meet him, we're going to be underwhelmed somehow and say, eh, yeah, he's all right. No, he is worthy of all glory. He is the essence and source of beauty, which means that all of the longing that you have and that I have for beauty and strength and splendor and majesty, and we have it. All those aesthetic desires, really, they only find their fulfillment in the God who made us. He doesn't disappoint. He always impresses when we see him rightly, and not to mention those things, that would all be enough, but he's also, he's in charge.

Look at verse 10. *Say among the nations, the Lord reigns.* So he's not just the creator. He's not just really impressive. He's also the king, and he reigns, it says he established the world and made it so that it won't be shaken, which is to say, the fact that you wake up tomorrow morning and the sun came up again is because there's a God who reigns and makes sure that the creation is established and is stable, that it's the only source for it, that he actually reigns over creation and peoples and systems and governments, good and bad, and things of beauty and natural disasters and times of peace and warfare. There's nothing that slips outside his reigning control. And it's not just that he reigns. He evaluates. Again, verse 10, *he will judge the peoples with equity.* He actually knows how to look at everything and evaluate it just right. He knows what's good, what's bad, what's true, what's false, what needs fixing.

So consider the immensity of God. He is your creator, your sustainer, your king, and your judge, and he doesn't do any of that stuff from some aloof, cold, wary distance. Look at verse 13. This might be the greatest reason that we have to worship him. It's the reason that he says, *let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice and the trees sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes.* He shows up. He takes all those things that we just said about who he is, and he brings them directly and squarely on a daily basis into your business, into your family and your job and your internal world and your psyche and your emotions and everything that makes up your world. There's a reason in verses two and three they sing of his salvation and marvelous works that because they're thinking about those times in their history when he came near. They're thinking about the Exodus when he had to come near to save them and he came near in his power and he evaluated Pharaoh and he found him wanting and he crushed him and he saved his people. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with faithfulness. He shows up, creator, sustainer, source of beauty, king and judge that actually comes near and sets things right. Verses 11 through 13 are a vision of a creation that has been fully restored, doing what it was made to do, being glad, rejoicing, roaring, exalting, singing for joy, and in that sense Psalm 96 has to look forward from its own setting. Old Testament times didn't see that fulfilled. Things didn't get restored and made right and everything fixed. In this sense, the Lord comes to judge and restore with the coming of God the Son, the God-man himself.

Psalm 96 has to drive us forward to the coming of Jesus who came to set things right. Who came and creation responded, right? We've seen this when we've been in the gospel accounts that he says the rocks will cry out if you don't.

He curses a fig tree and it withers.

He walks on the water and the water doesn't rebel.

He tells the storm to be calm and it's calm.

There is a moment when creation quakes and the rocks split and the light goes dark because in order to set things right, the Son of God has to die and creation responds. It reacts.

There was a tree of the forest that wasn't singing for joy when it got cut down and fashioned into a Roman cross. All of that happens so that people like us who have worshiped worthless idols and who have been very unimpressed with God and who have woken up in the morning and said, nah, don't care, and who have rebelled against him and shaken our fists at him and have built every sort of idol that is imaginable to humanity can be forgiven, declared righteous, and inexplicable to ourselves, welcomed into his presence, and at the end of all things made whole and made right. It's really good news.

Are you impressed with him? And can you acknowledge that if you're not, it's not him, it's us. If we can't see him and be completely bowled over by the glory of who he is, it has to be our glasses. He is not the one that is underwhelming.

Can you see him as creator and as impressive and as the king and as the one who's come near? Very often, we don't see him accurately, and when we don't see him accurately, we do see other things inaccurately as well, meaning when he's not the one that we worship, we do worship something else. That's kind of how idolatry starts, a diminished view of God, and therefore, something has to be powerful. Something has to take his place, and so we take something like money. And we think, money will get me what I want. It will get me stuff. It will get me security. It will get me power. It will get me peace. And it is greatly to be praised and to be feared above all gods. And if I have it, I have to protect it, and if I don't have it, I am of all people to be pitied. Of course, it can never measure up to what we ask it to do. In those moments when we inevitably have to sober up and realize that it can't do it, we begin to see that it's a tool to be used, but it's a really sorry God to be worshiped. It's literally a piece of created paper or metal or, dare I say, whatever a Bitcoin is.

If God is not your security provider and strength, something will be. Do you need to look at him and see him as the one with real power? That word glory is the word for weight and substance. Do you need to look at him until you see that he has substance and nothing else really does? Maybe you can see him as creator, but you really do struggle to see him as judge and king, especially if you have suffered injustice and it hasn't been resolved yet.

Brandon preached a great sermon last week on the justice of God. One of the hardest things about calling God the just judge is if you have suffered an injustice and it hasn't been made right in this life yet, and you have to wait. Waiting requires faith, and faith is hard. And you're just called every day to wait until God shows up and executes justice. It's so difficult.

How do you do that?

How do you see God as the just judge?

How do you see him as the creator with power?

How do you get impressed with him?

Maybe the best way to see God accurately is to look at what this psalm is driving us forward to.

To begin to see the God-man and to be impressed with him.

To begin to look at Jesus and to see the one who is creator, as the one who came to show us the mercy and compassion and power of God. It's clear in the scripture, it's clear. And yet he came to show us even more clearly.

To look at him and see a king who came to serve and a judge who came to bear justice. A God who comes near.

And it's in him by faith that we can begin to see the worthlessness of an idol and the substance of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

It's in him that we begin to be impressed with his humiliation and his exaltation.

It's in him that we begin to see a king and a judge who does everything right with us and the world.

Where do you need to meditate on who Jesus is and what he's done? And to ask that your vision might be corrected.

And if you're here and you're not yet a Christian, this is the place to start. If you honestly, when you show up here, you feel like you're at a sporting event where you're not on this team and you don't know these cheers. Let me just be frank, you're going to have to come on the team. You're going to have to actually declare allegiance. And my plea with you would be to look at the Lord Jesus and trust that he took judgment that should fall on sinners like us. Be identified with him.

Well, what if that happens? You either become a Christian or you're a Christian and you say, look, I want to look at who God is as he reveals himself in scripture and I want to worship him. How do I do it? I see why, but how? Let's ask the question then. How?

Sing. It's the first thing he says. And interestingly, it's a command, not a suggestion. It is commanded that you sing to God. Singing has to become the most normal, ordinary thing in the world for a Christian. Have you ever wondered, why singing? Maybe you like singing. Maybe you don't. And you think, why can't it be a cool, wary recitation of facts about who God is, right? Why can't we do that when we join? Why does it have to be singing? It's so awkward. People hear me.

Well, there's a lot of answers to that question. Think of what's happening when a person sings. You got to have something in your brain. So there's something that's true, but you've got to have more than just information in your brain. When you sing, you take thoughts and those thoughts run through, hopefully, the beauty of a fitting tune. That's what you hope happens. That actually

somehow calls your emotions to engage and even your will, and in God's providence, you might actually enjoy it. But even beyond enjoying it, you might find yourself able now to express the emotions that are fitting and right. Singing truth to God enables you to have right and fitting sorrow at times.

Sometimes we need to be people who sing a lament rather than an effervescent praise song.

Sometimes we need to be people who can sing about real sorrows and can sing about the horrors and the death that sin brings.

Sometimes we need to be able to sing things that are so glorious that we can't even fathom them, but the more we sing, the more we trust that we're growing toward it.

It is existentially satisfying to sing to the Lord. It's also instructive. Your kids remember their theology and song better than they remember it when you just try to teach them. The other thing is that it's good for us. Your singing is good for us. It's good for your brothers and sisters. We hear you sing and we hear you saying, yeah, I believe it too, and you're not alone, and there are others of us. It's so good for me. One of my favorite things about sitting up front during the times when we sing together is I can hear you. Your voices flood and hit me in the back of the head, and there are times when that is the most encouraging thing in the world to hear the singing of the people of God and to realize, oh, these are my people too. I'm part of this.

We do this in other areas of our lives. People still, less so, but people still sing national anthems. People still, you know, Red Sox fans still sing Sweet Caroline really loudly and joyfully during their games. It's a collective identity. God loves it when his people sing so much that he actually sings over us, we're told in Zephaniah. We sing because he first sang to us. You were made to do it, even if your voice is horrifying. You were still made to sing. If you choose not to, let me be clear here, you're robbing yourself of great joy and you're robbing your church of great joy and affirmation of truth. You're introducing what feels like cynicism. We need to hear you. We need to hear you even if you're screeching. We need to hear you if you're operatic. Whatever it is, do you sing? It's never too late to start. We worship by singing.

We worship by declaring. That's another aspect here. *Tell of his salvation day to day. Declare his glory among the nations*, verse 3.

Is it worship to tell your kids again about Jesus when you have your devotional time in the morning or at night? Is that worship?

Is it worship to talk to your spouse about something you're learning in the scripture?

Is it worship to talk to a coworker about meaning or contentment or forgiveness?

Is it worship when you get on a plane and you go overseas and you have the chance to tell someone else who doesn't speak your language about Jesus, yes, yes, to all, yes.

There's a horizontal aspect where we declare who he is to absolutely every set of ears that will listen. He's glorified when we talk about him like he's real because he is and he's glorified when we talk about what he's done like he actually did it, because he did. It's never too late to start declaring his glory. Singing is vertical and horizontal. Declaring is horizontal. What about this weird word ascribe, verses 7 and 8?

What does it mean to ascribe something to someone? *Ascribe to the Lord, glory and strength.* Singing is to God and to you. Declaring is to you. Ascribing is saying what is true back to God himself, which feels a little strange to say back to God, God, you are glorious. You are holy. You are good. You are right. You are just. Why do we do that? Is God a raging egomaniac that's constantly telling us, would you please tell me more about how great I am? He's been accused of that and worse, but you know, he knows his own perfections and he doesn't need you or me to tell him about them. He's well aware.

But when we speak back to him about who he is, it does honor him. Through the work of the Spirit, he presses those realities deeper into your brain and deeper into your affections in such a way that the God who is invisible, somehow we begin to realize that this is real. This is true. He is who he says he is. It's one of the ways that he works. He loves the fact that we would tell him who he is, but he is at work pressing into us more the reality of his presence. In the Old Testament, there's a reason it says in verse 8, *bring an offering and come into his courts.* And then again in verse 9, *worship the Lord in the adornment of holiness, tremble before him all the earth.* In the Old Testament, often they would bring their offerings and they would worship and there were times, specific times when the Lord would descend on the temple or the tabernacle in a visible cloud of glory that was radiant and terrifying all at the same time. There was something going on when they were ascribing to God who he is and they were bringing their offerings and he would show up and they would be reminded, oh, he's with us. He dwells with us. And it would create trembling and fear because this is not a God that's contained somehow to the corners of our minds. He's real.

And if you realize that you're in the presence of a God who actually made you and is not just a myth or an idea, you bow down. That's probably the last thing here. *Say among the nations, the Lord reigns.* If he's the king, we bow. There's no pride in front of this king. The only right posture of the human heart is to come before him and to submit ourselves entirely. It's why we're here on Sundays. It's why we'll be here next Sunday. It's to practice this activity of coming before him and submitting ourselves to him. What is the posture of your heart before God? Not only on Sunday mornings, but on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday.

What's the posture of your heart? He calls us to worship him. He tells us how to do it. Sing, declare, ascribe, bow down. Worship is not four emotionally charged songs and an informational talk once a week. That is so reductionist. It is not that. It's so much more. We are told who the God who made us and redeemed us is, and we are called to give him the glory that's due to his name with our voices vertically horizontally back to him and even with the posture of our hearts to bow down.

The irony is that in that posture, we are most lifted up. When we say, you are God, and therefore I am not, that's when we are most human and most whole, and he gets most glory. You are a worshiper. Every human being is, but are we making the habit of seeing him as he is, calling him our creator, being impressed with him, calling him our king and our judge, and rejoicing that he came so near to us that he would save us by his own death and resurrection?

If so, sing. Sing to him. Declare who he is. Tell him who he is and bow down. It's what we were made to do, and it's what we will do for all eternity when Jesus returns, and it's a new heavens that are glad and a new earth that rejoices, and there are new fields exulting, and new trees of the forest that are singing for joy, and a new humanity that never fails to add their voice to all creation. Join in and worship. Let's pray that we would be people who are learning how to do that now. Pray with me.

Father, we don't want to be hollow people. We don't want to be silent people. You made us for yourself. Help us to worship you according to the glory that is due to you. Make us people who sing, who declare, who ascribe, and help us know why. Lord, remind us that you are the creator and king, the judge, and would you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, help us to see that you always deliver. You never underwhelm. Help us to bow. We pray in Christ's name. Amen