

A New Song

*O sing unto the LORD a new song: sing unto the LORD, all the earth. Sing unto the LORD, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people. Say among the heathen that the LORD reigneth! (Psalm 96:1-3, 10)*

Singing is the exclusive business of the people of God. No one else has anything to sing about. All the crooning, whining, wailing, screaming, cussing and boasting which this world sets to metered noises and calls music, are the songs of fools. They have no substance to heal or feed the soul; and as the thorns under the cooking pot, the crackling of their burnings will be gone in a moment (Eccl. 7:5-6). Songs of the saints not only have solid joy in the soul for their provocation, but they have substance for their content. They are not merely religious entertainment, but proclamation of redemptive revelation and reality. When we are told to “sing a new song,” we are not being enjoined to learn a new composition that has not been on the market before. Its newness consists in the fact that it could not have been sung before. When we sing, we sing about something worth singing about. A new song is about something of the riches of God’s grace that has freshly been brought out of His storehouse and sounded that all who have ears to hear may hear and know, and join in the refrain.

The 96<sup>th</sup> Psalm is the second of a series of five royal Psalms that center around the theme of the Sovereignty of God, the King in His Kingdom, with the thrice repeated exultation, “The Lord Reigns!” Each is a part of a single complete mosaic. The 95<sup>th</sup> Psalm sets the criteria of true and acceptable worship of Jehovah. Enthusiastic, hearty adoration. Singing, shouting (loud! Joyfully!) Thankfulness, Worship. We are to bow down, to capitulate at His Feet. The great Apostle Paul was often accused of being “beside himself,” “out of his mind,” because of his joy and fervency in Christ. If we are not hot for God we shall soon be either ice cold, or worse, lukewarm, in which case we shall surely be spewed out. This is a truism consistent with the text, for the 95<sup>th</sup> closes with God’s rejection and reprobation of a people who for 40 years lived in the very shadow of the Almighty. They ate, drank, wore, followed, beheld, breathed the grace and power of God, yet their hearts remained afar off. The awful, final, eternally unchanging words that God says of them, “They shall not enter into my rest.”

This sets the stage for the new song of Psalm 96. Significantly, it is the identical song given by David to Israel (I Chron. 16:23-33) upon the return of the Ark of the Covenant. It was an even symbolic of the end of the desolation of Israel. God had judged His unfaithful nation by bringing against them the Philistines, who made a great slaughter of people, including the wicked sons of Eli. Eli himself died, and his daughter-in-law gave birth to a son named Ichabod (the glory is departed), because the Ark of the Covenant was removed from the land. As Israel rejoiced in the return of God’s Covenant and Presence, so is the song of Psalm 95 a prophetic declaration of the turning if Israel’s captivity with the incarnation of the Lord Jesus and His redemptive work on the Cross, bringing in the Kingdom. The new song is the song of the New Covenant. The nation Israel is not mentioned. Instead, it is “all the earth” that is enjoined. His Glory is to be declared among the gentiles (vs. 3,10), His wonders among all peoples (vs. 3). Kindreds of the peoples are exhorted (vs. 7). All the earth is to tremble before Him (vs. 9). This universality is summed up in “He shall judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with truth” (vs. 13). This is no tribal or regional Kingdom. It is all peoples of all the earth.

It is of critical importance that we grasp the substance of this song, for as New Covenant people of God, this is our song. It is not one that has people, but God in view. “Sing unto the Lord, bless His Name.” It is not focused on conversion of sinners, but the glory of God. Our hearts are not to be caught up with “soul-winning,” but with magnifying, adoring Him. “Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations. His wonders among all the peoples” (vs. 2-3). We are not so much to entreat the poor sinner to be saved from his misery, ruin and judgment as we are to point him to the glories of the Saviour. We are not to be in crusades to lift men out of their terrible state, but we are to call their attention to this great and glorious God.

In fact, the gravity center of the gospel, the sum and substance of what we are to preach and impress upon the minds of all peoples to the ends of the earth is comprehended in verse 10: “Say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns!’” That is the glad tidings! It has been generally agreed by many that the heart of the gospel is II Corinthians 5:19, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.” Others like to focus on John 3:16 or other such passages which call attention to the substitutionary suffering of Christ and the love of God. As great and glorious as these truths are, they are vulnerable to men’s tendency to see in them a God Who is doing the best He can to help man out of his state of ruin, but cannot actually, certainly and without fail deliver him. Such a God may be frustrated by the devil, by wicked men, by the world system, indeed, by the “free” will of the sought sinner himself. It is important that men should be taught the details

of the redeeming grace, of God's love, the Saviour's perfections, suffering and resurrection, and of Divine satisfaction in the Substitute. That is all at the heart of the gospel, but the gospel itself, the glad tidings, the provocation for the song and the shout is "The Lord Reigns!"

Contemporary preaching and evangelism have increasingly pictured salvation as a "possibility." Men are then motivated to avail themselves of this "chance to be saved." Social injustices, inequities, oppressions, political tyrannies, thefts, deceptions, wars, diseases, natural disasters, are all pictured as anomalies that men may correct if they are simply educated, refined and trained to do it. Deep down in the inner recesses of the soul, men know that it is all a hoax, a cruel lie. Preachers and theologians may deny it, but the natural man knows himself to be depraved, that he cannot be trusted, that if he "made a decision" to be saved, he is too wicked to persevere; that he is a captive of his own selfish, lustful, sinful nature. To leave the slightest part of his own salvation (let alone the salvation of others) to the discretion of sinners is a terrible thing. Swine will always despise and trample the pearl. The gospel is thereby evacuated of its power, and is no gospel at all. In spite of all our learning, technological achievements, social experiments, international treaties and "medical breakthroughs," the world is not getting better. It is getting worse. And the Good intentions and desires of a less-than-sovereign god is no good news. Redemption of the earth, the creation, the salvation of souls, must rest entirely in the hands of a God Who reigns!

It is in view of this glad tidings that the heavens may rejoice, the earth be glad, along with the sea and all its creatures, the field and the woods together with all their creatures (vs. 11-12). That is what the creation has been groaning and waiting for all along (Romans 8:19-22). "The world also is firmly established, It shall not be moved" (vs. 10). It is not in the capricious hand of fate and luck, nor left to the incompetent blundering of men. "He shall judge the peoples righteously . . . He shall judge the world with righteousness" (vs. 10,13). Justice and equity will be executed. Order, peace and right will be established. The Lord reigns!

If there is yet doubt that this be the sum and substance of the gospel, consider the Apostle's summation of that hallmark cry of the New Covenant, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). He invokes it in Romans 10:13, then observes that: (1) one may call only if he believes, (2) one may believe only if he has heard, (3) one may hear only by a preacher, and, (4) one may preach only if he has been sent. This, he concludes, is the provocation of that wondrous exultation from Isaiah 52:7:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace; who brings glad tidings of good things, Who proclaims salvation; who says unto Zion, YOUR GOD REIGNS!

- C. M.