

Psalms 97

This evening - we're continuing our overview of the Old Testament book titled Psalms.

With this as our focus - let's open our Bibles to Psalms chapter 97 - and as we make our way to the 97th Psalm...

...I should take a moment to point out that this Psalm is the fifth of eight Psalms that have been called by some - the theocratic Psalms.

The reason why is due to the fact that this series of Psalms are focused on the theocratic rule of our infinite King.

This same series of Psalms are also called - the Enthronement Psalms...

...and the reason why is because - these songs of praise focus our attention on the One Who sits enthroned over His creation.

And while the 97th Psalm is another anonymous Psalm that fails to identify its author...

...the Septuagint - and the Latin Vulgate both begin with a dedication to King David...

...for the day when his land is established.

It's also interesting to note that the lyrical content of this Psalm seems to be focused on the second coming of Christ.

And as we make our way through the lyrics of the Psalm...

...we'll take the time to consider the way in which the Lord Jesus will eventually return - and judge the nations.

And it's at that point in time - when He will be exalted before the nations of the Earth.

With this as our focus - let's turn our attention to the lyrics that we find here in the 97th Psalm.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 1 - where the Psalmist declared...

Psa 97:1 The LORD reigns;
Let the earth rejoice;
Let the multitude of isles be glad!

Here in the first verse of this Psalm - we find the Psalmist - assuring his audience - that the LORD reigns.

That word - reigns - was translated from a Hebrew word - which was used of a King - Who ascends to His throne.

And as we consider how the title - LORD is in all caps - then - we can be certain that...

...the Psalmist was assuring his audience - that YAHWEH is the One...

...Who has ascended to His kingly throne.

Now - I realize that there are times when we question this claim.

And as we consider the wars - and the rumors of wars - and the violence that takes place in every city...

...as we consider the natural disasters - and the pestilences that plague mankind...

...there are times when it's difficult to believe that God is reigning over His creation.

There are many who even use this as an argument against the existence of God.

For example William Rowe - who was a professor of philosophy at Purdue University was an atheist...

...who formulated his evidential argument against God - from the evidence of evil.

In summary - Professor Rowe insisted that the presence of intense, seemingly pointless suffering...

...makes the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good God - unlikely.

In other words - if there really is an all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good God - reigning over the Universe...

...then - why does He allow us to suffer the pointless evil that He permits?

Why does He allow children to suffer abuse - and disease - - why does He allow innocent people to be murdered?

Why does He allow people to die from natural disasters and senseless wars?

If YAHWEH truly is ruling and reigning over the Earth...

...then why doesn't He protect us from pointless pain and suffering?

In order to answer this question - I should first remind you that - our Creator made everything good.

It was on the 6th day of creation - when God considered everything that He created.

And according to Moses' account - found in Genesis chapter 1 it's verse 31 - where we learn that...

Gen 1:31 ...God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

On the sixth day of creation - everything was indeed - very good.

There was no sin - there was no suffering - there were no natural disasters - or death.

Everything was perfect.

Unfortunately - the entire creation was cursed - on the day when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit.

Let's consider how Paul explained it - in Romans chapter 8 - it's beginning at verse 18 - where he declared...

Rom 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Rom 8:19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.

Rom 8:20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;

Rom 8:21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Rom 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

Here in these verses - we learn about the day when our Creator subjected the entirety of His creation to futility...

...so that the entirety of creation can eventually be delivered from the bondage of corruption.

And as we wait for that day - when the creation will be delivered...

...it's important to remember that - God is patiently allowing corruption to run it's course...

...so that some might be saved from everlasting punishment.

Here's how the apostle Peter explained it - in 2nd Peter chapter 3 - it's beginning at verse 7 - where we learn that...

2Pe 3:7 ...the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

2Pe 3:8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

2Pe 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

2Pe 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

2Pe 3:11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,

2Pe 3:12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

2Pe 3:13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

According to Peter - the pain and suffering that the Lord allows isn't pointless - as atheists like Professor Rowe would have us to believe.

No - instead - the Lord is patiently enduring the evil that takes place in this wicked world...

...because - He's not willing that any should perish - but wants all to come to repentance.

Please trust me when I tell you that - the atheist who insists that pain and suffering is pointless...

...is pretending to have the knowledge necessary for that claim.

And they're failing to realize that God uses pain and suffering...

...so that sinners might repent - and trust in the Lord Jesus - for the forgiveness of sins.

This was precisely the point that Paul was making - in Romans chapter 8 where he declared...

Rom 8:28 ...we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

God works all things together for the good of those who love Him.

And while I realize that there are times when it feels like God is allowing us to endure pointless suffering...

...I can assure you that the One Who is ruling and reigning over the Universe...

...has a righteous reason for the pain and suffering that He allows.

It's for this reason that the psalmist declared...

Psa 97:1 The LORD reigns;
Let the earth rejoice;
Let the multitude of isles be glad!

Yahweh is on the throne - - and it's for this reason that we can all rejoice.

And while I realize that - the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together even until now...

...we can rejoice in knowing that there's coming a day...

...when the King of kings will create new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Let's consider how the Psalmist put it - here in the 97th Psalm.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 2 - where he declared...

Psa 97:2 Clouds and darkness surround Him;
Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.

Psa 97:3 A fire goes before Him,
And burns up His enemies round about.

Here in these verses - we find the Psalmist - assuring his audience that...

...the throne of the Lord is established upon a foundation of
righteousness and justice.

And it's for this reason that we can rejoice - - no matter what is
happening here on the Earth.

In order to make my point - it'll help you to know that - the word -
Righteousness - was translated from a Hebrew word...

...which was used of that which is right - and therefore - ethically
correct.

When the Psalmist assures us that the King of kings is seated
upon a throne that is founded upon righteousness...

...He's helping us to understand that all of this decisions
will be ethically right.

We should also notice that the throne of Yahweh is also founded upon
justice.

And just to be clear - that word - justice - was translated from a
Hebrew word...

...which speaks of lawful ordinances - and divine decrees.

What this means is that - the throne of Yahweh has been
founded upon the divine laws of a just judge.

With all of this in mind - we can rejoice in knowing that the King of kings is also a just judge - Who will always do what is right.

Every decision He makes is right - and every judgment He passes will be a perfect sentence.

I like the way that Ethan the Ezrahite put it in the 89th Psalm - it's beginning at verse 14 - where he declared...

Psa 89:14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne;

Mercy and truth go before Your face.

Psa 89:15 Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound!

They walk, O LORD, in the light of Your countenance.

Psa 89:16 In Your name they rejoice all day long,
And in Your righteousness they are exalted.

Christian - listen - we can rejoice all day long - knowing that the One Who is on the throne...

...will always do what is right - - because - He is righteous.

And yes - this includes the punishment of His enemies.

Let's consider how the Psalmist put it - here in the 97th Psalm - look with me again - there at verse 3 - where we learn that...

Psa 97:3 A fire goes before Him,
And burns up His enemies round about.

Here in this verse - we find the Psalmist - describing the way that the Lord punishes His enemies.

And listen - there are several stories in the Bible - that fit this description.

This includes the fire and brimstone that the Lord used to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah...

...as well as the fire that the Lord used to punish the Egyptians - at the time of the 7th Plague.

I should also remind you about the day when the Lord punished Aaron's sons - Nadab and Abihu.

They offered strange fire before the Lord - and it's for this reason that the fire of the Lord devoured them.

And then there were the two hundred and fifty men who were consumed by the fire of the Lord...

...and the reason why was because they offered profane incense - after the rebellion of Korah.

We also find a similar situation unfolding - during the days of Satan's final rebellion.

And with this as our focus - let's consider John's account - found in the book of Revelation.

Hold your place here in the book of Psalms - and let's turn in our Bibles to Revelation chapter 20

As we make our way to the 20th chapter of Revelation - I should take a moment to remind you that...

...there's coming a day - when Christ Jesus will return - and it's at that point in time...

...when He will rule and reign over the Earth for a thousand years.

This is the period of time that futurists call the Millennial reign of Christ.

And it's at the end of the thousand years - when Satan will be released.

Let's consider how John explained it - here in Revelation chapter 20 - look with me beginning at verse 7 - where we read...

Rev 20:7 Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison

Rev 20:8 and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea.

Rev 20:9 They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

At the end of Christ's Millennial reign - Satan will be released - for a short season.

It's at that point in time when the people of the Earth will be tempted - sort of like Eve was tempted in the Garden of Eden.

And listen - those who follow Satan in this rebellion - will be killed with the fire and the brimstone...

...that comes down from heaven.

It's at that point in time - when the righteous judge of heaven and Earth will solve the problem of evil - forevermore.

Let's consider how John explained it - here Revelation 20 - look with me beginning there at verse 10 - where we learn that...

Rev 20:10 The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Rev 20:11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.

Rev 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the

Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

Rev 20:13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

Rev 20:14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

Rev 20:15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Here in these verses - we learn about the day - when the Lord will solve the problem of evil.

And as we consider how those who will not repent - and trust in Jesus will be cast into the lake of fire...

...we can rejoice in knowing that - a fire goes before
YAHWEH - and burns up His enemies round about.

We should also consider the way in which the Psalmist appealed to the Creation - as evidence of God's glory.

With this as our focus - let's turn back to the 97th Psalm - and let's pick up our study - beginning there at verse 4 - where the Psalmist declared...

Psa 97:4 His lightnings light the world;
The earth sees and trembles.

Psa 97:5 The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the LORD,
At the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.

Psa 97:6 The heavens declare His righteousness,
And all the peoples see His glory.

Here in these verses - we find the Psalmist - describing the way in which the creation reveals the glory of God.

And we must not fail to notice the way that the Psalmist focused on destructive elements...

...that cause many natural disasters - all around the world.

For example - it's there in verse 4 - where the Psalmist referred to the lightnings that light the world.

You might not know this - but - lightning causes just over 8,000 wildfires every year - here in the United States of America .

And yet - the psalmist assured us that the same lighting is evidence of God's glory.

It's there in the second half of verse 4 - where the Psalmist referred to the way that the Earth trembles.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey - there are approximately 20,000 earthquakes around the world each year.

This is roughly 55 every single day.

And while it's true that many people lose their homes - and even their lives in earthquakes...

...the same natural disasters bring glory to God.

We should also consider the way in which the Psalmist described mudslides there in verse 5...

...as he mentioned the way that the mountains melt like wax at the presence of the LORD...

And as we consider the mudslides that just happened in Nepal...

...I'm sure we're all struggling to understand how these natural disasters glorify God.

And yet - it's here in this song - where the Psalmist assured us of this very truth.

Look with me again - there at verse 6 - where He declared...

Psa 97:6 The heavens declare His righteousness,

And all the peoples see His glory.

The skies above - that are filled with thunderstorms and tornadoes - declare the righteousness of our Creator.

And as we consider the power of these natural disasters - - we must not fail to realize that...

...the LORD literally spoke the entire Universe into existence.

And so - imagine with me for a moment how powerful our God actually is.

And listen - when the Psalmist declared: "all the peoples see His glory" - I can't help but to think about the second coming of Christ.

It's in Revelation chapter 1 - beginning at verse 7 - where the apostle John declared...

Rev 1:7 Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.

Every eye will see the glory of God - on the day when the Lord Jesus returns.

Jesus Himself compared His second coming - to lightning that flashes from the East to the West.

And it's on that day - when He will establish His throne - here on the Earth.

With that being the case - we should warn those who are worshipping the false gods of this wicked world.

Let's consider how the Psalmist put it - here in the 97th Psalm - look with me beginning there at verse 7 - where he declared...

Psa 97:7 Let all be put to shame who serve carved images,

Who boast of idols.

Worship Him, all you gods.

Psa 97:8 Zion hears and is glad,

And the daughters of Judah rejoice

Because of Your judgments, O LORD.

Psa 97:9 For You, LORD, are most high above all the earth;

You are exalted far above all gods.

Here in these verses - we find the Psalmist - warning those who were serving carved images...

...by helping them to realize that there's coming a day - when they will be put to shame.

And the reason why was presented in the previous Psalm.

Let's look back at the 96th Psalm - it's there in verses 4 and 5 - where the Psalmist declared...

Psa 96:4 For the LORD is great and greatly to be praised;

He is to be feared above all gods.

Psa 96:5 For all the gods of the peoples are idols,

But the LORD made the heavens.

The false gods of the pagan nations are nothing more than idols.

And listen - many of these false gods - were believed to be in control of the natural elements.

For example - the pagans worshipped a god of lighting - and they worshipped a god of thunder.

They served a god of earthquakes - and another god of flood waters.

And all the while - they were failing to realize that their idols are powerless.

I like the way that the Psalmist explained it - in the 115th Psalm - it's beginning at verse 2 - where he asked...

Psa 115:2 Why should the Gentiles say,
“So where is their God?”
Psa 115:3 But our God is in heaven;
He does whatever He pleases.
Psa 115:4 Their idols are silver and gold,
The work of men’s hands.
Psa 115:5 They have mouths, but they do not speak;
Eyes they have, but they do not see;
Psa 115:6 They have ears, but they do not hear;
Noses they have, but they do not smell;
Psa 115:7 They have hands, but they do not handle;
Feet they have, but they do not walk;
Nor do they mutter through their throat.
Psa 115:8 Those who make them are like them;
So is everyone who trusts in them.

The idols of the pagan nations are powerless statues that are unable to answer the prayers of their adherents.

In contrast to this - Yahweh is exalted far above all of these false gods...

...and the reason why is because - He is the most high God above all the earth.

With that being the case - we can rejoice in knowing that our God is able to hear our prayers - and answer them according to His almighty power.

Let’s consider how the Psalmist explained it - here in the 97th Psalm - look with me - beginning there at verse 10 - where he declared...

Psa 97:10 You who love the LORD, hate evil!
He preserves the souls of His saints;
He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked.
Psa 97:11 Light is sown for the righteous,
And gladness for the upright in heart.
Psa 97:12 Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous,
And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.

Here in the final verses of the chapter - we find the psalmist - reminding his readers about the way in which the Lord helps those who trust in Him.

He not only preserves the souls of His saints - but - He also delivers them out of the hand of the wicked.

He lead us with the light of His righteousness - - and He fills our hearts with gladness.

And it's for this reason that we should rejoice in the Lord...

...as we express our gratitude - for the God Who not only hears our prayers....

...but - He is able to answer our prayers - according to His will.

Remember - the false gods of the pagan nations have ears - - but they cannot hear the prayers of their adherents.

Our God has no ears — but He can clearly hear us - when we cry out to Him.

The false gods of the pagan nations have eyes - - but they cannot see those who bow before the lifeless statue.

Our God has no eyes - - - but He can see everything that happens - here on the Earth.

The gods of the pagan nations have hands - - but they aren't able to bear our burdens.

Our God has no hands - and yet - He helps us to bear our burdens...

...according to His infinite power.

What's even more is that - the Logos of the Lord clothed Himself with humanity...

...so that He offer Himself as a substitutionary sacrifice for our sins.

And in this way - Jesus suffered at the hands of evildoers - so that sinners like us could be saved.

I like the way that Paul explained it - in Philippians chapter 2 - it's beginning at verse 7 - where we learn that Jesus...

Phl 2:7 ...made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

Phl 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Phl 2:9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

Phl 2:10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,

Phl 2:11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Christian - listen - the God Who reigns over the Earth - sent His only begotten Son - to die on the cross for our sins...

...so that sinners could be saved from the punishment that we deserve.

And it's for this reason that I encourage everyone to bow their knee before the Lord Jesus...

...because - He is the King of kings - and the Lord of lords.

He is the Redeemer - Who sits upon a throne that is founded on righteousness and justice.

And He is the One Who is worthy to be praised.\

And so - let's confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.