

# Psalms 100

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Date: 30 May 2019

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[ 0 : 00 ] Okay, so for regulars amongst you who met on the Tuesday before the move, we were going through the letter to the Galatians in the New Testament, but I thought to mark this change and a bit of a new start for us, I thought we'd look at this psalm together.

And this psalm, I think, gives us the chance to step back a little bit and to pause and to see what we're all about. It gives us a wide-angle perspective on what we're doing here and what God's plan is for the people of this town and beyond and all around the world.

This psalm asks the question, what is going to convince people to take the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ seriously? What will make you pay attention to that gospel if you're looking in and inquiring? Will it be really, really clever arguments that do that? Will it be great Christian polemics arguments? Well, those things are really good, aren't they, and useful.

Will it be a knockout demonstration of great Christian apologetics? Again, it's a good thing to do. I think Psalm 100 shows us that actually good arguments about God are only convincing if you yourself are convinced of the goodness of God.

[ 1 : 32 ] This is a psalm, isn't it, that speaks to commend the character of God as the basis for worshipping Him. His character is such that genuine praise is the natural response.

Just feel the mood in this song with the lyrics. He is a God who inspires joyful noise, gladness, singing, thanksgiving, praise, thanks.

The Lord is good, verse 5. If Psalm 100 were a piece of music, it's the last night of the proms, isn't it? It's big and bold, bracing and strident, or it's like a football match when your team wins, where the subject matter, God Himself, excites people.

And we learn here that what convinces people outside to take Jesus Christ seriously is the praise of His people and their love for Him.

Psalm 100 actually tells us that praise is polemical. That when people are joyful about God and they're thankful to God, truly, when the world sees genuine praise of God, that is the best argument for Christianity of all.

[ 3 : 00 ] Praise is polemical. True joy in God is the best endorsement for God. True thankfulness to Him is the best apologetic of them all in this song.

Now we see two things going on here. The first thing, this song is a song sung by the people of the world. It's a song sung by the people of the world.

Just look how it starts in verse 1. Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. The first thing to notice is that the appeal of this God is universal.

It is a song. He is a God for the whole world. And that's the goal of the song, isn't it? The whole earth is called to express joy in the Lord.

The famous Scottish metrical psalms version of this by William Keith has all people that on earth do dwell. Sing to Him.

[ 4 : 09 ] Praise Him. Every single one. All over the world. So the song addresses people who are not yet doing this, doesn't it? Who do not yet worship the Lord.

It's addressing people throughout the whole world, across different time zones, across different continents, different religions and colours, who aren't singing this yet.

People walking past this building right now. People going about their everyday lives. People that you know, your family and friends and neighbours. Whose last thought is praising God, let alone having joy in Him.

It is a call for the world to do something totally alien, isn't it? Praising God. It's such a weird proposition. And it's done in a way that the world doesn't understand as well.

It's done in a weird way. Look at the ideas that the psalmist puts together in verse 1 and 2. To worship this God, to make a joyful noise to Him, is to serve Him.

[ 5 : 17 ] In verse 2. And to serve Him is to serve Him with gladness. Those things don't normally go together, do they?

Serving and being glad. This isn't just a call to worship this God. It is a call to work for Him. Seems like a really bad sell, doesn't it?

Come and be a Christian and start working and serving. Praise God and be His servant. And not only that, you've got to stop serving everything and anyone else.

Verse 3. Know or acknowledge that the Lord, He is God. That is the Lord in big capital letters, isn't it? It should be in big capital letters there.

The covenant-keeping God of the Bible. Yahweh. He is uniquely God. He is exceptional. Not the God who's in our hearts that we kind of feel.

[ 6 : 18 ] Or the God that we imagine out there somewhere. Or the Hindu gods or Muslim gods. Or the Buddhist gods. Or the God of secular humanism. It's the Lord. It is the Trinitarian, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

One God of the Bible. Who alone is God. And the psalm expects the world to drop everything. To stop serving all other gods.

And to serve this God. The God of the Bible. It expects that with one consent, the whole world will start doing that. So the question is how.

How is that going to happen? How are everyday people in this town and all around the world going to be convinced to stop everything, to turn away from worshipping their gods and to worship and live for the Lord instead and to start singing His praises?

It is a song sung by the people of the world. But secondly, the answer is that it's a song led by the people of God. It's a song led by the people of God.

[ 7 : 28 ] You see, God has a plan for the whole world. The great plan, world plan in the heart of God is that all peoples will come to see how good He is through a people who've already experienced that.

And the greatest polemic will be their praise. Notice how the psalm is addressed to the world in verse 1. But its singers are God's special people, aren't they?

In verse 3. It's they who say, it's He who made us. We're His. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. It's a poetic way of talking about a group of people in the world who God has fenced off in His pasture.

A special people, different from everybody else that belong to Him. It's talking about Christians, isn't it? About the true church. So as the world asks, well, why should we join in in this song?

God's people are to lead the praise and give the reasons why. And at the heart of the answer is a people who themselves have experienced this God to be the most valuable, delightful, exciting and joyful person that they could ever know.

[ 8 : 50 ] The call to come and serve and worship comes from the lips of people who are genuinely loving this God. That's the feeling, isn't it?

God's people lead in the very basic assertion, verse 5, that the Lord is good. He is pure good. He is unsullied goodness.

God's people are to say to the world, come and find somebody who is really worth getting excited about. Come and find somebody, it sounds weird, who is really worth serving.

We do get the joy of serving people we genuinely love, don't we actually? A friend of mine went to St Andrew's University in Scotland. It was the time when Prince William was there.

And she always goes on about the fact that once she served Prince William a pizza in the college canteen. It's kind of the best moment of her life. The prince came over and he asked me for a pizza.

[ 9 : 53 ] And it was the best moment of my whole time in St Andrew's. We do serve with gladness the people that we love, don't we? The song is led by people who don't just say thank you to God, but they feel thankful to God.

They enter his gates with thanksgiving, verse 4. These are people, aren't they, who have new desires created within them for this God.

And they feel like this because they can't believe they're this lucky. Wow! We can't believe that we are the sheep of God's pasture. We can't believe that we are the ones that he has chosen to not treat us as we deserve and lavish grace and goodness on us.

Now just think for a moment about what God's people here, their special people, are calling the world to do. Look at the verbs, verse 2.

Come into the Lord's presence. Verse 5. Enter his gates. Enter his courts with praise. Now, with those things, there should be a little bit of a flag, a little bit of an alarm going off.

[11:15] Because for the world, those things are actually very difficult to do. The allure of the invitations in the words of God's people, actually is in the very impossibility of them doing them and having them.

In a way, the whole world as it is may not enter God's presence or his courts. It's what the Old Testament temple system showed, isn't it?

That only people who were clean and had had sin cleansed could enter. And only that the high priest could go into the Holy of Holies once a year, into the inner courts of God's place.

That the gates of the Lord's place said to the world, actually world, you may not enter my presence.

That the curtain in the temple said to the people, you may not enter my presence.

To be a sinful person, you could not enter without certain death, could you? Never mind thanksgiving, more like enter his courts with absolute terror.

[12:26] But for this special people, God's chosen people, the Israelites, for some people that death could be avoided, couldn't it? As another death was died in their place, because lambs and bulls and goats are slaughtered outside the temple.

They were sacrificed. And it's as if here then, isn't it, there is a people, a special people, and they've got backstage passes to God's presence.

They've got the VIP party passes, and they go in, and the world looks kind of through the steamy windows, and sees the lights, and hears the music, and wonders, how did you get in there?

How did you get into God's presence? We thought we weren't allowed in. It's an interesting tension in the psalm, for the universal call to the whole world is there, isn't it?

As Jesus says, if anyone thirsts after me, anyone, come to me, let him drink. That universal call is there, make a joyful noise to the Lord, the whole earth.

[13:37] But that universal call is made through a demonstration of exclusivity. Through a people who know they've been treated differently, through no goodness of their own.

Through a people who are so grateful to have been let in, who are feeling so unworthy, and so privileged, to know the Lord, the command that is given to the whole world, it is a command, isn't it?

But it's also a gift. That knowledge is only given to those who God chooses, to the sheep of his pasture. The Lord is the name God revealed to his covenant people.

And so the inclusive call to the whole world comes through an exclusive people. And their praise is the big argument.

Their praise is polemical. When the world looks on with a certain hint of jealousy and thinks, how did you get in? What this psalm does is it places the praise of God's exclusive people at the centre of world evangelism to the universal people of the world?

[14:58] And when God's chosen people understand their privileges, the rest of the world will then look on and want to join in. I don't know about you, but for me, sharing about the Lord Jesus is a bit like Pavlov's dog syndrome.

Have you heard of that? Pavlov managed to train his dog, doesn't he, to salivate at the sound of a gong. Every day for a few weeks he rings the gong and then he brings out food for the dog so it kind of gets trained when the gong sounds the food comes out.

And after a few weeks he could just sound the gong and the dog would salivate even if there was no food. And sometimes it feels like kind of sharing the gospel is a bit like that.

An opportunity comes along and the gong sounds and kind of evangelistic juices get going and you're thinking I've got to spit something out here, I've got to say something.

And that's kind of natural, isn't it? But it is largely behaviour that is instilled by rewards and training. But the God of Psalm 100 is so attractive because God's people really believe that he is attractive.

[16:18] Because they feel thankful towards him as they say thank you to him. Gratitude and thanksgiving of God's people is at the heart of evangelism.

And it's only when we truly make a joyful noise to the Lord that others will want to too. Timothy Dudley Smith wrote the biography of John Stott and he says that one of his strengths was his gratitude for the blessings that God gave him, even the little things.

He recounts one of Stott's apprentices who would bring him coffee every day. The apprentice called him Uncle John. He says, Every afternoon at 4.30 I bring Uncle John a cup of coffee.

As soon as I set the cup on his desk he almost always says somewhat painfully, I'm not worthy. Usually without moving his bowed head from the papers.

One afternoon last week I felt that it was particularly silly for him to equate worthiness with a cup of coffee. So when he said I'm not worthy I responded, Of course you are.

[ 17 : 28 ] After a few moments he said, You haven't got your theology of grace right. I said back, Uncle John, it's only a cup of coffee.

As I went into the kitchen and began putting things away I heard him mutter, still with his head bowed down to his papers, It's just the thin end of the wedge, boy.

It's the gratitude, isn't it, of a man who feels the privilege of being the Lord, who with a simple cup of coffee he understands it's just the tip of the iceberg.

It is just a token of the whole life of privilege and of blessing in God's presence for God's chosen people. And the aim of the gospel message is not that people would serve as slaves, but that they would come and serve with joy.

That they would make a joyful noise to the Lord. not as unwilling slaves forced into it because they heard a script when we opened our mouths, but they saw our God and they watched us enjoy him and they saw our gratitude.

[ 18 : 39 ] Lloyd-Jones, he writes, the greatest need of the hour is a revived and joyful church.

Nothing is more important than that we should be delivered from a condition which gives other people looking at us the impression that to be a Christian means to be unhappy, to be sad and to be morbid and that the Christian is one who scorns, delights and lives laborious days.

Christian people too often seem to be perpetually in the doldrums and too often give this appearance of unhappiness and lack of freedom and an absence of joy. There is no question at all that this is the main reason why large numbers of people have ceased to be interested in Christianity.

Christianity. The challenge of the Christian life isn't it, is for those who have this exclusive right to joy, the sheep of his pasture, joy in God, is to be what we are allowed to be, joyful in God and to share it universally.

How will people be convinced? Well, they will be convinced when they see a grateful people, when they see that we say the Lord is good and we really, really mean it.

True thanksgiving and gratefulness to your God is the best kind of apologetic and true praise is the best polemic for the world.

[ 20 : 12 ] Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.