

# Psalms 98

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[ 0 : 00 ] Christians are people who sing, aren't we? It's one of the characteristics of the people of God, it always has been, it always will be.

! But we're not the only ones who sing. This week I was waiting for E1 at O'Griffin Avenue, and just by the lights around the corner from Dr. Manor High School, and I saw one of the mums from school in her car, she didn't see me, but she was singing in her car.

It's a great thing isn't it, when you see people like that, and they're really, really going for it. You know, I don't know what song it was on the radio, but it was as if she was playing their guitar. She was singing. It's a reminder isn't it, we're not the only ones that sing as Christians. This time of year is a pretty rowdy time of year. Sporting crowds sing, don't they, to celebrate the victory of their team.

Party crowds sing in clubs, and pubs to celebrate the end of the working week perhaps. People sing for all sorts of reasons. Because singing is one of the ways that we give expression to joy.

[ 1 : 07 ] And Psalm 98 is one of those songs. It's famous because of Isaac Watts. Isaac Watts was the Bob Dylan of his day. He was a popular songwriter, and a hymn writer.

Particularly with the book of Psalms, he took them and he paraphrased them in the 17th century. Some of them are outstanding, some of them are not so great. But this is one of his most famous paraphrases.

He didn't write it as a Christmas carol, but we sing it as a Christmas carol. And we'll sing it at the end of the series. It's joy to the world, the Lord has come. Let earth receive her king.

The psalm breaks into three. It's a bit like when you drop a stone into a pond. You know you drop a stone into a still pond, and there are ever-increasing ripples out there.

And that goes out. You know you drop it in, plop it in, and out it goes. In ripples of water. And they expand out from the centre. And this psalm is a little bit like that. It starts out small.

[ 2 : 11 ] It starts with Israel. The people of Israel, it's a very small nation. Geographically, it's about the size of Wales. It's very small. And that's verses 1 to 3, Israel sings.

And then in verses 4 to 6, can you see that? All people everywhere are called to sing. They are called to shout to the Lord, to worship the God of Israel.

And then in verse 7 to 9, the whole of creation sings for joy. Israel, all people, all creation.

It gets bigger and bigger and bigger, and just keeps expanding. In fact, the song is one of those songs that gets louder and louder and louder. It's quite a raucous song. Israel are singing.

God's people, verses 1 to 3, are singing. Verses 4 to 6, the nations are shouting. Verses 7 to 9, creation is roaring.

[ 3 : 14 ] It's a noisy sound. So let's listen in. First of all, the first section speaks of God as the saviour of his people.

That's what these verses are about. The theme of the song is quite obvious, isn't it? Look at verse 1. Oh, sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvellous things. His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.

The Lord has made known his salvation. He has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. He's remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

So there's no prizes for guessing. What's the theme? It's very obvious. There's one word that keeps coming up. It's salvation. Christianity is unashamedly a rescue religion.

Do you know what the angel said to Joseph? Call him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. And the name Jesus means the salvation of Jehovah.

[ 4 : 19 ] It means the name Jesus, God to the rescue. And that's why it's such a noisy time. And you know when there's, if you're on the Elk's Bush Road, and there's an emergency in Ealing, and the sirens go, don't they?

They're loud. And the police vehicles come down. And the ambulances whiz past with their flashing lights, and maybe the fire brigade are there as well. If you've seen that, you know, don't you, that they don't keep to the road laws at that point.

They just go crashing through the lights in West Ealing's. And you've got to get out of the way. Why have you got to get out of the way when the sirens are going and the lights are flashing? Because it's an emergency.

And the emergency vehicles have been called out. And in a sense, the message of Christmas is that. Our God is an interventionist God.

Apologies to Nick Cave if you know that song. But God has seen our plight. He knows that we're in deep trouble, and he has come down to deliver us. And he did it in the Exodus.

[ 5 : 29 ] And he did it in the Exile. And he did it in the Sunday of his Son Jesus into the world. So the theme of Psalm 98 is salvation. God has come to the rescue. He's broken all the rules of science.

And all the rules of nature. There is an outburst of the miraculous. Because the Creator has stepped into his own creation. He has come to rescue the human race.

And we've got something to sing about here, haven't we? But notice how it's described. This idea, it's really puzzled me this week. Oh, sing to the Lord a new song.

Sing to the Lord a new song. What does he mean by that? Does he mean a kind of new style of singing? Of course he isn't. In what sense is it new?

Is God doing something completely new here? Well, actually, no, he's not. He's always been the saving God.

[ 6 : 32 ] So originally in Exodus chapter 15, do you remember what happened in the book of Exodus? They are rescued. And Miriam, Moses' sister, what did she do?

After the Exodus, she wrote a song. She sang a new song to the Lord. God had rescued his people from Egypt. He drowned Pharaoh's chariots in the Red Sea.

And what happens? God's people sing. And Miriam writes a new song. We call it the Song of Moses and the Lamb. But that was then and this is now. This is hundreds of years later when this psalm was written.

It is a new song. A new psalm. People are returning from exile. They're dribbling back into the land. It's not very impressive. There are probably about 40,000 people in the end who came out of exile. It's not very impressive, really. There's not a lot to shout about. And yet God's people could see that God has done it again. What he's done in the Exodus, he's done in the exile.

[ 7 : 35 ] And God has intervened to save his people again against all the odds. And I want you to know this evening that God always does that. That is what he does. And that is why we call him Saviour.

It's what he does. He saves us. He rescues us. His love in time past forbids me to think he'll leave me at last in trouble to sink.

That's what's happening here. Here are God's people and they are coming back from Babylon and they're coming out of exile and they sing a new song. It's the same song of deliverance but it's a new song and they remember what God did back at the Exodus.

And they say, look, he's done it again. Let's sing a new song. And it's no wonder that Isaac Watts took this psalm and turned it into a Christmas carol. Because in Luke's gospel, when Jesus' birth is announced, do you remember what happened?

Mary, who is actually the New Testament equivalent of what name? I didn't know this until this week. It's Miriam. So obvious. Miriam's namesake, Mary, births into song.

[ 8 : 40 ] We looked at it this morning. We call it the Magnificat. And actually, when you look at Psalm 98 and Mary's song that Chris taught us about this morning, there are many linguistic links.

So Mary says, My soul magnifies the Lord. The Lord. I rejoice in God my Saviour. For he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name.

So it's a new song. But it's the same song. Do you know it's Christmas time? You know that song, it's in 1985. I think it's quite a good song.

The original, isn't it? It's got progressively worse. So there was one, I think it was there, it was 1993, a re-release with Bross and people like that in it.

That's awful. I think it was 1989. And then there's a third one, isn't there, that was on the radio the other day, that was just horrific, really. But it's a re-release. Same song, but new.

[ 9 : 40 ] It gets gradually worse with Do You Know It's Christmas. It's the opposite in the Bible. I think you have Exodus 15 with Miriam. And then you have Psalm 98. And then you have Luke 2.

It's Do You Know It's Christmas Time all over again. But it just gets better and better. God has done something new. God has come down to deliver. Then in the second part of the psalm, all people on earth are called upon to join in.

Look at verses 4 to 6. Shout for joy. Shout for joy. All the earth.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord. All the earth. Break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Sing praises to the Lord. And then we're given instruments. I don't really notice that. Why are we given those instruments?

The lyre. The lyre and the sound of malady. Trumpets and the horn. Why all this information? Well why? Because it's a coronation psalm.

[ 10 : 43 ] This is an enthronement psalm. So if you go back to the coronation of Solomon where Solomon, King Solomon became king in Kings chapter 1 you find that these instruments they are mentioned there.

When Solomon was appointed by anointed by Nathan the prophet and Zayduk the priest these instruments were there. You maybe know Handel's famous music.

Zayduk the priest and Nathan the prophet. It's a wonderful wonderful piece of music. Google it if you've not listened to it. And it was written for the coronation of George II in 1727.

It's been sung at the coronation of every British monarch ever since. And it's based on the passage from 1 Kings. And it gets very very noisy.

Doesn't it? At the end of that song. So here in the middle of this psalm the nations are called upon to acknowledge that Israel's God is not some tiny little tin pot God in a hideaway nation.

[ 11 : 44 ] He's the God of the whole earth. And he is the king. And they are to celebrate in an appropriate way and they are to praise him as king. Shout for joy before the Lord the king.

And isn't that perhaps why at this time of the year there is often a lot of noise and a lot of shouting but there is nearly total silence when it comes to the Christian message. And so you hear of schools don't you kind of nullifying Christmas carols by taking out all reference to God's king and Jesus as saviour.

Occasionally you hear of schools that ban nativity plays. Satan Santa and his reindeers they are ok but nativity scenes are not. Why is that? baby Jesus is banned.

Why? Christians all around the world today are being slaughtered. Why? Why Christians? Christ ones. Are Christians particularly dangerous people because they have some secret sinister agenda?

I hope you realise that Christians are the most persecuted people on the planet today. You may not know that the news is not really reported but that is the truth.

[ 13 : 02 ] Why is that? Shall I tell you why? it's because we serve another king and his name is Jesus that is why. I don't know if you remember a few months ago the Archbishop of Canterbury was involved in an exchange with some senior government officials he'd called him in and Justin Welby accused the government of being religiously illiterate and having a seriously flawed view of religious extremism so much so as you remember the government planning to send inspectors into Sunday schools I'd love them to turn up one Sunday morning can you believe that?

Well in the interchange you might remember the articles Justin Welby accused the government just of not understanding what they were talking about and failing to see the difference between the Muslim Brotherhood and conservative Christians and the politician who was with him in the interview that was on TV said surely someone whose faith is more important than the rule of law is surely an extremist that's what the government thinks someone whose faith is more important than the rule of law is surely an extremist well said the archbishop you've got a real problem haven't you because you've got an extremist sitting in the room with you and they went on to explain very helpfully we do not believe that the rule of law outweighs everything else we don't he believes that the kingdom of God outweighs everything else and that is why this salvation is so challenging tonight even though the surrounding nations don't like to acknowledge it and even though your

friends and your family who you may sit down at Christmas day to eat lunch with will not admit it Jesus is Lord his footprints are in the sands of time and so this Christmas why are we so keen that people come and hear this message because we're not celebrating some idea we're not celebrating some philosophical idea we are thinking about at Christmas time we're talking about something that happened in time and space we're talking about something that can be verified we are talking about real history we are talking about the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus we're talking about regime change because if God raised him from the dead then he is Lord and we are to bow the knee and to confess that he is Lord and that's what this psalm is telling us to do shout for joy to the Lord make a joyful noise shout to the Lord all the earth shout for joy before the Lord before Yahweh the King acknowledge that he is the righteous ruler of all the world and then the third thing not only is he the loving saviour of his people who's intervened on their behalf not only is he the righteous ruler of this world who's bringing his kingdom but thirdly in verses 7 to 9 he's the judge of all the earth he's the one who comes to judge how can that possibly be good news look at verses 7 to 9 let the sea roar and all that is in it the world and all those who dwell in it let the rivers clap their hands let the hills sing for joy to gather before the Lord it's a lovely picture isn't it of inanimate creation springing to life seas roaring foaming at the mouth rivers clapping their hands hills are alive with the sound of music and you see when the real king comes when Jesus comes it says creation will rejoice c.s.

lewis is what this picture is in the lion the witch in the wardroom of narnia do you remember it's under the spell of the witch where it's always winter but never christmas and then aslan comes and aslan is on the move but it's interesting how lewis describes his own conversion like that his spiritual autobiography was called surprised by joy joy was his wife and i'm sure she surprised him but that isn't what he's talking about he's talking about his conversion and he says this is how it happened for him he was an academic well known literary scholar he's an atheist he didn't want to become a christian and then it surprised him and he describes it beautifully in that book but this is something that he says which is interesting he says i felt i were a man of snow at long last beginning to melt the melting was starting in my back drip drip presently trickle trickle i rather dislike the feeling this is what happens when aslan is on the move that is what happens when the king comes into your life it's an unpleasant sensation in the first place there's a thaw that sets in as suddenly your conscience which had been frozen begins to speak to you it's unpleasant you are convicted of your sin and that is what happens in c.s lewis' personal experience and then he takes that picture and he applies it to narnia he says that is the world we live in where it's always winter but never Christmas until the true king comes and! is on the move and the thought sets in and creation springs to life do you know how Paul describes it in Romans chapter 8 the whole creation waits in eager anticipation for the children of God to be revealed for the creation was subjected to perspiration that tells you that this world is out of joint Adam's sin when Adam sinned in Genesis 3 did not only affect Adam and human beings it affected the human race it affected the environment and the natural world so everything is out of joint you can hear groaning Paul says can't you the sky is shed in tears of acid rain the rivers are giving up their fish because of human greed the barrier reef is mourning their loss of coral the earth is polluted with poison with nuclear waste and chemical affluence whether you believe in climate change climate change this world is groaning and it is frustrated and waits what is waiting for it is waiting for the king to come so look at verse 9 verse 9 is the climax of the whole psalm it says he will come he is

[ 20 : 15 ] Israel's saviour yes he is the king the righteous ruler of the universe but what is all the singing and the shouting about why so much noise verse 9 because he will judge the earth for he comes to judge the earth to judge the world with righteousness and the people with equity I think that's a little bit weird I've never had to do jury duty and I've never been called to do it and I've got a feeling I'm not allowed to do it which is a joy I think ministers of religion are not allowed to do jury duty you might correct me on that but I would imagine that no one is ever happy in the courtroom apart from lawyers the courtroom is not a place where you party and yet here is this psalm and it's saying it's saying shout for joy sin to the Lord for he comes to judge here comes the judge he's coming to judge the world in righteousness with equity

P.D. James was a detective writer she writes novels I've not read them I read this in another book but I think it's a good quote she writes detective novels about a guy called Adam Dalglish and the stories are on TV and in one of her novels Kate who is one of Dalglish's officers says to a Jewish friend I don't go in for all this emphasis on sin and suffering and judgment if I have a God I'd like him

to be intelligent cheerful and amusing to which her colleague replied I doubt whether you'd find such a God much for comfort when they herded you into the gas chambers you might prefer the God of judgment justice judgment vengeance it's good news it's good news for those who have cruelly lost loved ones in the most appalling circumstances it's good news for the families of believers who have blown up in

Egypt this morning for those who have lost lives to ISIS it's good news for those who have suffered for those who have suffered under Castro or Pol Pot or that guy in North Korea whose name we can never pronounce judgment is good news because it means that everything that has happened is meaningful that all the wrongs that have been done will be righted I told you before near where we lived in South London when I was there there was graffiti on the wall that said justice just is it's brilliant it's profound justice just is and every one of us has got a deep sense of justice we have a longing for justice to be done that is why isn't it that's why we cheer when the bad guy gets what's coming to him in the films that's why we rage against the system when we feel we've been taken advantage of it's why human rights are so prominent in our political discourse because we live in a moral universe justice just is it's not all a sea of relativism so that you can make up the rules in any way you want there is a

God who created this world and just as much as he put the laws of nature and science in place so there are moral laws there are commandments which govern every culture in every place and every person the children have learned them the ten commandments and they are they're not ten commandments they're not ten suggestions are they they're not ten tips they're ten commandments justice justice this is a moral universe that we live in and that is good news because there will be a final reckoning and it's good news but it's scary news too because there is no diplomatic immunity for you and me there are no exceptions Paul says we must all appear before the judgment of the seat of Christ and how do we do that on the one hand we rejoice don't we that God will judge Fidel Castro but he won't judge him in the way that he's judged on Facebook because when God judges he takes everything into account he judges with righteousness and with equity he knows all the factors he takes into account all the extenuating circumstances so Fidel Castro will be judged but not as the far right judge him

I'm sure he did do some good in his early years and God knows that and Donald Trump will be judged but not in the way that the media judge him he's thank God that Jesus is our judge and he knows us and he knows all the circumstances of our lives and he knows all the would have been and the should have been and the have things been different and he takes that all into account and that is good news but there is a judge because it means that God cares and it means that nothing absolutely nothing is insignificant and no one no one is insignificant and judgment is great news but it is scary news because you and I will face that judgment too well look at the psalm is the answer to that doesn't it look at verses 2 and 3 the Lord has made his salvation known when we talk about being saved we are talking about being rescued from the roth to come and the

[ 25 : 59 ] Lord has made his salvation known and he has revealed his righteousness to the nations he has remembered his love and his faithfulness to Israel and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God this salvation can be seen but what can you see well he's revealed his righteousness and he's remembered his love verse 3 where has God revealed his righteousness and where has God remembered his love well it's at the cross it's at the cross of Jesus Christ so at the cross of Jesus Christ our human sin and rebellion was seen in all his uglies at the cross when our sin was laid upon him when our sin was imputed put to him who was no sinner who was holy and harmless and undefiled and separate from sinners but when our sin was dumped upon him at the cross God turned his face God revealed his righteousness God revealed himself as a God who is so holy that he cannot even look upon iniquity even when it's found upon his son and so he turns away the cross is primarily a revelation of God's holiness and God's righteousness and how seriously he takes sin he reveals his righteousness but at the same time he reveals his righteousness he remembers his love

John Scott says the essence of sin is to put yourself in the place of God isn't that what we've done we've made ourselves to be the ones who make up the rules that's what the devil says to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden if you eat of the fruit you'll be like God you'll know right and wrong but that's not our prerogative it's God who says what is right and wrong but you see what's happened this is what's gone wrong with the human race we've become like God we're little flecks of consciousness on some obscure planet and we think we can make up the rules and we become

like God that is the essence of sin John Scott says it is to put yourself in the place of God but the essence of salvation is God putting himself in the place of sinners and that's what he has done in April this year there was the news story on the headline headline read this judge offers to pay court fine of girl who stabbed the pedophile who abused her now as you can imagine there's quite some story behind that headline it's a very sad story she committed an offence and yes of course there were extenuating circumstances and all that was taken into account she broke the law she did commit an offence she was found guilty and the sentence was passed but then the judge said I'll pay the fine he sat down from his judge's bench and he paid the fine justice was done and isn't that what God has done for us in Christ Jesus came into this world and he went to the cross not just simply to save you but to satisfy the justice of God at the cross Jesus satisfied the justice of a holy God he lived the life we should have lived and he offered that life up as a sacrifice he gave back to God what he had a right to expect from us he satisfied the just demands and at the same time by substituting himself for us he remembered his love and so at the cross righteousness and peace kiss at the cross love and mercy meet William Cooper puts it like this to see the law by Christ fulfilled to hear his pardoning voice changes a slave into a child and duty into choice the Lord has made known his salvation he's revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations he's remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God let's pray of the