

Rejoice, the LORD is King

Psalm 97:1-12

Halifax: 7 September 2003

Introduction:

As most of you know, on the first Sunday of every month, I preach from a psalm which then becomes our psalm of the month, to be sung on all the subsequent Sundays of that month.

- Two months ago, I began a new series in Psalms 95 to 100.
 - These are psalms that particularly focus on worshipping King Jesus.
 - In them, the psalmist speaks as if Jesus has already come to establish His kingdom.
 - And He calls upon the world of Jew and Gentile to worship Him accordingly...
 - to worship Him as the One who has already completed His work of redemption...
 - and as the One who is now seated at the right hand of God the Father to reign over all the earth, having sent His gospel into all the world.
- These psalms are a beautiful accompaniment to our regular series in Matthew's gospel, in which Matthew focuses on Jesus as King...
 - As the king who has come to set up His righteous kingdom in the whole wide world.
- This week, we come to the third psalm in our series, Psalm 97.
 - This psalm begins with a call to rejoice because Jehovah reigns.
 - This nothing else but an obedient response to the call in Psalm 96!
- Do you remember how Psalm 96 built up to that glorious climax in verse 10?
 - Look at it... we are commanded to:
 - Ps 96:10: "Say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns; the world is firmly established, it shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously.'"
 - The whole world was perishing in sin, but Jesus came to save the world!
 - Now that He is reigning as Lord and Christ, the world that was perishing is firmly established, it shall not be moved!
 - His kingdom of righteousness will abide forever!
 - Thus we are called to proclaim the gospel of this glorious kingdom to all the nations:

- “Say among the nations, ‘The LORD reigns!’”
- Psalm 97 does just that—
 - Look at verse 1:
 - “Jehovah reigns, Let the earth rejoice; Let the multitude of the isles be glad!”

I. Rejoice because the LORD Himself reigns in this world!

- It is the LORD Himself who has come to set up His kingdom of righteousness in this dark and sinful world that was perishing.
 - Rejoice because it is *He* who reigns...
- A. He is the One who is surrounded by clouds and darkness reigns!
1. This speaks of His incomprehensible majesty!
 - He is too glorious for us to behold—and He has come here to establish His kingdom!
 - We love our neat and tidy little boxes,
 - but here is one that is too grand for us to stuff in a box.
 - He breaks out of all our test tubes and leaves us in awe!
 2. He is the true *numinous* that the ancients understood so much better than we do.
 - a. They understood deity to be incomprehensible—
 - They had a sense of holy terror and awe before their gods—
 - They understood the word “sacred.”
 - b. We moderns repudiate their gods, but for the wrong reasons—
 - They ought to be repudiated because they are false gods...
 - But we reject them because we reject the numinous...
 - the very idea of a god that cannot be comprehended by us.
 - We don’t like gods who are surrounded by clouds and darkness because we don’t like to be mere creatures.
 - Our forefathers understood the glory of the numinous in their paganism, and when they embraced Jesus Christ,
 - they knew that they had to do with the One who was even more incomprehensible and awe inspiring—and they gloried!
 - As Douglas Wilson puts it,
 - “We [moderns] do not look at an unbounded northern sky and by analogy see the eternity of God; rather, we look mystically inward

to the swamps and standing puddles of our own hearts and see just what one might expect in such places—but not very much and not very far.”

3. Brothers and sisters, it is a wonderful thing to have One reigning over us who is surrounded by clouds and darkness!
 - a. This is glory!
 - Solomon tells us that it is the glory of God to conceal a matter!
 - Because He is God, we can't possibly know everything about Him.
 - b. There is great comfort in having one like this to rule over us.
 - One who is so much greater than we are that we can't comprehend Him.
 - One is able to manage every molecule in the universe;
 - when we can't even name all the molecules in our own finger tip!
 - This is the One who came to establish a kingdom for us in the world—
 - This is the One who came to save the world.
 - c. You cannot inherit His kingdom unless you become as a little child!
 - It is not for you to command Him and order him about!
 - It is for you to stand in awe and worship!
 - It is for you to trust Him.
 - Little children do not trust their parents to put food on the table each day because they understand all their parents to obtain the food...
 - They trust them because they don't understand and so they leave it to their parents.
- B. Rejoice because this incomprehensible One has come to reign—
- and not just to reign, but in order to set up a throne of pure righteousness in this world
 - v. 2 goes on to say: “righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.”
1. The greatest misery conceivable is to live without righteousness and justice.
 - Can you imagine if there were none?
 - Just try to picture a society where there were no laws, no penalties, no conscience, no restraint...
 - People would kill or steal or whatever they wanted to do and nobody would care—nobody would even consider it to be wrong!
 - Such a society could not even survive!

2. Jesus came into the world to establish a throne of perfect righteousness and justice.
 - He came to introduce righteousness and justice into a world that was fallen miserably away from these.
 - We do not understand it as clearly as we might...
 - but the greatest unrighteousness and injustice of all is in our rebellion against our Creator...
 - the One Who alone has a right to rule us,
 - and who alone is worthy to rule us.
 - Even after we have been saved, we simply cannot grasp how great an injustice it was for us to turn away from our God.
 - We are, as I mentioned before, so used to looking to ourselves as the standard that we fail to see the depth of our corruption...
 - And we fail to see how glorious Heaven will be when all that corruption is removed—
 - When God is loved and adored by us as He ought to be...
 - And when love is the law in all our relationships with our neighbour.
 - The glory of Jesus' reign is that He brings righteousness and justice to us.
 - It is His death on the cross for our sins that keeps the world from perishing and sliding into Hell forever and ever!
 - It is by raising us from spiritual death and perfecting us that He is bringing about a perfect world in which righteousness will dwell perfectly and forever!
3. What an amazing thing it is that this awesome incomprehensible God has come into this sinful ruined world to establish a kingdom of perfect righteousness...
 - How glad the once sinful perishing world ought to be that He reigns!
 - Let the nations rejoice!

TRANS> And there is yet more reason for you to rejoice in His reign!

- And that is because...

C. The incomprehensible One who came to set up His righteous kingdom has absolute authority over all things in heaven and earth!

- His power is absolutely irresistible.
1. Verse 3 says,

- “A fire goes out before Him, and burns up all His enemies!”
- a. Does that seem like a strange thing to rejoice in?
 - There is only one reason it seems strange—
 - because we don’t think straight, we don’t think obediently...
- b. It is a thing most worthy of rejoicing that the One who came to establish perfect righteousness and justice in the world should be a consuming fire to His enemies!
 - 1) If He was unable to bring all His enemies down,
 - There could never be a kingdom of perfect righteousness!
 - There would always be opposition!
 - His enemies deserve to perish.
 - 2) How could it be that the One who came to set up a kingdom of perfect righteousness in a lost and dying world would have any enemies?
 - What kind of enemies would such a gracious Saviour have?
 - Only one sort of enemy—
 - Enemies who oppose what He came to do—
 - Enemies who are against the establishment of perfect righteousness and justice in the world...
 - Enemies who are opposed and who try resist the restoration of guilty sinners to the true and living God!
 - 3) What kind of rebellion is it that would resist so gracious, so kind, so formidable a Saviour?
 - I tell you it is the very rebellion that is in the heart of every son of Adam by nature—
 - in every member of the human race except Jesus until He has changed us...
 - The Bible teaches that there is not one person that seeks after God—
 - This is true even after we are shown clearly the saving ways of Jesus Christ...
 - The rebellion of the human heart is so deep that not one will come to be saved...
 - not one will enter His kingdom.

- Your condition is absolutely desperate unless God is pleased to give you His Spirit to transform you from within—
 - to give you a new heart.
 - Those who oppose the reign of Christ show what is in their hearts—
 - They love death and hatred and darkness and they promote these things in the world.
 - They spend their days trying to make others deny the true God and think ill of Him.
 - They propagate sorrow and death and lies and sow discord between God and man.
- 4) My friends, such enemies **ought** to be destroyed!
- Any enemy of the gracious Son of God who opposes His gracious saving purpose must be punished by His holy fire!
 - Those who will not come to Him for salvation would ruin His glorious kingdom if He were to leave them there.
 - The Bible tells us that
 - “the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone which is the second death.”
 - These are the ones who have never come to Jesus to be delivered from all these sins...
 - Such persons would ruin heaven...
 - Heaven is only for those that He has redeemed.
- 5) Someone will say, but what about those who have never heard of His saving reign?
- Did I not tell you about them before?
 - They are like all the rest of us...
 - There is such rebellion in every last one of them that even if they did hear, they would reject...
 - Their hearts are too hard and rebellious to believe unless God does His extra work of changing their hearts by His Spirit.
 - God cannot be charged with any wrongdoing if those with such wicked hearts have not heard the gospel...
 - It is only of His marvellous grace that there even is a gospel!
 - And of even more grace that some have heard the gospel and that He has ordered us to take it to all people...

- And of even more grace that some have believed because they did not come on their own...
 - They came only because He drew them.
2. Rejoice that His judgements are so pure and powerful that not one of His enemies can stand!
- a. Verse 4 and 5 declare it to be so.
 - READ> v. 4-5
 - b. No enemy can lift a finger against so great a power!
 - 1) Here the lightening that shakes the earth is used to refer to His powerful judgements!
 - 2) Proud sinners erect mountains of opposition against Him.
 - One sets up high-sounding arguments—and gains a large following
 - Another boldly gives himself to corruption and pretends that he is safe because thus far, he has gotten away with it.
 - 3) But brethren,
 - The Lord will appear!
 - And then, even the proudest, most obstinate sinner who stands in this world like a great mountain will utterly melt!
 - Is there a rebel here among us?
 - Do not pretend that you can continue!
 - The day will come when you will melt before His glorious presence.
 - Do not let that melting be on the last day, for then it will be too late!
 - Let it be now, while you still have a chance to flee to Him for mercy!

TRANS> Do you see what an excellent Saviour He is?

- The world has every reason to rejoice that He reigns!
 - The incomprehensible One has come to establish His righteous throne in this sinful world, and He has absolute power to destroy all who oppose.
 - He will accomplish His glorious purpose!
- But would good would all this have done us if He had not made Himself known?
 - His kingdom would not benefit us unless His righteousness is declared to us.

II. And so I say that you ought to rejoice because He has been made known.

A. Verse 6 tells us that the heavens declare His righteousness and all the people see His glory!

1. His righteousness is declared when the gospel is preached in the world!
 - a. The gospel tells us how Jesus came to make a sinful world righteous.
 - How He lived a life that was pleasing to the Father—a life that none of us could live...
 - And how He went to the cross for our sins—
 - in order that we might be forgiven through the shedding of His blood.
 - b. This gospel is said to be declared from Heaven...
 - 1) It is from heaven because it originated in heaven—it was God who planned to bring righteousness into the world by His Son...
 - 2) And it is declared from Heaven because the Father declared the Son's righteousness when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand—
 - thus declaring Him to be Lord and Saviour—
 - thus declaring that His work on the cross was accepted by Him to make His people righteous!
 - 3) And it is said to be declared from Heaven because Jesus the King who is now in Heaven is the One who has commanded His messengers to preach the gospel to all nations...
 - They do not preach their own message, but the message that is sent from heaven!
2. What confidence it gives us to have heaven declare that we are righteous through faith in Jesus Christ!
 - That whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life!
 - Rejoice that the message is declared from heaven, and so declared that people from all over the world are able to see His glory!

TRANS> Rejoice when you see the powerful effect that this glorious gospel has on the world!

B. The declaration of the righteousness of Christ makes idol worshippers ashamed!

- Verse 7 declares:
 - “Let all be put to shame who serve carved images, Who boast of idols.”

1. When the world sees the glory of Christ, she is ashamed of her idols!
 - a. The apostle speaks of the Thessalonians of those who turned from idols to serve the living God.
 - b. To the Romans he says,
 - Romans 6:20-21: “For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness [you were not in the righteous kingdom of Jesus]... What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.”

2. This is a characteristic of those who are saved out of idolatry—
 - they look back with shame on what they were before they knew Christ.
 - a. There they were, boasting in the gods they had made...
 - But when they came to know the truth...
 - They were ashamed of how foolish they had been to boast in such gods that could never make them righteous!
 - b. Take a look at all the false religions and all the false systems and all the false gods in the world—
 - 1) There is one thing they all have in common...
 - There is not one that can make worshippers righteous!
 - They are all worthless and vain!
 - Their promise are all empty and useless!
 - 2) There is the Muslim—
 - He has high standards of morality—
 - But his is still a kingdom of sin and darkness—
 - He has no righteous king to save him and bring him into a kingdom of righteousness...
 - All he has is his own feeble failing efforts that amount to nothing.
 - 3) There is the Buddhist and the Hindu and the Romanist, and the New Ager and the Formalist and the Modernist and the humanist, the Moralist...
 - Let the gods they have fashioned for themselves fall down before the face of Jesus Christ the LORD.
 - That is what it means in verse 7 when it says, “Worship Him all you gods...”

- Let them be like Dagon who fell from his place when the ark of God was brought into Dagon's temple...
- What kind of gods are these that men fashion in their own brains that cannot save them or make them righteous?
- Even the atheist has his idol...
 - For he has sought to be saved by denying that there is a God so that he can judge himself—
 - Let him be ashamed of such a worthless idol—

C. But you Christian, how glad you ought to be when the righteousness of Jesus Christ is declared over against all worthless idols!

1. Such rejoicing is a mark of a true believer!

- a. Verse 8-9 say that Zion and the daughters of Judah—that is, God's people—are glad and rejoice when they hear that the gospel has been published in the earth.
 - Your great desire, if you are a believer, is for the glory of One who saved you to be published everywhere...
 - and for all the worthless and false gods to be exposed for what they are in His glorious light!
- b. God's people have always rejoiced whenever God's judgements fall upon these false gods—
 - They rejoiced when Elijah brought Baal to shame on mount Carmel...
 - They rejoiced when the Gentiles in the early days of the church began to turn from their idols to serve the true God...
 - They rejoiced at the reformation when those who had embraced false forms of Christianity began to trade in their idols of Mary and the idolatrous mass for Jesus Christ.
 - And you rejoice today whenever Christ is preached and His glory made known in opposition to all that exalts itself against Him!

2. You rejoice because you know that Jesus has been accorded His rightful place when this happens—

- a. Here the psalm shifts to speak directly to the LORD—
 - v. 9: “For you LORD are most high above all the earth; You are exalted far above all gods.”
 - In this way you show your gladness that there are none that compare with Him...

- He is far above all gods...
 - There are none who even come close in all the false religions of this world!
 - He and He alone brings righteousness to us.
- b. How inappropriate it is the church to be ashamed of Christ and His gospel while the world boasts in idols—
 - If you really do rejoice when the gospel is proclaimed, then you will do all you can for the gospel.
 - You will support the preaching of the gospel with your gifts
 - and you will call everyone you know to come and hear the gospel
 - and you will pray earnestly that the glory of Christ will be revealed to all.
 - and you will talk of the gospel to those around you—of the superiority and excellence of Christ—
 - You will talk of it to your children...
 - and you will talk of it to your friends and your neighbours.
 - You will participate in the declaration of His righteousness!

TRANS> Now this might seem like a fitting conclusion to the psalm at this point...

- But there is a very important exhortation that is needed...
- It is not enough to simply rejoice that Christ brings righteousness and that that righteousness is declared—
 - You yourself must participate in this kingdom!
 - And you must participate even though the world will oppose you.
 - The world has a way of bringing us down—
 - As soon as the righteous kingdom of Christ was established in this world, persecution broke out—
 - And since then, the gospel has always been opposed wherever it has gone—
 - whether by violence or by ridicule,
 - whether by organised authority or by popular sentiment
 - It has always been opposed...

And so in verses 10-12 you are exhorted to...

III. **Rejoice in LORD of righteousness!**

- You need to understand what it means to be in His kingdom...
- A. You who love Him are called to hate evil.
- After all—it is a kingdom of righteousness that He came to establish.
 - You are not on board with His agenda if you love the evil He came to abolish!
1. If you love Him, you must hate what He hates.
- Modernism is terribly dangerous because it teaches us to hate nothing.
 - It teaches us to be all-accepting of man in whatever man does because it makes man, not God, the measure of all things...
 - It gladly declares, “Judge not lest you be judged” but it does not mean at all what the Bible means...
 - The Bible means that we are leave judgement to God rather than setting up our own standard...
 - That we are to make His standard our standard...
 - That we are to judge everything by His standard and call what He calls evil and what He calls good...
 - But modernism means that we are to throw out God’s standard and judge no one.

TRANS> Our greatest problem is that we have listened and therefore...

2. We do not really hate evil.
- a. We might be willing to avoid evil and not to countenance it, but we don’t really hate it!
- We still have far too great a love for it!
 - We are not willing to take up arms against it and to oppose it.
- b. Examine yourself—
- What are those areas that you easily fall into?
 - Do you not fall into them because you still have a deep-rooted love for evil?
 - It still has a place in your heart?
 - You still make room for those evil affections and nurse them?
 - I say, you need to turn on them because they are in opposition to Christ’s righteous kingdom!
 - If you love Him, you must hate the evil that He hates.
 - You have come to Him and evil does not a place with Him.

- c. We modern Christians are so effeminate!
 - We have listened to the world when it tells us not to hate!
 - We do not go into a battle in the place where the greatest resistance is...
 - We may speak against abortion and homosexuality and drunkenness and gambling—
 - But we seldom deal with the root which is what I spoke about before—
 - The sinful human hearts opposition to the righteous kingdom of Jesus Christ—
 - That we would rather pretend to be righteous than bow to Him.
 - We are strangers to victory because we refuse to sing praise to the king of the battle—
 - We do not want a God of battles, we want sympathy for our surrenders.
 - We say,
 - “But LORD, people will think I’m mean and intolerant if I tell them they need to repent.”
 - “But LORD, my children might turn against me if I chasten them in the way you say.”
 - We want God to **understand** when we don’t fight—but He says, if you love me, hate evil.
 - Persecutions come when you being to fight against all resistance to kingdom of Christ...

B. But your God has encouragement for you Christian!

1. He reminds you that you are safe with Him.
 - v. 10: “He preserves the souls of His saints, He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked.”
 - a. It’s easy to think that safety comes from avoiding the world’s displeasure...
 - but that is to forget what you really need to be protected from!
 - b. There greatest evil is not to be put in prison or to have your possessions taken from you or to be killed...
 - The greatest evil is for you to be drawn away from your God.

- That is by far worse than anything that could ever happen to you.
- c. Jesus came to restore you to the Father, to set up His righteous kingdom where we are restored to the Father.
 - Your happiness is to be safely in this kingdom...
 - And you are not safe when you are trying to please the world...
 - You are safe when you are following Jesus and being opposed by the world.
 - You are safe because He Himself promises to keep you.

TRANS> And there is yet another encouragement for you...

2. Do not think that you will be miserable if you hate evil...
 - a. That is what you think sometimes, isn't it?
 - You think, "if I obey the Lord in that thing, I will be miserable!"
 - "If I sacrificially serve others, I will lose my own life..."
 - "If I turn with a vengeance against that evil that is lodged deep in my heart, I fear I will miss it..."
 - "If I honour my parents and obey them, I will be ruined."
 - b. But God's word tells you the opposite.
 - v. 11: Light is sown for the righteous, And gladness for the upright in heart.
 - If you are serving Christ in His righteous kingdom, He has sown light and gladness for you all along your way—
 - As you go down His path, there are all kinds of beautiful flowers and fruits along the way...
 - He has planted them for you to encourage you as you go along.
 - Now just stop and think about it—has your service to Christ ever made you miserable?
 - It may have been hard and brought you much trouble,
 - but if it was true service to Christ, it did not bring darkness but light; nor sadness, but gladness.
 - This is His promise.

Conclusion

Verse 12 calls you to rejoice in the LORD...

- And verse 1 told you what LORD it is in whom you are to rejoice...
 - It is in the LORD who reigns!
 - It is in the LORD who reigns in this world in His righteous kingdom that makes all who enter that kingdom righteous.

Come and rejoice in being made righteous by the reigning Christ!

- That is what this whole Psalm is about!
- This is a kingdom for poor miserable perishing sinners to come and rejoice in!
 - A kingdom where the incomprehensible God of Glory establishes perfect righteousness, and overthrows all opposition!
 - Here is a kingdom that has no rival, for this reigning king is the most high above all the earth!
 - Hate the evil that He hates and came to deliver you from, and He will keep you and bring you gladness along the way.

This is truly something to rejoice in...

- Rejoice that Jesus is King!
- Give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name—
 - That is, give thanks when you consider who He is and what He has done!
 - This word “give thanks” properly means “to confess” and is often translated “to praise” or “to thank.”
 - This is so because when you confess the truth about Him and His doings:
 - it is all **praise** because there is nothing to confess about Him that is not praiseworthy—
 - And it is all **thanksgiving** because everything He does ought to make us grateful.

Rejoice, the LORD is King!