

What Happens When You Truly Meet God in Worship?

Psalm 96:1-13

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Introduction:

As most of you know,

- I am presently doing a few sermons on various subjects that I thought would be beneficial before I begin a sermon series in the epistles to the Thessalonians.
 - We had a couple of sermons about how to deal with a sinning brother,
 - And now I am doing a few about worship—a subject that was requested of me by Kevin Bigney and that I thought to be an excellent suggestion.
- He pointed out that many people today do not understand what Sunday worship is supposed to be about.
 - Last week, I preached about that specifically...
 - I showed you that the church derives its name (church) from the fact that we are the congregation or the assembly (the word church means assembly) that gathers before the face of God.
 - That is what is unique about us as God's people.
 - We saw that our worship is Trinitarian...
 - We come before the Father which is a very fearful thing, for He cannot be manipulated by us or negotiated with—because He is God...we are sinners and His is holy God who is a consuming fire.
 - Yet, we have Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became flesh, who leads the assembly—We are accepted before God because He represents us as our High Priest, and He preaches the gospel (the good news of our acceptance through Him) and leads us in praise when we come.
 - And then we saw that the Holy Spirit is intimately involved in the assembly, for He works in our very hearts and minds so that we receive the truth of the gospel and obey the commandments and so that we have a true heart for praise and a burden for prayer.

But you know as well as I do that although we always come before the Father in worship, we do not always truly encounter Him as we ought—

- When we do, we know that we are truly before His face and it has a powerful effect on us.
 - We are filled with joyful praise before Him, seeing His glory and His saving work.
 - We are constrained to pour out our lives in service to Him as our God...
 - And we rest in His sovereign reign with hope and assurance.
- To put it simply, when we truly meet with God, we praise Him, we submit to Him, and we rest in His reign.
 - This is the outline that we find in Psalm 96, a Psalm that is associated with the day that David brought up the ark to Jerusalem.
 - It is a Psalm that actually commands us what we are to do when we come before God—

Give attention now as I read it to you—Psalm 96.

- This is the Word of the living God.

Psalm 96:1-13: Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! Sing to the LORD, all the earth. ² Sing to the LORD, bless His name; proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. ³ Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples. ⁴ For the LORD is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. ⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. ⁶ Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. ⁷ Give to the LORD, O families of the peoples, give to the LORD glory and strength. ⁸ Give to the LORD the glory due His name; bring an offering, and come into

His courts. ⁹ Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth. ¹⁰ Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns; the world also is firmly established, it shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously.” ¹¹ Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and all its fullness; ¹² let the field be joyful, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice ¹³ before the LORD. For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with His truth.

The Word of the Lord endures forever.

- May He bless it to us so that we receive it, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God that effectively works in those who believe.

You see that there is one command after another about what we are to do in worship.

- This would be very discouraging if not for the fact that what God commands to us as His people, He also gives us the grace to do.
- When you understand this, it means that His commands are actually blessings...
 - For example, when God made the world and said, “Be fruitful and multiply,” it was not only commanding them to do this, but also giving them the ability to do it—it was blessing as well as a command.
- So when we look in Psalm 96 at the command to sing joyful praise, to submit to God, and to rest in His reign,
 - We should look at it as what our gracious Lord enables us to do when He blesses us in the church assembly!
 - As we saw last week, it is by the working of His Spirit that we truly engage with Him.

So let’s take a look at what happens, according to Psalm 96, when we truly meet with God.

I. When you come before His face in truth, you will be constrained to praise Him with joy!

- You see that not once, not twice, but three times we are told to sing to the LORD!
 - We are given two reasons—

A. First, the praise is stirred up when you see what God has done to save you!

- That is the emphasis in the first three verses.
 1. You are told to sing a new song...
 - A new song is a song that celebrates God’s saving work...

- Like the song that Israel sang when God brought them across the Red Sea and wiped out the Egyptians by His mighty power.
 - In Exodus 15, they said: **“I will sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!”**
2. Last week we saw that the chief feature of New Testament worship is the proclamation of the gospel.
- a. The gospel is the good news that God Almighty has accepted us through His Son.
 - That is the message that Jesus has commanded His ministers to declare each Lord’s Day among the nations.
 - We are to tell of how God sent His Son from heaven...
 - Of how He came in human flesh and displayed the power of His kingdom...preaching the good news to us...
 - Of how, as our priest, He offered Himself as the sacrifice for our sins, and how the Father accepted His sacrifice and raised Him from the dead.
 - Of how He then poured out His Spirit upon His church and commanded them to go among all nations and proclaim the good news that through faith in Him, there is acceptance with God!
 - b. You can see that our Psalm anticipates this...it speaks of this very thing.
 - It calls not just Israel, but all the earth to join in the new song!
 - Egypt and the Canaanites certainly had no cause to sing when God brought Israel into the land—only Israel...
 - But this is looking ahead to the time when all the families of the earth would be blessed in the saving work of Christ.
 - You see in verse 2 how we are told to proclaim the good news—the gospel—of His salvation from day to day.
 - Verse 3 adds that we are to declare His glory among all nations—
 - This reminds us of the promise that God gave to Abraham that through his seed, all the families of the earth would be blessed.
 - Today, the church is all over the world, proclaiming the wonders that God has done among the nations...
3. When we grasp even a fraction of the significance of God’s salvation for us—of the wonder of it—
- we will break forth with the joyful singing of praise to God.
 - Just to think that we who were so ruined by the fall and condemned to Hell for all eternity have now been brought near by the blood of Christ.
 - If ever you are not singing, it is because you are not grasping it.

TRANS> And the second reason for our praise grows out of the first.

B. When we see what God has done for us in the gospel, we see what a great God He really is—and we praise Him because of His greatness!

- 1. You see how verse 4 says, **“for the LORD is great and greatly to be praised.”**
 - Nothing shows us that as much as the gospel does!

- We see His marvellous kindness that thought on us when we all deserved to be destroyed...
 - We see His love in giving His only Son, and the Son's love in coming to die for wretches like us...
 - And we see God's inflexible justice and purity that would accept nothing less than the sacrifice of His Son to atone for our sins—truly our God is a consuming fire...
 - He is not to be trifled with—
2. It says that He is to be feared above all gods!
- a. To fear God means that you recognise that God has absolute authority over you and over whatever happens to you...
 - and that you have absolutely no way to alter what He does, to soften it, or to control Him—and no argument to sway Him.
 - You are entirely shut up to His mercy.
 - You can only come before Him on His terms—you cannot change His law or come up with a new way to approach Him.
 - All you can do is stand in awe before His majesty and praise Him.
 - But you can praise Him with joyful adoration when you see that what He has done in Christ is more gracious than anything you might have suggested if you were able to influence Him.
 - This actually makes you glad that you cannot control Him or sway Him—how much better it is for everything to be in His gracious hands!
 - He is to be feared above all gods!
 - b. In verse 5, the gods of the nations are compared to Him...
 - “For all the gods (*eloheem* in Hebrew) of the peoples are idols (*eloleem*—which means *nothing*).”
 - For example, the word *eloleem* is used to describe Job's worthless counselors. They were *eloleem* (worthless) counselors.
 - What a wonderful play on words...they are called gods (*eloheem*) but in fact they are *eloleem*.
 - c. This rejection of the gods of the nations has always been a distinguishing mark of God's people once they understand the gospel.
 - Christians have been known to be fearless before kings who set themselves up against the Lord,
 - and to have no fear of the gods that the nations worship.
 - Once we see the greatness of the true God, we see how powerless and how worthless they all are—even as they mock us and flex their muscles against us to make us afraid...
 - even torturing us as they did Christ, ridiculing Him that His God is not able to deliver Him.
 - Let them murder us, let them mock us, we have nothing to fear, for ours is the God who made the heavens.

3. And so we praise Him because, as verse 6 says, **Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.**

- There is no one so honourable, so majestic, so strong, and so lovely as our God.
- That is what we see when we assemble before His face in worship—in the sanctuary where He reveals Himself—now in Jesus Christ.

TRANS> No wonder this Psalm opens with a three-fold repetition of the call to sing praise to the LORD!

- How can we not when we meet Him in worship as the God of our salvation!
- And now we come to the middle of the Psalm where we have another three-fold repetition.
- Here we see the second thing we do when we truly come before His face...

II. We humbly submit ourselves to Him.

A. This time, the word *give* or *ascribe* is the one that is repeated three times.

1. You see that the thing that is to be given or ascribed to God is *glory* and *strength*.

- *Glory* is mentioned twice and *strength* is mentioned once.
- The word *glory* is used a lot in the Bible and it refers *weightiness*.
- It is often translated by the word *honour*.
 - For example, in the fifth commandment you are told to *honour your father and mother...*
 - Because they are your parents, you are let them carry weight in your life—you are to obey them and to treat them with respect and honour.

➤ But there are two ways to look at this call to give glory and strength to God.

2. But are we to *give* glory and strength to God, or to *ascribe* it to Him?

a. There is a difference here...and the Hebrew word can have either meaning.

- If we are to *give* glory and strength to Him, then we are taking whatever glory and strength we have and offering for His service.
 - In other words, if I am a governor, I will use my influence or my weight in service to God.
- But if we are to *ascribe* glory and strength to God, then we are recognising the glory and strength that God has.
 - We are saying, “yours is the greatness and the power” as we did in verse 6—this is just a further expansion of that.
- Of course it is obvious that we ought to give our glory and strength to God and that we ought to ascribe glory and strength to Him...
 - You might argue that you can’t do one without the other...

b. But I think the focus here is that we are being called to offer our glory and honour and strength to God—

- whatever weight, whatever glory, whatever importance, whatever strength you might have is to be entirely offered to God...
 - In other words, all of you is to be put into His service.

- It is parallel to the statement in Revelation 21:24 where it says that the kings of the earth will bring their glory and honour into the city of God.
 - **Rev 21:24: And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it.**
 - Kings, who have more glory and strength than most of us do, will put it all into God's service, just as we will lay all our crowns at Jesus' feet when we see Him in glory.
- c. This is very much equivalent to Jesus' call to us to die to self, to take up our cross, and follow Him.
- All that you are should be let go of for His service.
 - You die so that you can live—you lose your life to gain it.
 - You are to be like Paul who called himself a debtor to God, and who always spoke of himself as a slave to Jesus Christ.
 - That is what he delighted to be to Jesus.
 - He said that he gladly poured himself out as a drink offering for Him.
 - As I was thinking about this, I had a memory of a silly television show I saw as a child—an episode of Gilligan's Island...
 - In that episode, Gilligan managed to save a foreigner's life, and the foreigner then declared himself to be Gilligan's lifelong slave—Gilligan felt awkward as this guy followed him around, calling him "my honorable master," and looking to fulfill his every wish.
 - But as silly as that is, that is what worshippers are compelled to do when they come before God—
 - Seeing God's glory and majesty—and seeing all that He has done for us—we are compelled to give our lives entirely to Him.
- B. The remainder of this middle section of Psalm 96 (verses 8 & 9) also focuses on giving all in God's service.
1. At the end of verse 8, you are told to bring an offering when you come.
- Hebrews 13 speaks of a three-fold offering we bring in the New Covenant.
 - In Hebrews 13:15-17, each verse speaks of an aspect of the offering we are to bring:
 - a. Verse 15 says: **Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.**
 - This reminds us that we are to sing to God with thanksgiving—
 - that is an offering that we bring to Him under the gospel instead of burnt offerings and peace offerings.
 - We thank Him for Christ and for all that He has done...
 - b. Verse 16 gives us the next part of our offering: **But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.**
 - This shows that we are to put our substance at His disposal.
 - We are to use the resources that God has given us to take care of the poor and to support the work of the church.

- c. And verse 17 speaks of the rest of the offering: **Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.**
 - Of course this last one does not mean that you are supposed to obey the ruling elders in all things,
 - but you are to obey them as those who represent the Lord and speak His word to you...
 - Many people suppose that they can honour the Lord without submitting to the elders that He has appointed on earth to rule in His church.
 - Such persons are mistaken, except in the case where the elders reject you and cast you out wrongfully the way the elders of the Jews cast out Christ and those who followed Him.
 - But when that is the case, it is your duty to find those who are faithful to the Lord and place yourself under their authority.
 - In establishing churches, we see the apostles always ordaining elders to represent Christ in caring for His people.
- So we are to bring our offerings of praise, money, and obedience to the Lord.
2. Verse 9 presents the call to service in a slightly different way...
- a. It calls for us to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness...
 - The word *worship* means to bow down to Him.
 - By bowing, you present yourself to Him as a servant.
 - It is a display of your submission.
 - When you come before God in truth, it causes you to bow yourself before Him.
 - There is no room for compromise—He is God.
 - You ought not to even think about doing anything but His will.
 - You are constrained to put off your sin and to put on obedience.
 - When you see His glory, you say, “Lord, what will you have me to do?”
 - b. And it says to bow to Him in the beauty of holiness—or with holy attire...
 - Both are valid translations—for in the Old Testament, they had holy garments—the priest even had a label that said, “holiness to the Lord.”
 - When something is holy, it is dedicated to God’s service—it is to be used exclusively for Him.
 - And that is the point—the beauty of holiness is that come as one who is conformed to God Almighty
 - c. And once again the call for this holy obedience and service goes out to all nations...
 - Verse 9 concludes with the words, **Tremble before Him, all the earth.**
 - Some understand the word translated *tremble* to refer to whirling about in a dance.

- The meaning is nearly opposite to tremble, but it actually amounts to the same thing—that the nations are called to respond to the living God.
 - I am inclined to say that it refers to *trembling* because the context is about laying down our lives before Him as our awesome Master.
- But as dancing and whirling was a part of the OT procession when the ark was brought up, it could refer to that...
 - If it does, this is not a call for us to whirl about with dancing in our worship, for processions do not belong to New Testament worship—we are not taking an ark somewhere but assembling before God to hear the gospel and to praise His name.
 - Our worship is not carnal, but spiritual.

TRANS> So now we have seen the first two of the three things that happen to us when we realise that we are before the face of God in our worship...

- Joyful praise comes forth.
- And we give ourselves to Him as servants.
- Now we move on to the third thing that happens...

III. When we truly come before God, we rest in His sovereign rule.

A. We find secure, comfortable rest because He reigns over all things.

- because He is, as we saw before, a God who controls all things and who cannot be controlled or swayed by others.
1. When we worship, we are to declare among the nations that our God reigns!
 - You see what Psalm 96 tells us to do in verse 10: **Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns; the world also is firmly established, It shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously.”**
 - The world is not on a collision course to disaster—it is not spinning out of control—
 - But our sovereign LORD is carrying out His purposes in every detail.
 2. The world does not understand this because they do not understand what His purposes are.
 - If we read His word, we see that His purpose at this time is to gather His elect from all the nations of the earth.
 - Too often, we judge whether He is reigning by who got elected to office.
 - We should rather judge it by looking at how the gospel is spreading—especially in those places where those in political power are most opposed to it...
 - We might think of Iraq and China and parts of Africa.
 - It is in such places that we see that the same thing that happened with Israel when they were in Egypt.
 - God’s purpose for them while there was that they should multiply into a great multitude.
 - When this began to happen, Pharaoh tried to stop it, but the more he tried, the more they multiplied.

- God even told Pharaoh that He had deliberately given him great power and authority so that when he used that power and authority to oppose God,
 - God would be able to show that He was LORD—that Pharaoh could not stop Him or alter His purposes—that He is the LORD who reigns.
 - Opposing nations are no threat to God’s plan and purpose for His church.
 - As Jesus said, the gates of Hell cannot prevail against His church...they can put walls around the church to try to contain it, but it always breaks out.
 - They bring forth all their power against the gospel, but they cannot stop its spread.
 - I just read a BBC article about how the Berlin Wall in East Germany came down—and it is largely attributed to a prayer meeting that was held in Leipzig on October 9, 1989.
 - It started as a weekly prayer meeting on Mondays at the St. Nickolas church in 1982. It usually saw around 12 people in attendance.
 - The German government strongly opposed such religious activities, but as they exerted pressure, more and more people joined the prayers.
 - A showdown came on October 9, 1989 when 70,000 gathered in Leipzig not with arms, but with prayers and candles.
 - The heavily armed police were ready to mow them down, expecting them to be armed, but when they saw that they were not, they pulled back.
 - There are many other stories that could be told of similar regimes.
 - It is reported in Iraq that the church’s greatest challenge is handling all of the new converts that are flooding into their ranks—all in spite of persecutions.
 - It is also reported that the government there has realised that persecution doesn’t work, but only causes the church to grow.
- The LORD reigns—let us find security in Him.
- No one can harm us because we are in His hands.
3. We take delight in the fact that, as verse 10 says, that He judges the world in righteousness.
- This means that He rules in righteousness—He exercises government that is righteous.
 - He is reigning now until all of His enemies are brought under His feet.
 - Many of them are brought under Him by repenting and believing the gospel.
 - Many others will be cast off to eternal misery and suffering.
 - But righteousness will prevail.
 - Satan and all who are league with him will be completely dismantled, but we as God’s servants will serve Him forever in His glorious house under His marvellous rule!
 - There will be great peace and the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea!

- B. His reign will be so great that the very creation itself is called to rejoice in the anticipation of it.
1. Verse 11- 13 call for it... **Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and all its fullness; ¹² let the field be joyful, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice ¹³ before the LORD. For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with His truth.**
 - The creation itself was cursed when man sinned.
 - Paul tells us in Romans 8:22 that the whole creation groans, waiting for the day of Christ's return.
 - When He comes, the creation will be restored, it will no longer be hostile toward us, but it will be under our dominion.
 - There will be no more storms, no more death, no more sickness, no more injuries and shortages.
 - All the physical infirmities you suffer today will be gone.
 2. As Christians, this hope is an anchor to us in the changing scenes of this world.
 - When we come to worship and we meet with our God who reigns...
 - when we see His glory and His beauty and His sovereign power, and when we know that He is our Saviour and our protector,
 - we are able to endure all things that this world might throw at us, knowing that our Lord is using them all to bring about His gracious purposes of salvation in the earth.
 - Peace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, and it is greatly increased in worship when the Spirit shows us that our God reigns.
 - Do not be short sighted.
 3. It is this peace that has enabled Christians to laugh at the flames of their persecution—to press on with joy when they are threatened and opposed.
 - Our reigning Lord has it all in His hands.
 - It is He who has said to us,
 - **John 14:27: Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.**

Conclusion: So it is all quite straight forward in Psalm 96.

- When you come to worship and you see the glorious God who made heaven and earth and who sent His Son to be our Saviour as He is...what else can you do but:
 - Sing joyful praises to Him!
 - Give yourself in service to Him!
 - And rest in His sovereign, gracious rule!
- Praise, submission, and rest—that is the outcome of true worship.