

Sunday evening December 9th 2018 at CBC
Sermon outline: Psalm 97

[1] The reality of the LORD'S reign [v1]

If we asked people how we could make the world a happier place there would no doubt be various answers. Many people would cite the need to deal with things like war, poverty, violence, ill health, lack of medical facilities, misuse of resources, and so on. But our writer is thinking in a different direction, or at least he is thinking of a more fundamental answer. He says that the world should derive its happiness from the fact that God – the personal God who may be known (the LORD) – rules/reigns.

To put it another way, to know that God reigns is the root of happiness.

[2] The nature of the LORD's reign [vv2-7]

If you look at the second half of verse 6 you find “*all people see his glory.*” And your initial response may well be, but they don't. They certainly don't act as though they do. Many people in our culture, to say nothing about other cultures, have no interest in God or his glory at all.

But there is a sense in which this psalm is speaking not of what is, but of what will be, to encourage the Lord's people not to be in any doubt about the validity of their commitment to him. This psalm assures that *what we who belong to the Lord see now is what the world will one day recognise.*

[a] The LORD's moral purity

As one commentator puts it, we have here a picture of *“the terrifying impact of God’s presence. Clouds of thick darkness warn of his unapproachable holiness and hiddenness to presumptuous humanity, while the fire and lightning reveal a holiness that is devouring and irresistible. There is no escape. To speak of mountains melting is to see the most immemorial landmarks disappear, the most solid of refuges dissolve.”*
[Derek Kidner]

There are surely deliberate echoes here of the occasion when the Lord came down to Mount Sinai (Exodus 20) and gave the 10 commandments to Moses. But this also surely looks forward to the day when the Lord will appear once and for all in the terrifying way described here – compare Revelation 6:12-17.

[b] The LORD’s universal authority

We must remember something that we are inclined to forget, namely, that the world is not as ignorant of God as we may think. The Lord has given proof of his existence in creation. The world knows he exists.

Our task is to challenge the world about that as we share the Christian message. And through the grace of God people who once denied God’s existence are brought to confess their deliberate rejection of him and find in him their forgiveness through faith in Christ.

Once day, the day to which this psalm (and so many passages in the Bible) look forward, the world will recognise the glory of God whether willingly or not. All peoples will see his glory, and those who have worshipped idols and images are put to shame.

There is a sense in which anyone who turns to God from the worship of anything or anyone other than God is put to shame as part of the process of conversion. You appreciate the grace of God only in as far as you recognise just what an appalling state of affairs you were in before you were rescued.

On the last day, all who have stubbornly refused to acknowledge the glory of God freely will have no other choice but to face the truth even in their rebellion.

[3] The response to the LORD'S reign [vv8-12]

What should the proper response of the Lord's people be to the reality and nature of his reign?

[a] serious rejoicing

Joy (rejoicing) is certainly the theme that is underlined in this psalm:

[1] rejoice, be glad, [7] worship him, [8] glad, rejoice, [11] joy, [12] rejoice, give thanks

It is serious rejoicing because the subject matter is serious. God's people rejoice because he is the holy and righteous God who will triumph over evil. When the Lord of all the earth finally arises in judgement all his enemies will fall, all his people will be vindicated, ie their faith will be confirmed. We rejoice in the LORD's judgements. That is serious rejoicing.

[b] holy hatred

Hate[red] is not always wrong. In deliberately strong and contrasting language verse 10 encourages the LORD's people to hate evil. The safe way to hate evil is, as the verse implies,

to love God. It is important to see it that way. If we love God, seeking to discover what his word says and then to live accordingly, we shall hate evil. There is no other option. Love for God will take us away from evil such that we shall effectively hate evil.

[c] continuing trust

It follows that those who rejoice in the Lord and whose love for Him leads to hatred of evil will surely continue to trust him. That is the call, the encouragement, in verses 10-12.

The LORD guards the lives of his people, delivers them from the hand of the wicked and brings them into light and joy.

Now we know very well that these promises do not mean that the Lord's people never suffer or are never mistreated or persecuted by the enemies of God. Clearly that happens. It happened to the Lord Jesus and to his disciples and it happens in different ways and times to the Lord's people to this day. But when we grasp that the Lord reigns, we will trust him in life and in death.

May the Lord encourage us as to the reality of his reign and the nature of his reign so that we rightly respond to his reign.

“Rejoice in the LORD, you are who are righteous, and praise his holy name!”

And all the people said ... amen!