

# Choose Joy

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## *Psalm 98*

### INTRODUCTION

- A. A growing number of lawyers, bankers, stockbrokers and salespeople are having Botox shots to shape their faces into poses of tranquility.
  - 1. With just a few injections, they are wiping away frowns and the appearance of weariness, and replacing them with effortless smiles. Those perpetually happy faces beam at arrogant bosses, annoying underlings, resistant customers, skeptical juries and everybody else, even if the person behind the face is really feeling something quite different.
  - 2. And apparently it works. After losing his job as an investment banker, 39-year-old Christopher Marre went to interview after interview without landing another position.
    - a. Finally, an executive recruiter told him the problem wasn't his resume; it was his face. The deep lines in his forehead made him look angry, the recruiter said.
    - b. So Marre went off to a plastic surgeon for Botox injections, and, with his new friendly face firmly in place, he landed a new job just two weeks later.
- B. The problem, of course, is that there is a difference between looking joyful & being joyful.
  - 1. Every time we flip on the television, we are reminded that this world is not a happy place—we can hear of senseless murders, people losing their worldly goods in a flood, or people being unemployed because of the current economic situation.
  - 2. Furthermore, the Christian way life doesn't always lend itself to happiness.
    - a. C. S. Lewis wrote: "I have an elderly acquaintance of about 80 who has lived a life of unbroken selfishness and self-admiration from the earliest years, and is, more or less, I regret to say, one of the happiest men I know. From the moral point of view it is very difficult! ... As you perhaps know, I haven't always been a Christian. I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity."
    - b. The Lord Jesus has called us to a difficult life.
      - 1) "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14:26).
      - 2) "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law" (Mt 10:34-35).
- C. Our text tonight was not written during a "happy time."
  - 1. Many biblical scholars believe that this Psalm comes from the Babylonian Captivity; many scholars believe that because this Psalm, as well as the ones around it, emphasize over & over the reign of God.
  - 2. It is that reign of God so frequently mentioned in these Psalms that provides the joy the psalmists feel in the midst of their troubles.
- D. READ TEXT.
  - 1. While this Psalm certainly belongs to the Old Covenant with its mentions of different musical instruments, there is much here that we can apply to this modern era.
  - 2. The psalmist encourages all people & even the earth itself to sing praise to God & in so doing he provides a reason that we can CHOOSE JOY. The psalmist urges us to SING OF GOD'S SALVATION, SING OF GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE, & SING OF GOD'S SENTENCE.

## **SING OF GOD'S SALVATION, vv 1-2**

- A. "Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous 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."
- B. What does the author mean by singing "a new song"?
1. If this passage does indeed arise out of the Babylonian Captivity, this likely has to do with the songs of sorrow the Israelites sang while in Captivity: "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our lyres. For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!'" (Ps 137:1-3).
  2. The Israelites will no longer weep & hang their lyres on the willows, but they will sing to the LORD for joy.
- C. The LORD has done marvelous things.
1. The psalmist informs us what marvelous things the LORD has done: "His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him."
    - a. There are some scholars who believe that the salvation of which the psalmist speaks refers to the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea.
    - b. That idea does make sense from the context.
      - 1) The psalmist declares that "the LORD has made known his salvation"—God informed Moses that he would deliver his people in marvelous fashion at the Red Sea so that "the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD" (Ex 14:4).
      - 2) God used water to deliver his people from the Egyptians. Twice in this passage, the psalmist calls upon the water to give praise to God: "Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the LORD" (vv 7-9).
    - c. If the psalmist does reference the deliverance at the Red Sea, think about what encouragement that would have been to the Israelites in Babylonian Captivity.
      - 1) The Israelites were captive for 70 years in Babylon, but they were held captive in Egypt for well over 400 years.
      - 2) God marvelously brought salvation from the Egyptian bondage—the sending of plagues & the crossing of the Red Sea—and he would marvelously bring his people out of Babylon by raising up Cyrus to sit on the throne.
  2. Thus, because the LORD has brought salvation, the psalmist urges the Israelites to sing of God's salvation.
- D. What is in this text for us?
1. While God saved the Israelites from the Egyptians at the Red Sea and from the Babylonians through Cyrus, he will save us from hell through Jesus Christ.
    - a. "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost" (1 Tm 1:15).
    - b. Jesus "is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25).
  2. For that salvation, God deserves the highest praise.
    - a. John saw a great multitude from the earth praising God for his salvation: "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Rev 7:9-10).
    - b. "After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God'" (Rev 19:1).

3. Let us always give praise to God for his marvelous salvation!

### **SING OF GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE, v 3**

- A. "He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God."
- B. The Hebrew term "steadfast love" refers to covenantal loyalty.
  1. The idea is that God is faithful to his covenant.
  2. God had made numerous promises to his people in his covenant.
    - a. God had promised that if his people did not keep the covenant, he would drive them out of Canaan.
    - b. Yet, he also promised that if his people would repent—even when they were in a foreign land—he would forgive their sin: "And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you" (Deut 30:1-3).
    - c. If the Israelites living in Babylon, therefore, would fully repent & return to God, God would raise up Cyrus and his people could go home.
  3. Therefore, the Israelites had every reason to sing to the LORD of his steadfast love.
- C. God continues to have steadfast love, i.e., the LORD continues to be loyal to the promises he has made.
  1. Can you imagine what it would be like if God were not loyal to his promises?
    - a. You're sitting in a waiting room while you wait for the doctor to give you test result.
      - 1) You want to pray, but you don't know whether or not God will hear you.
      - 2) Those tests turn out badly. You'd like to know that God will provide you a heavenly home, but you just don't know.
    - b. Your company is getting ready to downsize. You know that God has promised to watch over you, but you can't be sure if he's true to his word or not.
    - c. You're weighed down with sin. You're baptized into Christ, but you can't be sure if God will forgive you or not.
  2. But, GOD DOES HAVE STEADFAST LOVE! He will be faithful to every promise he has ever made.
    - a. "Know . . . that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations" (Deut 7:9).
    - b. In encouraging the Hebrew Christians to remain faithful to the Lord, the author of Hebrews writes, "When God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us" (Heb 6:17-18).
  3. How wonderful it is to know that we have a God who is faithful! Let us ever sing of God's steadfast love!

### **GOD'S SENTENCE, 8-9**

- A. "Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity."
- B. The psalmist calls upon the river to clap & the hills sing for joy because the LORD "comes to judge the earth."

1. When we think of God's judgment, we don't typically think of breaking forth in joyful praise. The idea of God's judgment is generally going to conjure up a fearful expectation, as it partially should.
  2. Therefore, why would the psalmist call upon the earth to give forth joyful praise because God was going "to judge the earth"?
- C. There seem to be two reasons in context that we can joyfully praise God for his judgment.
1. One: God will judge the enemies of Israel.
    - a. If this Psalm did originate during the Exile, the author anticipates God's judgment upon his enemies & his subsequent freedom.
      - 1) When Belshazzar saw handwriting on the wall, this is the interpretation Daniel gave him: "Mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; Tekel, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians" (Dan 5:26-28).
      - 2) That very night Belshazzar died & his kingdom was given to the Medes & Persians; Cyrus, King of the Medes and Persians gave the Israelites their freedom.
    - b. Even if the Psalm originates from another historical context, the idea is the same—God will vanquish Israel's enemies & vindicate his people.
    - c. Should that not cause us to break forth in joyous praise? God will vanquish all our enemies.
      - 1) "God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire" (2 Thess 1:6-8).
      - 2) The Book of Revelation depicts the judgment of God upon the Roman Empire.
        - a) After a depiction of that judgment, we read, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants" (Rev 19:1-2).
        - b) Because their enemies would be vanquished, the churches in Asia Minor had reason to rejoice.
    - d. Is that not a reason to have joy in the midst of this dark & dying world? God will have the ultimate victory!
  2. Another reason to praise God for judgment is that God judges the world with righteousness and people with equity.
    - a. God does not judge haphazardly, but God does what is right.
    - b. God "has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:31).
      - 1) The judgment God renders through Jesus Christ on that final day will be the proper judgment.
      - 2) When Jesus tells people, "Depart from me," it will be the right judgment in that situation; when he says, "Well done good and faithful servant," it will be the right judgment in that situation.
    - c. What a calm assurance knowing that God will judge this world appropriately.
      - 1) Every now & then we hear of people being sent to death row and then being freed when DNA testing establishes that they did not commit the crime.
        - a) While our judicial system has several checks and balances, it is still flawed, for it is operated by flawed people.
        - b) Not so with God! He makes no mistakes when he judges.
      - 2) Are you ready to stand before him & have him judge you righteously?