

Sing to the Lord a New Song

PSALM 96

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Have you ever had a song stuck in your head? Sometimes it's a good song, sometimes it is a song we would rather forget, but most of us have had the experience of hearing a song, and it sticks with us, sometimes for a very long time. A certain person in our family is in the habit of occasionally breaking out into "The Song that Never Ends," literally. It is, *"...the song that never ends, it just goes on and on my friend. Some people started singing it not knowing what it was, and they'll keep on singing it forever just because...it is the song that never ends..."* And it never ends!

And yet as frustrating as some songs might be, we realize that singing is an important part of our lives, and if this is true in the world, then it is especially true in the Lord's church. Singing has a way of changing us. Singing can lift us up. Singing has a way of touching us emotionally. And God knows this. It is hard to calculate, since there are so many variations of the word sing – song, singing, sang – and so on, but it seems as if there are more than 200 references to singing in the Bible. And we know why: Singing is important to God. God created us with the ability and the desire to sing.

This morning, as we continue our emphasis on singing new songs, I would invite you to turn with me to Psalm 96 (p. 950). Most of us will probably agree that there is a value to singing so many of those old songs that are so familiar to us. At the same time, though, there is also a tremendous value to singing those songs that are new. We need to remember that even the oldest songs we sing here were new at one time. A week ago at sister Geri's memorial service we were able to sing "As the Life of a Flower." I would say that is a rather old song. And yet in 1904, that song was very new, and there was a church somewhere that came together to sing that song for the very first time. And of course, to most of us, that old song is fairly new.

It is easy to get in a musical rut, so I am very thankful that Rob suggested an emphasis on new songs this morning. And yes, there may be some level of stress involved when it comes to singing new songs – especially for our songleaders! God, though, does value the new. And that is why I would like for us to focus our thoughts this morning on Psalm 96. In the Bible, there are eight references to singing a *"new song,"* and Psalm 96 contains one of those references.

If you will, please look with me at Psalm 96,

- ¹ *Sing to the Lord a new song;
Sing to the Lord, all the earth.*
- ² *Sing to the Lord, bless His name;
Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day.*
- ³ *Tell of His glory among the nations,
His wonderful deeds among all the peoples.*
- ⁴ *For great is the Lord 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 *Splendor and majesty are before Him,
Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.*
- ⁷ *Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.*
- ⁸ *Ascribe to the Lord the glory of His name;
Bring an offering and come into His courts.*
- ⁹ *Worship the Lord in holy attire;
Tremble before Him, all the earth.*
- ¹⁰ *Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns;
Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved;
He will judge the peoples with equity."*
- ¹¹ *Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
Let the sea roar, and all it contains;*
- ¹² *Let the field exult, and all that is in it.
Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy*
- ¹³ *Before the Lord, for He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in His faithfulness.*

As we look at this Psalm I'd like for us to go back and try to emphasize one of the main ideas. **As the author of this Psalm calls people to worship God, he starts with the reminder that every encounter we have with God has the potential of being NEW or FRESH, even EXCITING.** We are to, *"Sing to the Lord a new song!"* Not that every song we sing needs to be new in a literal sense, but every time we approach God in worship, it is a *"new"* experience. The worship we offer to God today is different from the worship we offered to God yesterday. Our worship is never boring, and the reason is: Almighty God blesses us in new ways every day. As we sometimes sing (based on Lamentations 3:22-23),

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
His mercies never come to an end.
For His compassions never fail.
They are new every morning.*

That quote, of course, is from the prophet Jeremiah in Lamentations 3. In Lamentations, the prophet Jeremiah had just seen his city leveled by the Babylonian army, and as he sat there on the hillside watching the smoke rise, Jeremiah was still able to praise God, *"Great is Your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'Therefore I will hope in Him.'" Even in the middle of it, Jeremiah found a reason to praise God.*

Haven't we seen this right here in our own nation over the past few days? This past Wednesday evening, we came together as a congregation to ask God's blessing on the situation down in Ferguson, Missouri. And from a human point of view, we might say, "What a mess. What a tragic situation." But haven't there been some bright spots as well? I am thankful for the picture that came out of Portland, Oregon, yesterday. During one of the protests, a Portland police officer noticed a 12-year-old boy holding a sign that said "Free Hugs." The officer started talking to the boy about the demonstration, and school, and art, and life. When they were done talking, the officer pointed to the sign and said, "Do I get one of those?" Most of us see something like this, and we see a bright spot, we see new reason to thank God, because God's mercies are indeed **"new every morning."**

Sometimes those blessings are rather obvious. About a month ago, Nathan Hill, a youth minister at the King's Crossing congregation in Corpus Christi, Texas, preached a lesson on God's generosity, how God is always providing what we need. At the end of the sermon, one of the young people, Quaylon Hughes, got up and said that he was ready to be baptized into Christ. Quaylon and his grandfather got up to get ready for the baptism, but when they opened the door to the baptistery, they realized that it was completely empty. It had been drained for repairs and hadn't yet been refilled. Well, at that point, Nathan opened a side door on the church building and discovered a fresh, temporary pond right outside that door. The day before, the area had received an unexpected downpour of rain, and the water had collected in the lawn, just deep enough for a baptism. Quaylon walked out there and was baptized by his grandfather. Indeed, God's lovingkindness is **"new every morning."**

The point is: We do not worship God today exactly the same way we did last Sunday morning, because as the author of Psalm 96 says in verse 2, we **"...proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day."** Every day is new and different. Every time we pray, every time we sing, we have grown in our understanding of who God really is; we have grown in our appreciation for what God has done. Quaylon Hughes understands this. He knows something about God that he did not know a month ago! And so, if we ever make it through worship feeling indifferent or bored, then we have failed to understand how amazing God really is, we have failed to open our eyes. We even think of an old song like Amazing Grace. That song was written by John Newton back in 1779. I guess we might be able to say that is an old song. But in another sense, it's not really old, is it? That song is about each of us here this morning – right here, right now, "I once was lost, but now am found." That is me singing! And when I sing that song today, it is a new song, in that every single day I have a new and deeper appreciation for God's amazing grace. So I suppose the first idea in this Psalm is that God is alive, that God is working in our lives today, that God is truly great in every possible way, that God is worthy of our praise right now. And for this reason, we are told here to sing a new song.

There is so much else we could get from Psalm 96, but I want us to close our thoughts this morning by noticing a very closely related idea here. As we sing this new song, as we experience God in a new and fresh way every time we worship, we are to worship God with the end in view. And I'm not really sure how to summarize this in just the right way, but as we look at this Psalm as a whole, we see the idea that we are to express our worship of God outwardly – to those around us and even to other nations – knowing that there is a day of Judgment coming. Out there on the horizon somewhere, God is coming back, and when he returns, all people will need to give an account for how we have lived. As we go through life, therefore, we need to be telling people about God, and we do this for their benefit.

Just looking at this Psalm as a whole, do you notice how outwardly focused it is? In verse 2, this blessing of God's name is something we need to **"proclaim."** In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word used here is the basis of the English word "evangelize." We are to proclaim the good news about God. In verse

3, we are to tell of God's glory to the nations, among all the peoples of the earth. In verses 4-5, we have the contrast between God and all of the fake gods or idols of the world. Down in verse 10, we have the author referring to speaking about God **"among the nations"** again, and the reason we do this is because (according to the end of verse 10) God will **"judge the peoples with equity."** In verses 11-12, the earth and everything in it is to praise God openly, because (according to verse 13) **"...the Lord...is coming to judge the earth."** And so we find that this Psalm is basically an encouragement for us to extend God's invitation to the world around us.

As frustrating as this life is sometimes, we know that there is a day of justice coming. And so we sing about the future. We encourage each other. We warn the world. The Lord is coming back to judge the earth. This is an old song, but it is also very new. Just like the love and grace of God, the coming judgment also needs to be new and fresh on our minds every morning.

Conclusion:

And with this, we come to the end of Psalm 96 with two basic thoughts this week. First of all, we are to worship God every day, making it our goal to find at least one new blessing to praise God for every single day – something from His word, something from the world around us, something from our families – God's love is new every morning, and we need to thank God for that. And then secondly, we tell others, because there is a day of judgment coming. We need to be telling people about God, because the Lord God is **"coming to judge the earth."**

The good news is that God's only Son came to this earth to die in our place, to pay the price for our sins. He lived a perfect life but was executed by the Romans at the age of 33. He was buried a short time after his death on a Friday afternoon but came back from the dead early on Sunday morning. That is the good news. We obey the good news by turning away from sin and then by allowing ourselves to be buried in water so that our sins can be forgiven. If you have any questions, let us know. If you have something we need to pray about, let us know. If there is some other way we can help you, let us know. But if you are ready to obey the good news right now, you can come to the front as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

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