

Psalms 97-99

Psalms 98:7-9 Let the sea roar in all its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it; Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together before the Lord, for He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world, and the peoples with equity.

Psalms 93, 97 and 99 each begin with the words, "The Lord reigns." Psalms 95 begins, "O Come let us sing to the Lord." Psalms 96 and 98 begin, "O sing to the Lord a new song." All of these Psalms are thought to have been composed during the period of the return from the Babylonian exile. They are an example of how our insights into the ways of God and our perceptions of Him are connected to the times in which we live.

But this is a very limited perspective from which to see God. Faith goes further than this and takes seriously the witness of previous generations as to how God worked among them and the witness of the Word which declares the character and values of the Lord. These remain unchanged whether or not they appear to be validated by present circumstances.

This is not to say that we should not learn from the activity of God in our day and time

for we should. This is just not all that we should know of the Lord. With the return of the captives there was a fresh optimism born by their experience of God's intervention on their behalf. God did for them that which was comparable to the first Exodus. They found themselves in the midst of this unique and special season. They had known frustration and disappointment but a turn had come. God was working. They were returning to the land of promise. One kept promise leads to another. Suddenly, the fulfillment of every promise is no longer beyond reason.

This is all in the realm of human experience. In truth, God is God. The fact that He reigns is always true. But, during exile or during the decades of faithlessness that led to the exile, the fact is not nearly as observable to the natural eye.

But, it is critical for us to learn from the exultant confidence that comes when God is on the march and when His purpose and plan is unstoppable. This was the initial experience of the returning captives. And they celebrated. Everything they offered in these celebrations is valid. "The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the peoples see His glory." God's intervention on their behalf rekindled the link between

blessing and obedience, "You who love the Lord, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked."

Psalms 98 observes a sequence of praise. The Lord's work is celebrated in the context of what He is doing for His people, Israel. "O sing to the Lord a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory... He has remembered His mercy and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God." This is then the basis for the enthused and musical praise of God's people and even the equally enthused praise of all of the creation.

Psalms 99 wisely takes praise from earth to heaven, from heaven to the earth, from the present to the past, and from the past to the present. The evidence that God reigns is clearly seen in what He is doing. This is a witness to God's presence on His heavenly throne which is above and over the earth. God is powerful on Mount Zion. He is holy and requires justice and righteousness of His people. Moses and Aaron and Samuel are examples of men who knew the Lord and experienced God's care. And so we bow and worship.