

PSALM 99

Still we are celebrating the glories of the kingdom of God among men, and are called upon to praise him, as in the foregoing psalms; but those psalms looked forward to the times of the gospel, and prophesied of the graces and comforts of those times; this psalm seems to dwell more upon the Old-Testament dispensation and the manifestation of God's glory and grace in that. The Jews were not, in expectation of the Messiah's kingdom and the evangelical worship, to neglect the divine regimen they were then under, and the ordinances that were then given them, but in them to see God reigning, and to worship before him according to the law of Moses. Prophecies of good things to come must not lessen our esteem of good things present. To Israel indeed pertained the promises, which they were bound to believe; but to them pertained also the giving of the law, and the service of God, which they were also bound dutifully and conscientiously to attend to, ~~491~~ Romans 9:4. And this they are called to do in this psalm, where yet there is much of Christ, for the government of the church was in the hands of the eternal Word before he was incarnate; and, besides, the ceremonial services were types and figures of evangelical worship. The people of Israel are here required to praise and exalt God, and to worship before him, in consideration of these two things: —

I. The happy constitution of the government they were under, both in sacred and civil things (v. 1-5).

II. Some instances of the happy administration of it (v. 6-9). In singing this psalm we must set ourselves to exalt the name of God, as it is made known to us in the gospel, which we have much more reason to do than those had who lived under the law.

~~491~~ PSALM 99:1-5

THE DOMINION OF GOD

The foundation of all religion is laid in this truth, That *the Lord reigns*. God governs the world by his providence, governs the church by his grace,

and both by his Son. We are to believe not only that *the Lord lives*, but that *the Lord reigns*. This is the triumph of the Christian church, and here it was the triumph of the Jewish church, that Jehovah was their King; and hence it is inferred, *Let the people tremble*, that is,

1. Let even the subjects of this kingdom tremble; for the Old-Testament dispensation had much of terror in it. At Mount Sinai Israel, and even Moses himself, did *exceedingly fear and quake*; and then God was *terrible in his holy places*. Even when he appeared in his people's behalf, he did terrible things. But we are not now come to *that mount that burned with fire*, ^{<3928>}Hebrews 12:18. Now that *the Lord reigns let the earth rejoice*. Then he ruled more by the power of holy fear; now he rules by the power of holy love.

2. Much more let the enemies of this kingdom tremble; for he will either bring them into obedience to his golden sceptre or crush them with his iron rod. *The Lord reigns, though the people be stirred with indignation at it*; though they fret away all their spirits, their rage is all in vain. He will set his King upon his holy hill of Zion in spite of them (^{<3921>}Psalm 2:1-6); first, or last, he will make them *tremble*, ^{<665>}Revelation 6:15, etc. *The Lord reigns, let the earth be moved*. Those that submit to him shall be established, and not *moved* (^{<3950>}Psalm 96:10); but those that oppose him will be moved. Heaven and earth shall be shaken, and all nations; but the kingdom of Christ is what cannot be moved; the *things which cannot be shaken shall remain*, ^{<3827>}Hebrews 12:27. *In these is continuance*, ^{<2545>}Isaiah 64:5.

God's kingdom, set up in Israel, is here made the subject of the psalmist's praise.

I. Two things the psalmist affirms: —

1. God presided in the affairs of religion: *He sitteth between the cherubim* (v. 1), as on his throne, to give law by the oracles thence delivered — as on the mercy-seat, to receive petitions. This was the honour of Israel, that they had among them the Shechinah, or special presence of God, attended by the holy angels; the temple was the royal palace, and the Holy of holies was the presence-chamber. *The Lord is great in Zion* (v. 2); there he is known and praised (^{<3970>}Psalm 76:1, 2); there he is served as great, more than any where else. *He is high there above all people*; as that which is high is exposed to view, and looked up to, so in Zion the perfections of the

divine nature appear more conspicuous and more illustrious than any where else. Therefore *let those* that dwell in Zion, and worship there, *praise thy great and terrible name*, and give thee the glory due unto it, *for it is holy*. The holiness of God's name makes it truly great to his friends and terrible to his enemies, v. 3. This is that which those above adore — *Holy, holy, holy*.

2. He was all in all in their civil government, v. 4. As in Jerusalem was the testimony of Israel, whither the tribes went up, so *there were set thrones of judgment*, ^{<RC>}Psalm 122:4, 5. Their government was a theocracy. God raised up David to rule over them (and some think this psalm was penned upon occasion of his quiet and happy settlement in the throne) and he is *the king whose strength loves judgment*. He is strong; all his strength he has from God; and *his strength* is not abused for the support of any wrong, as the power of great princes often is, but it *loves judgment*. He does justice with his power, and does it with delight; and herein he was a type of Christ, to whom God would give *the throne of his father David, to do judgment and justice*. He has power to crush, but his *strength loves judgment*; he does not rule with rigour, but with moderation, with wisdom, and with tenderness. The people of Israel had a good king; but they are here taught to look up to God as he by whom their king reigns: *Thou dost establish equity* (that is, God gave them those excellent laws by which they were governed), and *thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob*; he not only by his immediate providences often executed and enforced his own laws, but took care for the administration of justice among them by civil magistrates, who reigned by him and by him did decree justice. Their judges judged for God, and their judgment was his, ^{<RC>}2 Chronicles 19:6.

II. Putting these two things together, we see what was the happiness of Israel above any other people, as Moses had described it (^{<RC>}Deuteronomy 4:7, 8), that they had *God so nigh unto them*, sitting between the cherubim, and that they had *statutes and judgments so righteous*, by which equity was established, and God himself ruled in Jacob, from which he infers this command to that happy people (v. 5): “*Exalt you the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool*; give him the glory of the good government you are under, as it is now established, both in church and state.” Note,

1. The greater the public mercies are which we have a share in the more we are obliged to bear a part in the public homage paid to God: the setting up of the kingdom of Christ, especially, ought to be the matter of our praise.
2. When we draw nigh to God, to worship him, our hearts must be filled with high thoughts of him, and he must be exalted in our souls.
3. The more we abase ourselves, and the more prostrate we are before God, the more we exalt him. We must *worship at his footstool*, at his ark, which was as the footstool to the mercy-seat between the cherubim; or we must cast ourselves down upon the pavement of his courts; and good reason we have to be thus reverent, *for he is holy*, and his holiness should strike an awe upon us, as it does on the angels themselves, ^{<396>}Isaiah 6:2, 3.

~~<396>~~ PSALM 99:6-9

DIVINE JUSTICE AND MERCY

The happiness of Israel in God's government is here further made out by some particular instances of his administration, especially with reference to those that were, in their day, the prime leaders and most active useful governors of that people — Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, in the two former of whom the theocracy or divine government began (for they were employed to form Israel into a people) and in the last of whom that form of government, in a great measure, ended; for when the people rejected Samuel, and urged him to resign, they are said to reject God himself, that he should not be so immediately their king as he had been (^{<397>}1 Samuel 8:7), for now they would have a king, like all the nations. Moses, as well as Aaron, is said to be *among his priests*, for he executed the priest's office till Aaron was settled in it and he consecrated Aaron and his sons; therefore the Jews call him the *priest of the priests*. Now concerning these three chief rulers observe,

I. The intimate communion they had with God, and the wonderful favour to which he admitted them. None of all the nations of the earth could produce three such men as these, that had such an intercourse with Heaven, and whom God *knew by name*, ^{<397>}Exodus 33:17. Here is,

1. Their gracious observance of God. No kingdom had men that honoured God as these three men of the kingdom of Israel did. They honoured him,

(1.) By their prayers. Samuel, though not among his priests, yet was *among those that called on his name*; and for *this* they were all famous, *They called upon the Lord*; they relied not on their own wisdom or virtue, but in every emergency had recourse to God, towards him was their desire, and on him their dependence.

(2.) By their obedience: *They kept his testimonies, and the ordinances that he gave them*; they made conscience of their duty, and in every thing made God's word and law their rule, as knowing that unless they did so they could not expect their prayers should be answered, ^{<1809>}Proverbs 28:9. Moses did all according to the pattern shown him; it is often repeated, *According to all that God commanded Moses, so did he*. Aaron and Samuel did likewise. Those were the greatest men and most honourable that were most eminent for keeping God's testimonies and conforming to the rule of his word.

2. God's gracious acceptance of them: *He answered them*, and granted them the things which they called upon him for. They all wonderfully prevailed with God in prayer; miracles were wrought at their special instance and request; nay, he not only condescended to do that for them which they desired, as a prince for a petitioner, but he communed with them as one friend familiarly converses with another (v. 7): *He spoke unto them in the cloudy pillar*. He often spoke to Samuel; from his childhood the word of the Lord came to him, and, probably, sometimes he spoke to him by a bright cloud overshadowing him: however, to Moses and Aaron he often spoke out of the famous *cloudy pillar*, ^{<1260>}Exodus 16:10; ^{<1175>}Numbers 12:5. Israel are now reminded of this, for the confirming of their faith, that though they had not every day such sensible tokens of God's presence as the cloudy pillar was, yet to those that were their first founders, and to him that was their great reformer, God was pleased thus to manifest himself.

II. The good offices they did to Israel. They interceded for the people, and for them also they obtained many an answer of peace. *Moses stood in the gap*, and *Aaron between the living and the dead*; and, when Israel was in distress, Samuel cried unto the Lord for them, ^{<1079>}1 Samuel 7:9. This is here referred to (v. 8): "*Thou answeredst them, O Lord our God!* and, at their prayer, *thou wast a God that forgavest* the people they prayed for;

and, *though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions*, yet thou didst not cut them off from being a people, as their sin deserved.” “*Thou wast a God that wast propitious for them* (so Dr. Hammond), for their sakes, and sparedst the people at their request, even when thou wast about to *take vengeance of their inventions*, that is, when thy wrath was so highly provoked against them that it was just ready to break in upon them, to their utter overthrow.” These were some of the many remarkable instances of God's dominion in Israel, more than in any other nation, for which the people are again called upon to praise God (v. 9): “*Exalt the Lord our God*, on account of what he has done for us formerly, as well as of late, *and worship at his holy hill of Zion*, on which he has now set his temple and will shortly *set his King* (⁹⁰⁶Psalm 2:6), the former a type of the latter; there, as the centre of unity, let all God's Israel meet, with their adorations, *for the Lord our God is holy*, and appears so, not only in his holy law, but in his holy gospel.”