

PSALM 97

This psalm dwells upon the same subject, and is set to the same tune, with the foregoing psalm. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega of both; they are both penned, and are both to be sung to his honour; and we make nothing of them if we do not, in them, make melody with our hearts to the Lord Jesus. He it is that reigns, to the joy of all mankind (v. 1); and his government speaks,

I. Terror to his enemies; for he is a prince of inflexible justice and irresistible power (v. 2-7).

II. Comfort to his friends and loyal subjects, arising from his sovereign dominion, the care he takes of his people, and the provision he makes for them (v. 8-12). In singing this psalm we must be affected with the glory of the exalted Redeemer, must dread the lot of his enemies, and think ourselves happy if we are of those that “kiss the son.”

~~97~~ PSALM 97:1-7

RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT

What was to be said among the heathen in the foregoing psalm (v. 10) is here said again (v. 1) and is made the subject of this psalm, and of psalm 99. *The Lord reigns*; that is the great truth here laid down. The Lord Jehovah reigns, he that made the world governs it; he that gave being gives motion and power, gives law and commission, gives success and event. Every man's judgment proceeds from the Lord, from his counsel and providence, and in all affairs, both public and private, he performs the thing which he himself has appointed. The Lord Jesus reigns; the providential kingdom is twisted in with the mediatorial and the administration of both is in the hand of Christ, who therefore is both the *head of the church* and *head over all things to the church*. The kingdom of Christ is so constituted that,

I. It may be matter of joy to all; and it will be so if it be not their own fault. *Let the earth rejoice*, for hereby it is *established* (~~97~~ Psalm 96:10); it

is honoured and enriched, and, in part, rescued from the vanity which by sin it is made subject to. Not only let the people of Israel rejoice in him as King of the Jews, and the daughter of Zion as her King, but let all the earth rejoice in his elevation; for the kingdoms of the world shall, more or less, sooner or later, become his kingdoms: *Let the multitude of isles, the many or great isles, be glad thereof.* This is applicable to our country, which is a great isle, and has many belonging to it; at least, it speaks comfort in general to the Gentiles, whose countries are called *the isles of the Gentiles*, ^{<1005}Genesis 10:5. There is enough in Christ for the multitude of the isles to rejoice in; for, though many have been made happy in him, yet still there is room. All have reason to rejoice in Christ's government.

1. In the equity of it. There is an incontestable justice in all the acts of his government, both legislative and judicial. Sometimes indeed *clouds and darkness are round about him*; his dispensations are altogether unaccountable; *his way is in the sea and his path in the great waters.* We are not aware of what he designs, what he drives at; nor is it fit that we should be let into the secrets of his government. There is a depth in his counsels, which we must not pretend to fathom. But still *righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne*; a golden thread of justice runs through the whole web of his administration. In this he resides, for it is his habitation. In this he rules, for it is *the habitation of his throne. His commandments are, and will be, all righteous. Righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne* (so Dr. Hammond); for *therefore his throne is for ever and ever, because his sceptre is a right sceptre*, ^{<986}Psalm 45:6. *The throne is established in righteousness. Even the heavens declare his righteousness* (v. 6); it is as conspicuous and as illustrious as the heavens themselves. The angels of heaven will declare it, who are employed as messengers in the administration of his government and therefore know more of it than any of his creatures. His righteousness is incontestable; for who can contradict or dispute what the *heavens declare?* ^{<1806}Psalm 50:6.

2. In the extent of it in the upper and lower world.

(1.) All the men on earth are under his government; either he is served by them or he serves himself by them. *All the people see his glory*, or may see it. The glory of God, in the face of Christ, was made to shine in distant countries, among many people, more or less among all people; the gospel was preached, for aught we know, in all languages, ^{<405}Acts 2:5, 11.

Miracles were wrought in all nations, and so *all the people saw his glory. Have they not heard?* ^{<518>}Romans 10:18.

(2.) All the angels in heaven are so. Perhaps we should not have found this truth in those words (v. 7), *Worship him, all you gods*, if we had not been directed to it by the inspired apostle, who, from the Septuagint version of those words, makes the Messiah to be introduced into the upper world at the ascension with this charge (^{<5106>}Hebrews 1:6), *Let all the angels of God worship him*, which helps us to a key to this whole psalm, and shows us that it must be applied to the exalted Redeemer, who has gone into heaven, *and is on the right hand of God*, which intimates that all power is given him both in heaven and earth, *angels, authorities, and powers, being made subject unto him*, ^{<4022>}1 Peter 3:22. This speaks the honour of Christ, that he has such worshippers, and the honour of all good Christians, that they have such fellow-worshippers.

II. Christ's government, though it may be matter of joy to all, will yet be matter of terror to some, and it is their own fault that it is so, v. 3-5, 7. Observe,

1. When the kingdom of Christ was to be set up in the world, after his ascension, it would meet with many enemies, and much opposition would be given to it. He that reigns, to the *joy of the whole earth*, yet, as he has his subjects, so he has *his enemies* (v. 3), that not only will not have him to reign over them, but would not have him to reign at all, that not only will not *enter into the kingdom of heaven themselves*, but do all they can to *hinder those that are entering*, ^{<4233>}Matthew 23:13. This was fulfilled in the enmity of the unbelieving Jews to the gospel of Christ, and the violent persecution which in all places they stirred up against the preachers and professors of it. These enemies are here called *hills* (v. 5), for their height, and strength, and immovable obstinacy. It was the *princes of this world that crucified the Lord of glory*, ^{<418>}1 Corinthians 2:8; ^{<512>}Psalms 2:2.

2. The opposition which the Jews gave to the setting up of Christ's kingdom turned to their own ruin. Their persecuting the apostles, and *forbidding them to speak to the Gentiles*, filled up their sin, and brought *wrath upon them to the uttermost*, ^{<515>}1 Thessalonians 2:15, 16. That wrath is here compared,

(1.) To consuming fire, which *goes before him, and burns up his enemies*, that have made themselves like chaff and stubble, and have *set the briers*

and thorns before him in battle, ²⁷⁰⁶ Isaiah 27:4. This fire of divine wrath will not only burn the rubbish upon the hills, but will even *melt the hills themselves like wax*, v. 5. When our God appears as a consuming fire even rocks will be wax before him. The most resolute and daring opposition will be baffled *at the presence of the Lord*. His very presence is enough to shame and sink it, for he is *the Lord of the whole earth*, by whom all the children of men are manageable and to whom they are accountable. Men hate and persecute God's people, because they think him absent, that the Lord has *forsaken the earth*; but, when he manifests his presence, they melt.

(2.) To amazing *lightnings* (v. 4), which strike a terror upon many. The judgments God brought upon the enemies of Christ's kingdom were such as all the world took notice of with terror: *The earth saw and trembled*, and the ears of all that heard were made to tingle. This was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation by the Romans, about forty years after Christ's resurrection, which, like fire, wholly destroyed that people, and, like lightning, astonished all their neighbours (⁴⁵²⁴Deuteronomy 29:24); but the heavens declare God's righteousness in it, and all the people, to this day, see his glory, in those lasting monuments of his justice, the scattered Jews.

3. Idolaters also would be put to confusion by the setting up of Christ's kingdom (v. 7): *Confounded be all those who serve graven images*, the Gentile world, who *did service to those that by nature are no gods* (⁴⁰⁰⁸Galatians 4:8), who boasted themselves of idols as their protectors and benefactors. Did those that served idols boast of them, and shall the servants of the living God distrust him, or be ashamed of him? *Let those be ashamed that serve graven images*.

(1.) This is a prayer for the conversion of the Gentiles, that those who have been so long serving dumb idols may be convinced of their error, ashamed of their folly, and may, by the power of Christ's gospel, be brought to serve the only living and true God, and may be as much ashamed of their idols as ever they were proud of them. See ²¹²⁰Isaiah 2:20, 21.

(2.) This is a prophecy of the ruin of those that would not be reformed and reclaimed from their idolatry; they shall be confounded by the destruction of Paganism in the Roman empire, which was fulfilled about 300 years after Christ, so much to the terror of idolaters that some think it was the revolution under Constantine that made even the mighty men say to the

rocks, *Fall on us and hide us*, ^{<415>}Revelation 6:15, 16. This prayer and prophecy are still in force against antichristian idolaters, who may here read their doom: *Confounded be all those that worship graven images*, v. 7. See ^{<2483>}Jeremiah 48:13.

^{<1978>}PSALM 97:8-12

ZION REJOICING IN THE REIGN OF CHRIST

The kingdom of the Messiah, like the pillar of cloud and fire, as it has a dark side towards the Egyptians, so it has a bright side towards the Israel of God. It is set up in spite of opposition; and then *the earth saw and trembled* (v. 4), but *Zion heard and was glad*, very glad, to hear of the conversion of some and of the confusion of others, that is, the conquest of all that stood it out against Christ. *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! for behold thy king comes unto thee*, ^{<399>}Zechariah 9:9. And not Zion only, where the temple was, but even *the daughters of Judah, rejoiced*; the common people, the inhabitants of the villages, they shall triumph in Christ's victories. The command (v. 1) is, *Let the earth rejoice*; but it is only the sons of Zion and the daughters of Judah that do rejoice. All should bid the kingdom of the Messiah welcome, but few do. Now here observe,

I. The reasons that are given for Zion's joy in the government of the Redeemer. The faithful servants of God may well *rejoice* and be *glad*,

1. Because God is glorified, and whatever redounds to his honour is very much his people's pleasure. They rejoice *because of thy judgments, O Lord!* which may take in both the judgments of his mouth and the judgments of his hand, the word of his gospel and his works wrought for the propagating of it, miracles and marvellous providences; for in these we must own, "*Thou, Lord, art high above all the earth* (v. 9); thou hast manifested thy sovereignty in the kingdom of nature, and thy command of all its powers, and thy dominion over all nations, over all hearts; thou art *exalted far above all gods*" — all deputed gods, that is, princes — all counterfeit gods, that is, idols. The exaltation of Christ, and the advancement of God's glory among men thereby, are the rejoicing of all the saints.

2. Because care is taken for their safety. Those that pay allegiance to Christ as a King shall be sure of his protection. Princes are the shields of the earth; Christ is so to his subjects; they may put their trust under his shadow and rejoice in it, for (v. 10) *He preserves the souls of the saints;* he preserves their lives as long as he has any work for them to do, and wonderfully *delivers them* many a time *out of the hand of the wicked*, their persecutors that thirst after their blood; for *precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints*. But something more is meant than their lives; for those that will be his disciples must be willing to lay down their lives, and not indent for the securing of them. It is the *immortal soul* that Christ preserves, the *inward man*, which may be renewed more and more when the *outward man decays*. He will *preserve the souls of his saints* from sin, from apostasy, and despair, under their greatest trials; he will *deliver them out of the hands of the wicked one that seeks to devour them; he will preserve them safely to his heavenly kingdom*, ² Timothy 4:18. They have therefore reason to be glad, being thus safe.

3. Because provision is made for their comfort. Those that rejoice in Christ Jesus, and in his exaltation, have fountains of joy treasured up for them, which will be opened sooner or later (v. 11): *Light is sown for the righteous*, that is, *gladness for the upright in heart*. The subjects of Christ's kingdom are told to expect tribulation in the world. They must suffer by its malice, and must not share in its mirth; yet let them know, to their comfort, that *light is sown* for them; it is designed and prepared for them. What is sown will come up again in due time; though, like a winter seedness, it may lie long under the clods, and seem to be lost and buried, yet it will return in a rich and plentiful increase. God's goodness shall be sure of a *harvest* in the *appointed weeks*. *Those that sow in tears shall, without fail, reap in joy*, ^{5, 6} Psalm 126:5, 6. Christ told his disciples, at parting (²⁰ John 16:20), *You shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy*. Gladness is sure to the *upright in heart*, to those only that are sincere in religion. *The joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment*. There is no serenity without a lasting sincerity,

II. The rules that are given for Zion's joy.

1. Let it be a pure and holy joy. “You that love the Lord Jesus, that *love his appearing* and kingdom, that love his word and his exaltation, see that you hate evil, the evil of sin, every thing that is offensive to him and will throw you out of his favour.” Note, A true love to God will show itself in a real

hatred of all sin, as that abominable thing which he hates. The joy of the saints should likewise confirm their antipathy to sin and divine comforts should put their mouths out of taste for sensual pleasures.

2. Let the joy terminate in God (v. 12): *Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous.* Let all the streams of comfort, which flow to us in the channel of Christ's kingdom, lead us to the fountain, and oblige us to *rejoice in the Lord*. All the lines of joy must meet in him as in the centre. See ~~<100>~~Philippians 3:3; 4:4.

3. Let it express itself in praise and thanksgiving: *Give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.* Whatever is the matter of our rejoicing ought to be the matter of our thanksgiving, and particularly the holiness of God. Those that hate sin themselves are glad that God does so, in hopes that therefore he will not suffer it to have dominion over them. Note,

(1.) We ought to be much in the remembrance of God's holiness, the infinite purity, rectitude, and perfection of the divine nature. We must be ever mindful of his holy covenant, which he has confirmed with an oath *by his holiness*.

(2.) We ought to give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness, not only give him the glory of it as it is an honour to him, but give him thanks for it as it is a favour to us; and an unspeakable favour it will be if, through grace, we are *partakers of his holiness*. It is God's holiness which, above all his attributes, the angels celebrate. ~~<200>~~Isaiah 6:3, *Holy, holy, holy*. Sinners tremble, but saints rejoice, *at the remembrance of God's holiness*, ~~<300>~~Psalms 30:4.