

A New Song

Psalm 98:1-9

Series: Exalt the LORD our God – Fall 2021

Preaching Date: October 31, 2021

Worship: Sing to the Lord a New Song

Key Sentence: Let what God has done and will do lead you to celebrate Him right now.

Outline:

I. Past Salvation (Psalm 98:1-3, Hebrews 12:18-21)

II. Present Celebration (Psalm 98:4-6, Hebrews 12:22-24)

III. Future Culmination (Psalm 98:7-9, Hebrews 12:25-29)

Psalm 98:1-9 A PSALM.

¹Oh 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. ²The LORD has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. ³He 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.

Hebrews 12:18–21 For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest ¹⁹and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. ²⁰For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” ²¹Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”

⁴Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! ⁵Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody! ⁶With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD!

Hebrews 12:22–24 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

⁷Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! ⁸Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together ⁹before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

Hebrews 12:25–29 See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. ²⁶At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” ²⁷This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹for our God is a consuming fire.

A New Song Psalm 98:1-9

Past, Present and Future. This is one of the most common outlines in the history of thought. For many of us the first example that comes to mind is *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens with its ghost of Christmas Past, ghost of Christmas Present and ghost of Christmas yet to come. This outline is also used for all kinds of non-fiction writing, from the story of gold to the story of houses to the therapeutic use of telling your own story as past, present and future. As a preacher I often found that a “past, present, future,” outline was easy to impose on many Scripture passages. I told myself I’d avoid it when possible. Yet this week I have chosen a past, present, future outline for Psalm 98. For two reasons. First, I think that outline really reflects the structure of the Psalm. What God has done and what God will do leads us to celebrate Him right now. Tremper Longman’s commentary says verses 1-3 are “Israel, praise God your Victor in the past,” verses 4-6 are “All the earth, praise God your King in the present,” and the last verses are “All of creation, praise God your Judge in the future.” That’s roughly the outline we’ll use, though I’ve simplified it a bit.

Another reason for this approach is to avoid repetition. I love preaching through long sections of Scripture, but sometimes they get repetitive. The Psalms use repetition to reinforce key truths. This psalm, repeats some of what’s in Psalm 95 and a good deal of Psalm 96. We studied those Psalms two and three weeks ago. But by using the outline, “past, present, future,” I’m able to give a different perspective on some of the same words we’ve already studied. I’m also free to bring in a different Scripture as an example of the same outline. The second Scripture we’ll look at today is from Hebrews, chapter 12, where the past example is the people of Israel standing before Mount Sinai, the present is us standing spiritually in a heavenly Jerusalem, and the future is when heaven and earth come together in God’s eternal kingdom.

Let’s begin by remembering God’s great rescue, salvation and provision. Psalm 98:1-3 *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. ²The LORD has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. ³He 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.*

You’ve already noticed the similarity to Psalm 96, “sing a new song.” Why? “for He has done marvelous things.” We’re not told what things he’s talking about.

As one commentator says “The psalmist does not explain the historical details of the victory. The purposeful ambiguity of the background moves the worshiper from a reflection of one event to the worship of the Redeemer-God, by whom his people have been delivered many times.” This psalm is a fill-in-the-blank outline where each person can worship for the marvelous work God has done in their life, their circumstances, or the last Scripture they studied. And the new song, as we said, is not necessarily a new composition. You’ve don’t have to be a composer, but it’s a new to you or a renewed way of expressing praise.

The next phrase, “His right hand and his mighty arm have worked salvation for him,” personalizes it. The formal word is “anthropomorphizes” it. God doesn’t have in his essential nature a right hand or a left one, nor an arm, nor a leg, nor an eye, nor an ear. God is a spirit, the invisible God. But God consistently speaks of himself in Scripture in human terms so we can understand and even picture his power and his rescues, and so that we can understand that the God of the universe is working consistently and personally on our behalf. What happens in the world is not chance or circumstance – it is God’s right hand at work, it is the power of God’s own arm at work, it is a salvation he had planned.

The word salvation, is huge in the Old Testament. It essentially means being brought out of tight place to a wide place, a place of freedom. It’s used 353 times. It can refer to a human rescue. Moses saved the daughters of Jethro when evil shepherds drove their flocks from the well. But mostly it is God who saves. Exodus 14:30 “Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians,” Every time God raised up a judge in the book of Judges he saved them, through the judge. God saved his people through the hand of David. Yet over and over David calls God his savior, his deliverer, not just from enemies, but from his own sin and guilt. Psalm 51:14 “Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation.” This ultimately points to Jesus. In Isaiah 52, just before the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, Isaiah says “The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.” Therefore when the angel announces the birth of Jesus he says “You will call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.” Indeed, Jesus is God the Son, the one at the right hand of God whose sacrificial death and victorious resurrection are the marvelous work by which God has worked salvation to rescue us.

Verse 2 “The LORD has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.” This is the third psalm in a row that sees that what God does he does not just for Israel, but as a witness to the whole world.

When God rescues his people from slavery, evil or oppression it is a witness to his righteousness in the sight of all the nations. In fact salvation and righteousness are often found together. In Isaiah 45, where God is comparing himself to worthless idols, he says “Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. ²²Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!” God’s righteousness is ultimately displayed through his salvation. Paul teaches in Romans 1 that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes . . . ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

But the righteousness of God is not the only thing revealed by his past rescue. Verse 3 “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.” God’s marvelous works on our behalf show his steadfast love, his hesed. By now I hope you’ve got the Michael Card definition memorized. Hesed is when someone who owes me nothing gives me everything. This is what God has done, through his covenant faithfulness, through his rescues from Egypt and Babylon, through his forgiveness and redemption, and through the finished work of Christ. He owes us nothing except just punishment. He gives us everything through the righteous sacrifice and victory of Christ.

So we sing a new song because we remember all the things God has done in the past, rescuing his people from slavery, giving them the law, giving them the land, giving them the kingdom, giving them a remnant even when they sinned, bringing them back from exile in Babylon, and giving them the promise of the Messiah. And we remember all that God has done for us in sending that Messiah, Jesus, to live a holy life, to die a sacrificial death, to rise in victory and to save the unrighteous by faith through the gift of his righteousness.

Hebrews 12 has a section in it that follows the same past-present-future outline we’re seeing in Psalm 98. Verses 18-21 of Hebrews 12 look back on one particular episode of God’s marvelous works for his people, the revelation of himself in giving of law on Mt. Sinai. Hebrews 12:18–21 *For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest ¹⁹and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. ²⁰For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” ²¹Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”*

Last week we saw the transcendent power of God in Psalm 97, and we used the giving of the law on Sinai as an example of his volcanic presence. The New uses the same example. But notice, it says you have not come to that mountain. The author of Hebrews looks at the past to prepare his readers for the realities of the present and the future. He calls the presence of God on Mount Sinai, “what may be touched.” It was a physical manifestation of the invisible God, a theophany, a swirling tempest mass of smoke and darkness and fire. There was, according to Exodus 19, a very great trumpet blast that grew louder and louder. Then the voice of God spoke the words of the Law, the ten commandments. Exodus 20 tells us that “when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off ¹⁹and said to Moses, ‘You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.’” By God’s presence the mountain was made holy, just as God’s presence in the burning bush made the ground around it holy, separate from the common things of the world. So holy was Mount Sinai that any person or even beast that touched the mountain was to be stoned to death. Even Moses, Hebrews 12 reports, was terrified and trembled with fear.

This giving of the law was a marvelous work of God. It is a perfect example of the kind of thing Psalm 98 calls us to praise God for, to sing a new song because of his righteousness and steadfast love. But the author of Hebrews does not call his readers to simply look at the past, like a bunch of cows staring at a stranger. Instead, like the Psalm, he calls us to celebrate now, in this moment.

The Psalm does this very simply in verses 4-6: *Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!* ⁵*Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody!* ⁶*With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD!*

This is a series of present tense immediate commands. You have seen what God has done in the past, his marvelous works, and for us especially his marvelous work in Jesus, and so you burst forth into praise. The positive thing about this is that God doesn’t need to have done something new to evoke a new song. All these great deeds and rescues are enough. What Jesus did was enough, we don’t another miracle today or any day since then. Demanding another miracle today is like telling the guy who jumped into the ocean and pulled you out when you were drowning that you won’t be happy until he also does a magic trick. No, your gratitude and praise are based on the rescue, not on any comparatively minor provisions since then, though God does give these.

God's salvation is so marvelous that it compels all the earth to make a joyful noise, to break forth into joyous song, to sing praise. It's a command to each of us here today individually, to all of us as a community, and to all the earth, which means all the people of the earth and the whole of creation itself. Not only is this response to be with our joyous song and joyful noises, it is to be, verse 5, with the lyre and the sound of melody! ⁶With trumpets and the sound of the horn. Instruments like these were used in Israel in the worship of the tabernacle and temple, in the many religious festivals and celebrations and in what we would call secular celebrations, such as military victories. We don't know what the resultant worship sounded like, but we know that it was a joyful noise, celebrating the mighty works God had done for his people.

All three of these verses are present tense. The work of God in the past leads to the celebration of God in the present. Isn't that the way it ought to be for us? We may want our new song to celebrate a new work of God. And he does do new works, in and for his people. But we don't need new works. What God has already done is enough to justify celebration now and into eternity.

This is where our parallel passage in Hebrews really shines, because while it depicts worship in the present tense, as Psalm 98 does, it's focused on the who, not the how. Listen to Hebrews 12:22–24 *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

We're no longer looking back to the Mount Sinai, at the terrifying holy presence of the Lord. Instead the author says, you've come to Mount Zion. This could be looking back, Mount Zion being the name of the temple mount in Jerusalem. But as he goes on it's clear that's not what he's talking about. You've come, present tense, to the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem. The book of Hebrews talks about longing for the city yet to come whose architect and builder is God. But now, in the present tense, this author is telling us, you're already there, in your spirit through the Holy Spirit. This great celebration is going on now. You can't see these spiritual realities, but when you worship, and when we gather to worship as believers, we are meeting with the living God, who was and is and is to come, and we are spiritually present in that most holy place, and we are joining tens of thousand of angels, myriads of angels in festal gathering.

We worship with “the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.” The word assembly there is “ekklēsia,” normally translated “church.” So we worship as part of the church universal, and we worship with the firstborn. Jesus is the firstborn from among the dead, and the firstborn of many brothers and so his brothers, the redeemed, whose names are enrolled in heaven can also be called the firstborn. They are probably believers who have gone ahead, who have fallen asleep in Christ, whose souls now worship in that heavenly Jerusalem not yet united with the new earth. Yet in a real, if invisible sense we stand there with them and in our worship we come to God the judge of all. No one of us deserves to stand in that assembly, but those who are there are the spirits of the righteous made perfect. They are those the judge finds no cause to accuse or to condemn. And in this moment, in our own assembly, we are with them. We are not yet spirits made perfect, as we will be if we depart to be with God before the Last Day, but we are the righteous, declared perfect in Jesus.

And that’s the climax, the main point. In the present moment we come to Jesus, who is the mediator of a new covenant. A mediator is a go-between, one who speaks on behalf of God to men, and one who speaks on behalf of men to God. The book of Hebrews focuses on the new covenant prophesied in Jeremiah, and describes how Christ, by his sacrifice is it’s mediator. Hebrews 9:15 “Therefore he [Jesus] is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.” The death of Jesus redeems us from sin and grants us eternal life. It is his life, his blood poured out, sprinkled on the altar of sacrifice in our place that creates this new covenant. Jesus says of the cup at the Lord’s supper. “Drink of it, all of you,²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” This is the sprinkled blood of Hebrews 12:24 that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. The blood of Abel cries out of unjust death. But the blood of Jesus speaks of redeemed life.

The present celebration is not just singing and instruments. Those can be the instruments of celebration, but the content of celebration is what God has done, all of his marvelous works of creation and history. Hebrews 12 calls us into our redemption in Jesus Christ, in our present reality of being in the presence of God through Jesus. But even this is not the last word. What God has done also leads us to trust in the future culmination of all God has promised. Psalm 98:7-9 *Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it!*⁸ *Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together*⁹ *before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.*

We've heard verses 7 and 8 earlier in this series. "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." This is repetition for effect from Psalm 96 verses 11-12, and even earlier than that, from 1st Chronicles 16. This depiction of the joy and celebration that all creation will participate in when the Lord returns is an image God wants us to dwell on and be part of.

But verse 9 tells us what all this celebration celebrates, the future culmination of the Lord's big plan, his big story. "For he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity." He brings justice. He says "enough" to all the injustice and unrighteousness that fills this broken and dark world and he gives sinful people what they deserve. We've seen this several times since this summer when we asked "How could a loving God send people to hell." We've discovered, I hope, that we want justice. We want those who abuse and oppress to not get off scot-free, those who harm the innocent and murder the helpless. We've also discovered that we need righteousness. We ourselves deserve judgment, not because of some world class crime, but because of rebellion against God and selfishness in all our ways. Finally, we've discovered, as we saw just now, that God offers us righteousness as a free gift through the sacrifice of Jesus the Son, his blood which speaks that better word. In Him we can look forward with expectation to the culmination and celebration of all that God has promised, when He comes to judge the world with righteousness and its peoples with equity.

Hebrews 12 looks forward to the same culmination. Verses 25-29 *See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. ²⁶At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." ²⁷This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹for our God is a consuming fire.*

Verses 25 and 26 look briefly back again to Sinai, to the warning of God that anyone who touched the holy mountain would die. At that time his voice shook the earth. But a day is coming when God will shake not only the earth but also the heavens, and in that day the shaking of God's judgment will remove all the things that can be shaken, all the things that deserve judgment, so that all the things that he has made unshakeable can remain for eternity.

The quote is from Haggai 2:6–7 “For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. ⁷And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts.” I believe the primary application of that prophecy is to the glory of the temple of Israel during the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. But the book of Hebrews, and the book of Revelation make it clear that there is a final shakeout after that, when evil will be no more and righteousness established for all eternity.

Therefore, verse 28, “let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹for our God is a consuming fire.” Do you see how that ties everything together? The past work of God in salvation, leads to a future kingdom that we will receive, that cannot be shaken, and that compels us to celebrate in the present moment with worship that is full of reverence and awe.

As we close, let me challenge you with a three step application. Each of the psalms in this series offers the opportunity to stretch our brains for deeper worship. Have they done this for you? Are you finding yourself daily more engaged with God’s eternity, or God’s power, or God’s majesty, or God’s justice? If not, there is nothing more I can do for you. You’ve got to do it yourself. Suggestion 1: open your Bible in some orderly way, reading the histories or the prophecies or the psalms, reading the Gospels or the Acts or the letters, and find out what God has done. Put in one sentence one of his concrete acts for his people since creation. Suggestion 2: open your Bible in some orderly way and find out what God has promised. Put in one sentence one of his thousands of promises to his people. Suggestion 3: leave your Bible open and worship God for that marvelous work and for that faithful promise. Tell God in as many words as you can find, how great he is for that marvelous work and for that faithful promise.

I believe that’s what the writer of this Psalm is calling for, and I believe that’s what the writer of Hebrews has done. Go and do likewise. Let what God has done and will do lead you to celebrate Him right now.