

## Sing to the Lord a New Song

You won't need to get very far in the reading of the Bible to discover that God commands that He's to be worshiped by mankind created in his image. He also determines a special day in which mankind is to worship Him. In Genesis 2, we see that the seventh day is set apart especially by God after the completion of creation. This would be a special day of worship and rest later enshrined into the 10 commandments and pointing forward to the end times worship and rest in the consummation (Hebrews 4 and 12).

After the fall of Adam and Eve into sin in Genesis 3, they're driven out of the Garden of Eden. Chapter 4 picks up the subject of worship after the fall and begins with the birth of Cain followed by the birth of Abel. We're told immediately that Abel is a shepherd ("keeper of the sheep") and Cain is a farmer ("worker of the ground"). "In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So, Cain was very angry, and his face fell." (Genesis 4:3-5).

This narrative has induced any number of inquiries — e.g., "Why did God accept Abel's offering and reject Cain's offering?" The writer of Hebrews gets at the heart of the matter when he shares that Abel's offering, unlike Cain's, was given by faith (Hebrews 11:4). "And without faith it's impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him," or some translations read, "... earnestly seek him." (Hebrews 11:6).

It matters that our worship of God is given by grace through faith; it matters that our worship is from the heart and not merely external-only words and works. Abel worshiped God by faith, from the heart — not merely externally. Later, God would give very detailed instructions in the Old Testament for worship — which included not only animal sacrifices which pointed forward to Christ, the perfect sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 10:12), but later the specific place in which he would be worshiped. But always, the worship of God that he accepts is from the heart by grace through faith.

Today in Psalm 149, we'll begin to see that the glorious worship of God by His people from the heart results in external actions of witness to others as we show by our words and actions that God is faithful and His plans will always come to pass. Because God's ways are true, we'll see that telling others about the gospel will either bring about salvation or ultimate judgment for those who will not turn from their sin and turn to Jesus Christ. This, too, can only happen by grace through faith.

I want to begin our look at this psalm today beginning with *the Church Gathered for Worship*.

As we begin this psalm today, let me note that the context of this psalm is post-exilic. That is to say that this worship celebration takes place after Judah is released from captivity in Babylon

and after the Temple has been rebuilt. It's likely that this psalm is referencing the time of Nehemiah and the building of the wall. Let's look at the first part of this section by looking at the people's exuberant praise.

This psalm — as the others in this series of psalms of praise (Psalm 146-150) — begins and ends with the command to worship. “Praise the Lord!” This is followed by another command to: “Sing to the Lord a new song.” We see this same phrase in other psalms, including Psalm 96:1-2, where the command is followed closely by, “... tell of his salvation from day to day.”

I'll also reference Psalm 98:1: “Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.”

With just these two examples, it seems best to see the “new song” as simply a way to call God's people to acknowledge that — because God is faithful to his covenant people — he is continually providing new blessings just as he provides new mercies every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23). God is continually at work in our lives in the present, and we have no doubt about his promises for the future and we can't help but share this with others. The church gathers for worship and scatters for witnessing, but let's not get ahead of ourselves.

Verse 2 seems to look back to the previous psalm. It's a reminder to Israel that the Covenant God is their “maker” or “creator.” God calls the “children of Zion,” that is to say, all his covenant people, to “rejoice in their King.”

We know that at this time in redemptive history, the people of God no longer had a human king to rule over them. And yet, their worship shows that their trust was in God who is truly the King of his people.

What a blessing to know that Christians have such a faithful, loving and benevolent King who “rules and defends us.” God is continually at work for good in the lives of his people (Romans 8:28) What a blessing to “Sing to the Lord a new song.”

*The Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton.*