

The LORD Takes Pleasure in His People

In my previous article, we began our look at Psalm 149 by noting that God commands worship from mankind made in his image. I began verses 1-2 under the heading:

—The Church Gathered for Worship

Let's go further in the Psalm as we get an up close and personal look at the worship of the people of Judah in the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem after their release from captivity in Babylon. Along with the "gladness and rejoicing" in verse 2, as we come to verse 3, the worship leader further encourages the exuberant worship of the people. "Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with the tambourine and lyre!" We see this same type of thing in other times of Old Testament celebration. For example, in Exodus 15:20-21, after the children of Israel had come out of Egypt and the horses and riders of Pharaoh were drowned in the sea, Moses' sister, Miriam "took a tambourine in her hand and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. And Miriam sang to them: 'Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.'" After David had defeated Goliath, in 1 Samuel 18:6 we read: "As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments." With just these examples, we can conclude that when God blessed his people—and certainly when he blessed them in times of victory over their enemies—there would be singing, dancing and music to celebrate God's covenant faithfulness.

Let me just note that the question has been asked about "dancing" in worship in our 21st Century, local church context. Some have highlighted the truth that, in the Old Testament worship of Israel, celebrating by dancing was mostly seen *outside of the temple* worship. Along with this, dancing in scripture is often used as a *metaphor* for being joyful rather than *literal* dancing. For example: "You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness." (Ps. 30:11) Keep in mind that Psalm 30 tells us that it is written as "A Song of dedication at the dedication of the Temple." As far as our passage from Psalm 149 goes, John Calvin writes that the "musical instruments that he mentions were peculiar to the infancy of the Church, nor should we foolishly imitate *a practice* which was intended for God's ancient people." The mention of "a practice" in that quote, I take that to mean the practice of dancing. It's true that some musical instruments—especially the tambourine—were connected to pagan rituals and pagan worship and literal dancing was connected to the worship of the golden calf in Exodus 32:19.

New Testament worship is different from Old Testament worship in that Jesus Christ fulfills the types and shadows of Old Testament worship. In Jesus we meet with God (John 1:14); Jesus' body is the temple (John 2:10); Jesus is the perfect sacrifice (Heb. 10:1-8); his death for sin and his resurrection should move us to ongoing praise (Rom. 9:5; 11:33-36); Jesus is the ultimate high priest (Heb. 8); all the tabernacle and temple furniture including the table for bread and the

golden lampstand point to Christ who is the “bread of life” (John 6:35) and the “light of the world.” (John 8:12) The New Testament nowhere prescribes dancing in worship and therefore, in Reformed churches dancing has not held any place in corporate worship. Dancing is not the primary focus of the passage, so we’ll leave it at that for now.

Notice in verse 4 that we’re given a very important reason why God’s people should worship him. “For, the LORD *takes pleasure in his people*; he adorns the humble with salvation.” The Hebrew word translated “humble” carries the meaning of those who are “lowly, meek, afflicted, or weak.” Scholars have suggested that, in the context, it seems that the Psalmist is pointing to the fact that God’s people are “helpless apart from God’s help.” The word translated “salvation” in the context may speak of the “deliverance” of God’s people from harm. Or it could also mean that the people of God are “adorned” with “prosperity” simply meaning God’s provision of all that’s good in their lives according to his perfect will. We go now from Exuberant Praise to:

—Exit with Ongoing Joy

Verse 5 points us to the time *after* the gathered corporate worship of God and our *exit strategy*. “Let the godly exult in glory...” The phrase translated “exult in glory” seems to mean that God’s people are to rejoice in the fact that God has poured out glory and honor on them which is clearly seen by the nations around them. The phrase translated, “let them sing for joy on their beds” is important. In different times in the history of Israel, the night had been a time of fear that God had abandoned them because of their sin. For example, in Psalm 6:6 we read: “I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with weeping.” And yet, there are other times when we find that God’s people have tasted the blessings of God, and it affects them in positive ways even into the night. In Psalm 63:5-6 we read: “My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed and meditate on you in the watches of the night.” In the Psalm before us what we’re being told, at the very least, shows us that God’s people can take great comfort in the fact that our God is faithful and that he is with us and with our children. Even as we lie on our beds in the dark hours of the night there’s no reason for unhealthy fear and anxiety but rather, there’s every reason to “sing for joy.”

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