

Introduction:

A. Illus.: It's probably been 20 years since I read this story in the newsletter of Wycliffe Bible Translators. Bernie May, who was then the U.S. Division Director, wrote of returning to a remote area of Peru for the dedication of a new Bible translation in the Ticuna language. He had worked in that area as a rookie missionary pilot and now he returned, many years later. The dedication was scheduled for Easter Sunday. He wrote, "*The people started arriving on Good Friday, coming by boats up the Amazon. I stood on the bank, watching and listening. Long before they appeared, I could hear them singing hymns down the river... Many of these people had never seen each other before. It was like a great, joyous family reunion of brothers and sisters who had never met.*"

"Friday night we had a service... I had never heard such enthusiastic singing and it seemed to me like everyone had some kind of musical instrument. One man had a tin can with rocks in the bottom... a cross between a tambourine and a snare drum..."

Bernie found out that the songs they were singing so enthusiastically were all Scripture; it was how they had memorized the Bible.

"'God has put a new song in our hearts,' the song leader grinned. 'So I have written 43 Ticuna songs. The last one was John 14:2-3. Do you want to hear it?'"

"I was eager. Several men were standing around and the song leader called them over. They began to sing. I couldn't understand a word [but]... tears formed in my eyes as I remembered the English translation: 'In my Father's house are many mansions... I got to prepare a place for you.'"

On Easter there was a great celebration, climaxed when the translator formally handed the brand-new New Testament to the pastor who had so long helped with the work. Soon every Bible was taken.

May wrote, "*I lay awake for a long time that night. All through the jungle, around little campfires, Indians were singing the Scripture in their own language.*" [#1850]

- B. We have more in common with those people singing in the jungle by campfires than we do with our neighbors sipping Starbucks this morning as they read their papers. When God saves people, he forges us into a new nation, and at the heart of this new national culture are our songs of praise.
- C. Today we look at Psalm 149. Again, we have a *hallelujah* psalm, a song that begins and ends with "Praise the LORD"—Hallelujah! This one celebrates our privileges as God's people. It is a kind of **national anthem**. Follow with me as I read it... Wow! That took kind of a nasty turn there in v.6 didn't it. We're praising God and dancing and all of a sudden—BAM—we're killing people with our double-edged sword. What's with *that!*? Hold that thought.
- D. First, let's look at how this psalm is put together, because that will help us understand its purpose. You can see the "Praise the LORD" at the beginning and end. I think v.6 in the middle is the organizing sentence, the first phrase summarizing what came before, and the second phrase summarizing what comes after. Notice one other thing. There are two synonyms here: *honor* in v.5, and *glory* in v.9. V. 5 says, "*Let the saints rejoice in this honor*" and v.9 says, "*This is the glory of all his saints.*"
- E. **Psalm 149 tells us to praise the LORD because God has made us his people. Then, like many national anthems, we sing our resolve to always love our King and to always defend his honor.**

I. SINCE GOD HAS MADE US HIS PEOPLE HIS PRAISE IS IN OUR MOUTHS (149:1-6a)

I love something **Bruce Thielemann** said a few years ago: "*There is one thing that is part of our worship that is not part of the worship of any other major faith on earth. That is singing. Christianity is the one faith that puts a song in your heart. Confucianism has no chorales. Shintoism has no songs. Islam has no glorias. And atheism has no anthems.*" [#2612] The Psalmist says in v.1, "*Sing to the Lord a new song.*"

- A. We have a new song to sing (v.1). This expression, "*a new song,*" is pretty common in the Bible—especially in Psalms and Revelation. But the Bible never speaks of an "*old song.*" I suspect we looked at an *old song* last week when we heard all creation singing God's praises as Creator. The *new song*, I think, celebrates God as *Re-Creator*, his work as Savior and Deliverer of his people. Creation shows God's glory and strength in one way. His salvation shows a different kind of strength and glory. Illus.:

When I was a freshman at Trinity I decided to walk across the street one Sunday to the Unitarian Church. Their pulpit is a big rock, and they sang songs about nature. I think I remember that their songs recognized God as Creator, but what I remember clearly is how dull the singing was; how joyless. They did not have God's *new song* to sing, because the Unitarians, for all their spiritual flexibility, do not preach salvation through Jesus Christ alone. When we sing of God as Creator—as we did last week in Psalm 148—we do it with joy and wonder, but when we sing our *new song* of salvation, our praise is at its best.

- B. We sing to the LORD as our Maker and King (v.2). For God to be the Maker of creation is an act of infinite genius and power, but here the LORD is the Maker of a nation—a nation of the lost and lame, of the blind and foolish, the nation of the condemned and dying. To be the Maker of his people did not require making men and women from the dust of the earth, but of redeeming men and women from the sentence of death, and rebirthing them as new creations, freed from the curse of sin. Again, as our King he did not gain a nation of the brave and brilliant, but of the poor and afflicted, and from such orphans and rebels he forged a Kingdom of princes and priests.
- C. To praise such a King we pull out all the stops (v.3). The picture here, I think, is that singing alone is not adequate to praise such a God as ours. We must add to our songs all the instruments we have and we must dance as well. I grew up in a church climate where dancing was not done. One commentator I read on this verse must have been from that era because he wrote, *“Other musical instruments are used today, and mercifully the dancing is taboo”* [Scroggie]. Reminds me of our friend, Pearl, who died not too long ago. I heard that near her death she said to someone, *“If I get to heaven and find out dancing is ok, I’m really going to be ticked off!”* The point of our text here is that a King this great deserves all the music we can muster, including our dances. Illus.: Years ago in my previous church we were planning a big musical concert which included a beautiful, soaring tenor-soprano duet entitled, “Mercy Saw Me.” One of the people at that planning meeting was Polly. She worked with our kids’ choir so she was there to help us figure out their part in the performance. Polly was a newer Christian. Her day job was a dance instructor. I hadn’t really thought of it before that moment, but I blurted out, *“Polly, would you like to dance this song while the duet sings.”* She caught her breath, grinned, and she said, *“I’d love that.”* This was way outside my comfort zone, but I’ll never forget our first performance. The singers sang high and sweet, *“Beautiful—that’s how mercy saw me, not what I was, but what I could be, that’s how mercy saw me.”* And Polly danced it; she danced her testimony, and her dance added something that our duet and choir and orchestra couldn’t have said without her. And I wept as I watched.
- D. Now we come to the reason in v.4... The LORD shows delight in us by crowning us, humbled as we are, with salvation. The Heb. word for *humble* points to people who were poor and afflicted, not just meek. They were broken and helpless—and it was their own fault. Yet these are the people God delights in, for he loved them—loved *us*—and saved them. **Salvation, of course, has a name.** The Heb word here is *yeshuah*, the same word behind the name, Jesus. God’s salvation took on flesh. God’s salvation is a God in person. John Wesley translated the words of the saintly Count Zinzendorf this way:
- Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
‘Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.”*
- E. So we rejoice in this glory, this honor (v.5). It is an interesting image—God’s people so overjoyed that they can’t stop singing even when they go to bed. Another way of seeing this is to translate the word *couches* instead of *beds*, with the image being of a great feast and the honored guests gathered on couches around the table. I think that fits the context better here. Remember **Ps. 23**, *“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”* Remember how we’ll sing the Hallelujah chorus as we find our places at the wedding supper of the Lamb?

SUMMARY: All this to say, *“May the praise of God be in their mouths.”* Our praise of God is the glory of our nation as God’s people. We are not at our best when we are studying or even serving. **If you want to know our nation’s glory you must hear us sing!**

Now, what are we going to do about these last verses, which muscle their way into our praise like an uncouth guest at dinner? One commentary I read said that this kind of language might have been o.k. for Old Testament Israel, “*But it ought to require no proof that language like [this] is no warrant for the exhibition of a similar spirit in the Christian Church*” [Perowne]. Many point to this as the language of spiritual warfare—“*we wrestle not against flesh and blood,*” they remind us. The double-edged sword is the Word of God. I see that. But I think these verses mean just what they seem to mean and that there is coming a day when this very truth will indeed be “*the glory of all his saints.*” Let’s read **vv.6-9**...

II. SINCE GOD HAS MADE US HIS PEOPLE HIS SWORD IS IN OUR HANDS (149:6b-9)

- A. To understand these verses, we must remember how bad God’s enemies are. The kings of the earth, throughout all history, have always rebelled against God’s authority to reign. **Ps. 2** says, “*The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. ‘Let us break their chains,’ they say, ‘and throw off their fetters.’*” And when mankind and our rulers rebel against God, everyone suffers. Rebellion against God creates chaos throughout the earth. Injustice, cruelty, corruption, war and the despoiling of the planet.

Furthermore, these rulers of the earth have persecuted God’s beloved people. **Rev. 6:9-10** tells of the martyrs now in heaven who beg for justice. “*They called out in a loud voice, ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’*”

The world has not just refused to bow to God, but they have rejected the Sop he sent to save them. What could possibly be a greater guilt than that?! There is nothing more even the omnipotent God can do! This cannot go on! These enemies of God must be brought down!

- B. Remember, too, how patient and gracious God has been. God is not short-tempered. He never rushes to judgment. The Bible says, “*God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*” [2 Pet. 3:9] When God’s judgment comes on mankind, there will not be anyone—not one person—who would have repented and turned to God had they been given one more day.
- C. Illus.: In Dostoevsky’s famous novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, one brother wrestles with the idea of a world where nothing is ever made right. He cries out, “*I must have justice, or I will destroy myself. And not justice in some remote infinite time and space, but here on earth. Justice that I can see myself. I have believed in it. I want to see it. And if I am dead by then, let me rise again, for if it all happens without me, it will be too unfair.*” [#2422, p.225].

That is why these words of Psalm 149 are so good—Jesus Christ will one day bring justice, and we will be there with him. Turn in your Bibles to **Rev. 17**. In this mysterious passage about the end times, we’re told of 10 kings who align themselves with the Satanic beast. Look at **vv.13-14**: “*They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.*” Now look at **Rev. 19:11-21**... (esp. v.14)

Illus.: Old soldiers sometimes brag about their generals. “*I served under Patton,*” they say, or “*I was with MacArthur.*” We will one day say, “*I rode with Jesus Christ on the day he made all things right, on the day when sin was conquered once and for all, and all those who had resisted God met their Maker. I was there!*” That is why the Psalmist says, “*This is the glory of all his saints.*”

Conclusion

Part of our repertoire as Christians are songs and prayers like Psalm 149—national anthems, in a way, that praise our Maker and King for making us his royal, priestly people. **Here is a song that strengthens our resolve to always love our King and to always defend his honor.**

V.5 says, “*Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds.*” Rather than our beds let’s think of the couches surrounding a royal banquet, in the fashion of the Mideast. We come to this Communion table, mindful of our Savior’s sacrifice, but also full of gratitude. Here we will think quietly and here we will sing, as only the people of God can.