

Horsley Evangelical Church ([www.horsleyec.org.uk](http://www.horsleyec.org.uk))

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### PSALM 47 SOMETHING TO SHOUT ABOUT

Psalm 47 has been described as a *Praise Psalm* – and it certainly calls us to praise the Lord. It's also been described as a *Great King Psalm* - because it's one of a group of Psalms which describe the Lord as *the great King*. But I think the best description of Psalm 47 is that it is *an evangelistic Psalm*, because it is primarily a call for the nations to *seek* the Lord - who is not only Israel's king but theirs too. And yet the meaning of the Psalm doesn't lie on the surface. It is not at first obvious why the nations are being called to rejoice in the Lord and praise him. But that is because the Psalm is prophetic. It's meaning is only understood by thinking of the Lord Jesus, his ministry and the good news of his salvation to all the nations.

For us, Psalm 47 is one that reminds us how fortunate we are if we are Christians. It's a Psalm that reminds us of the glory of heaven and our inheritance, but also our responsibility to proclaim the gospel throughout the world. Let's look at it this morning under two headings. First, in verses 1-5 we find a call to **rejoice in our future inheritance**. **Read verses 1-5.**

The song begins with the Psalmist, who belongs to the people of Israel, calling on the nations to *clap their hands and shout to God with cries of joy* (1). And this *clapping of hands and shouting to God with cries of joy* is about the nations rejoicing greatly in some wonderful news. It's the sort of behaviour that people display when they have heard what we might call *the best news ever*.

The commentators take us back to a time in the Old Testament when the people of Israel literally did this. It's recorded in 2 Kings 11 when young Joash is proclaimed their King. His coronation effectively removed his wicked grandmother Athaliah from the throne. She had murdered the whole royal family and assumed the throne for herself. But God had hidden one of her grandsons in the temple. And when young Joash was just 7 he was proclaimed king. And the people were so happy to hear this news. **Read 2 Kings 11:12.** There was such relief and joy throughout the land because the wicked reign of Athaliah had come to an end and the rightful king was enthroned. The people rejoiced as they looked forward to better times.

But this reaction (of clapping the hands and shouting to God with cries of joy) could describe our response to *any* very good news. When a loved one with a serious illness is suddenly given a clean bill of health, you might well react in this way. When you unexpectedly inherit a very large amount of money you might well clap your hands. When a son or daughter, presumed dead, is suddenly found alive and well, you would probably shout for joy. It represents our reaction to the very best of news. And this is how the Psalm opens. **Read verse 1 again.** But then the Psalmist proceeds to tell the nations about the Lord's love for *Israel* and how in love, the Lord settled them into their own land - the land of Canaan.

**Read verses 2-5.** It's interesting that the Assyrians described their king, Sennacherib, as *the great king*. (We thought about him last week and his attack on Jerusalem being a possible background to Psalm 46). But the Lord is described here in Psalm 47 as *the great King over all the earth*. He is the Lord Most High and is awesome. And as such he gave his chosen people Israel their inheritance – the lands of other nations whose sin before the Lord has reached its limit. So verse 3 describes how the nation of Israel subdued other nations and brought them to submission. And we know that the Lord gave them the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Gergashites and Jebusites (Genesis 15:19-21).

This was not because Israel was stronger than these other nations, but only because the Lord loved them and gave them this land as their own. The land was his to give because he is the great

King. And in love, the Lord gave this land to Israel as their inheritance. And the land was famously beautiful. It's described here as *the pride of Jacob* (4). A land of plenty - of milk and honey. A wonderful gift, given according to promises and given in love.

And then we read – **read verse 5**. This verse has been interpreted in different ways – not all of them helpful. But I think it's best to understand it as referring to the Lord *finishing* his work of settling Israel into their inheritance. The Lord initially 'went down' to lead the Israelites into every battle, and his presence, symbolized by the ark of the Lord, went before them. But then after the battles were won and his people were settled into Canaan, the Lord went 'back up' again, as it were - he ascended to his heavenly throne. And so in verse 5 the Psalmist is acknowledging God's help and the victory the Lord gave Israel.

And yet at this point in the Psalm, we need to remember *why* this story is being told. This story of the Lord settling his people into their inheritance is told because the Psalmist is urging the nations to rejoice greatly, to clap their hands and shout to God with cries of joy (1). But we ask, why are *the nations* to rejoice in this?! Have we missed something?! Why are the nations to rejoice in Israel's inheritance and in Israel's God?

Is the Psalmist mocking the nations? Is verse 1 said to them sarcastically? No, he is not mocking. So is the Psalmist expecting the nations to be happy for Israel? Are they to be happy and throw a party because the Israelites, having come out of Egypt, have settled into a land of their own? But that doesn't make sense. It's difficult to see why the nations should rejoice in *this*. What do they care if Israel lives in Canaan?

The answer to the question as to why the nations should rejoice in Israel's inheritance is not obvious. Part of the reason must be that this God is not only Israel's God, but in fact, *the Lord most High* and therefore the God of every nation. He is the *great King over all the earth*. But in addition to this, the nations are being called to rejoice greatly because in love, this same God will give to *them* a wonderful inheritance as well.

This reason is not immediately obvious, but I think it is the reason, and I think it becomes clearer as we read on in the Psalm. This 'theory' is backed up by other Old Testament prophecies which look forward to the coming Messiah and to the blessings he would bring to all the nations. That the nations shall be blessed by the Lord is prophesied in different Old Testament books - in Isaiah for example. **Read Isaiah 2:2-3**. Isaiah is looking forward to the blessing of God that will come to the nations through the gospel. Another example - **read Isaiah 56:6-8**.

And so this same rejoicing of the nations at what is to come is also anticipated by Isaiah in various places in his prophecy. **Read Isaiah 55:1-3, 12, 13**. A time of extraordinary joy is anticipated by Isaiah. But if you look at Isaiah 55, this invitation and anticipated joy is not given to *Israel*. Israel's invitation to such things is found in chapter 54. But chapter 55 is spoken to *the nations* – all of them. And it anticipates this inheritance which the Lord, in love, will give to all the nations. And so, just as Israel rejoiced in their earthly inheritance, the whole world is to rejoice in a far greater inheritance yet to come from the Lord.

So these verses, and particularly the opening verse of our Psalm are prophetic, pointing forward to the coming of our Lord Jesus and to the inheritance which he will give his people. This inheritance concerns the new heavens and the new earth which the Lord is yet to create. But this is made available to us by the Lord Jesus.

When the times reached their fulfilment, the Lord Jesus came down; he came down to earth from heaven. And he came to engage in a great mission and to do a great work. The Saviour lived our life yet was without sin, and then he died our death on the cross of Calvary. But on the cross, Jesus defeated the great enemy, Satan. And by his death on the cross Christ made a way for all nations to be blessed, to receive the forgiveness of sins and a great inheritance. And at the end of his earthly life,

the Lord Jesus commissioned his disciples to go to all nations and tell this good news. And the apostles were commanded to make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

And then we are told that *the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven*. And really, that is what this rather strange verse 5 is pointing forward to. **Read verse 5 again**. After Christ's work of securing our inheritance he ascended back into heaven where he sits at the Father's right hand. But again this ascension speaks of victory and a finished work. And this is something to greatly rejoice in. It is the best news ever. For it means eternal salvation and eternal glory in heaven to whoever will come. And so we are called to **rejoice in our future inheritance**

But then in verses 6-9 there is a call to **praise the Lord for our future gathering**. **Read verses 6-9**. The second section therefore begins like the first, with an enthusiastic call to the nations – this time to praise the Lord. The *rejoicing* called for in verse 1 is anything but half hearted. And now the *praise* that is called for is anything but half hearted.

Five times in just two verses, the nations are called to *praise the Lord*. And they are called to do it in song. It is to be a joyful praise of the Lord. Again, as in the first section, the people are told that the Lord is King over all the nations, not just Israel. He reigns over the nations. He is seated on his holy throne. But the question now is, why are the nations being called to praise the Lord. The answer is found in verse 9. **Read verse 9 again**. They are to praise the Lord because the nobles and kings of all the nations are assembled and gathered before the Lord.

The important phrase is that they are assembled as *the people of the God of Abraham* (9). And as such, they have received the blessing of God. This takes us back to the promises that God gave Abraham. **Read Genesis 12:1-3**. It's the last phrase that interests us here. God promised Abraham that all peoples on earth will be blessed through him. And in verse 9 this is what we are seeing. These nobles and kings represent their people. And so the picture is that people from every nation have been gathered before the God of all the earth.

It's another prophetic vision concerning the result of the gospel being preached to the nations. Through this witness, the great King of all the earth will gather people from every tribe, language and people to be his and to receive this great inheritance.

And the New Testament speaks about this promise to Abraham being fulfilled. "So then he (*Abraham*) is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised (*i.e. the Gentiles*) in order that righteousness (*the righteousness of Christ*) might be credited to them" (Romans 4:11).

And this is what has happened to all those around the throne of God in verse 9. They are Gentiles – uncircumcised people from the different nations. But they have been credited with the righteousness of Christ as they have believed the gospel. And the Psalmist calls the nations to praise the Lord for this.

**Then read Galatians 3:6-9**. And so our verse 9 is really a vision of all those who have believed the gospel from the nations. And they are truly blessed around the throne of God. God will keep his promise to Abraham and the nations will be blessed through Christ. And this is something to praise God for. **Rejoice in our future inheritance. Praise God for our future gathering.**

Psalm 47 then is an unusual Psalm and not easy to understand at first. But it is a wonderful Psalm, and we can apply it in two ways as we close. *First, it's a Psalm that reminds us how fortunate we are if we are Christians, for it reminds us of the wonder and significance of the gospel*. To be a member of God's kingdom is to be loved by God, forgiven and adopted by his grace and to have a glorious inheritance. This is something to enthusiastically rejoice in and give thanks for each day.

It's no small thing. Something truly amazing has been done for us. The Son of God died for us. A tremendous 'work' has been done by him. The most amazing victory has been achieved by him. And when his mission was finished our Lord Jesus ascended. Now we should clap our hands and shout to God with cries of joy because of this. For we have been cleansed of sin, clothed with righteousness and welcomed into the family of God. We are being prepared to receive an inheritance that no human mind has ever conceived. Canaan and the beauty of the Promised Land is but a picture of our coming inheritance. The real thing is yet to be. And we are to rejoice exceedingly.

When he returns for us, we shall see him as he is. It will be the most wonderful sight we will ever see. This is what we have been waiting for all our life – whether we realise it or not. And then we shall be made like him and we shall be with him. As a bride is with her husband, so we shall be with our Lord. We shall know the full extent of his love. And we shall share in his glory and reign with him. There is nothing so wonderful as this coming inheritance. And Peter tells us it can never perish, spoil or fade, but is kept in heaven for you who are being shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last day. The thought of what is to come ought to thrill us.

But the second application of the Psalm is to remember our responsibility to proclaim the good news and support the proclamation of the gospel throughout the world. For a great gathering is going on before the final assembly. There is a tremendous work going on. The people of the God of Abraham are being gathered in. People from every tribe and language and nation are being gathered in. And there is no greater work than this. There is no greater project than this. And there is no greater privilege in being part of that work. We each have a part to play. We each have been gifted and enabled to contribute in some way. We are all called to be co-workers. The New Testament talks about us sharing in the benefits and blessings of the coming harvest. All shall be gathered. Everyone will be assembled at the end. No one will be missing.

And what a joy to be part of that congregation - the people of God from every age and every nation in perfect fellowship together. But for now, there is work for us to do. We all have a part to play. We are to seek the lost. We are to pray and invite and plead with people to receive Christ. God is at work. Praise him for it. And at the end, all the Father has given the Son shall be gathered. And we shall be there.