

Session 2

October 21, 2018

A PRAYER OF PRAISE

Matthew 6:9b; Psalm 96:1-9

I grew up in a small rural church where it seemed the offering could not be taken up without the Doxology being sung. We'd all rise at the appropriate time, the ushers would stoically walk down the aisle, and the brass offering plates would be placed solemnly on the altar table...all to the tune of "Praise God from whom all blessings flow..." Now, a half-century later, I not only remember every word of the Doxology, I kind of miss singing it! Whether he knew it or not, Anglican Bishop Thomas Ken (1637–1711), captured the essence of praise in those four short lines.

Praise is an essential ingredient in our prayer lives. Psalm 22:3 tells us that God "inhabits" the praises of His people. That makes praise the most appropriate starting point in any communication with God. In Psalm 96, the writer presents three reasons why God is worthy of our praise.

Praise Him above all things; He is supreme (vv. 1-3). The significance of the new song is its freshness. New mercies from God and deeper discoveries about God produce a fresh outpouring of awe and wonder toward God. All the earth should praise Him, because all the earth receives His benefits. Three are mentioned specifically. First, His salvation demands it (v. 2). Just as His mercies are new every morning (Lam. 3:23), His salvation should be remembered, and proclaimed every day. Second, His glory demands it (v. 3). God's glory has been defined as His "divine dignity." As a depiction of His holy character, His glory is often manifest as a burning light (see Isaiah 60:1-3). Always, His glory sets Him apart as supreme. Third, He should be praised because His wonderful works demand it (v. 3). From the act of creation to the process of redemption, we are the beneficiaries of all His good works.

Praise Him above all gods; He is exalted (vv. 4-6). These verses contrast the excellency of our Lord with the emptiness found in other so-called gods. He is great, and worthy of our highest praise. Other gods don't compare to Him. They are fake gods, dumb idols, empty figures of impotence. But our Lord is different! He is to be revered. He created everything. His splendor and majesty shine out before Him, so that where He is, His presence is known. Both strength (things like power, nobility, integrity) and beauty (things that are lovely, pleasant, delightful) find their source in our Lord (see James 1:17). They proceed from God's *sanctuary*; His "inner-place." No wonder the prophet proclaimed, "There is none like You, O LORD; You are great, and great is Your name..." (Jer. 10:6).

Praise Him above all people; He is Lord (vv. 7-9). Since He is above all other things and above all other gods, humanity has no choice but to ascribe to Him that which is befitting Him. In this case, *ascribe* means *to give* Him, or *grant* to Him that which is due. The *source* of this praise is the "families of the peoples." The idea here is praise should come from those who are unified by family-like ties; things like a shared past, a striving present, a victorious future. The *elements* of this praise follow in the next few verses. From our mouths, the Lord is to be

acknowledged for His glory and strength (vv. 7-8). He is worthy to receive offerings and worship (vv. 8-9); He is to be revered with the silent awe that accompanies the beauty of His holiness.

Bishop Ken did well...and I just may add his wonderful chorus back into the service this Sunday!

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost! Amen.*