



ENCOUNTERING GOD THROUGH THE PSALMS

STUDY 1: PSALM 96 – GOD IS KING

Start the study by reading the psalm aloud and asking the group for their immediate response to the psalm. What caught their attention? What was their overall impression?

This psalm is one of a group of psalms (47, 93, 95-99) known as enthronement psalms with their key declaration being 'The Lord reigns'. The message of these psalms is that God is not just king over Israel but over the whole earth and there will come a day when God's kingdom will come in its fullness bringing with it both justice and judgment. In the meantime the whole of creation is called to worship Him.

As we go through the psalm we will consider what it teaches us about God and our relationship with Him.

DISCUSS

Psalm 96:1-6. The psalmist encourages the people to praise God.

What are some of the characteristics of God that they are called to praise, proclaim and declare in these verses? Which ones are most significant for you?

DIGGING DEEPER

*'For all the gods of the nations are **idols**, but the LORD made the heavens.'* (Psalm 96:5 NIV) God, the Creator, is contrasted with the 'gods' that are objects made by human hands. In fact worshipping such worthless idols has the effect of making the worshippers themselves worthless. Read 2 Kings 17:5 and Jeremiah 2:5.

We may not be tempted to worship inanimate objects today but there is still a temptation to idolatry whether of celebrity, material possession or even ideas and beliefs that are not biblical. The apostle John ended his letter with a warning about idolatry. *'He is the true God and eternal life. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols'* (1 John 5:20c,21 NIV)

*'Idolatry is the condition of self-deluded sovereignty by which we choose a god, assume it to be self-originating, craft a life system over which it is enthroned and then surrender to it, forgetting that its mastery is a figment of our imagination. In short, creature chooses creature and then deifies it.'*¹ (Harold M. Best p.163)

What parts of our culture or lifestyle can become an idol? How do you think we can we avoid that happening?

'Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns.' (Psalm 96:10 NIV). Notice that the worshippers are to speak it aloud. There is a power in confessing God's kingship and remembering it in our daily lives.

¹ Harold M. Best *Unceasing worship* IVP 2003 USA p.163



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'How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7 NIV)

DISCUSS

How often find yourself confessing God's kingship aloud? Who is in your world who needs to hear the good news that God reigns?

DIGGING DEEPER

*'Worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness; **tremble** before him all the earth' (Psalm 96:9 NIV).* The word 'tremble' is used frequently in the Bible in relation to God's activity and generally it has the sense of people trembling with fear.

However here the context is that of worship and has the sense of trembling with reverence and holy fear at God's greatness. Other verses that imply something similar include Isaiah 66:2; Psalm 119:120, 161 and Proverbs 28:14.

What does it mean to you to tremble before God and to tremble at his Word? How has it helped you to stay faithful to Him?

DISCUSS

'Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth.' (Psalm 96:12 NIV)

The Israelites had a hope that the King would come one day to rule the whole earth and establish His kingdom of righteousness but we have a greater hope because Jesus, the king, has already come and the kingdom is already here although the future fulfillment is still to come.

Read Matthew 12:18-21. This prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus. What does it say about the importance of justice to God?

DIGGING DEEPER

Read Romans 8:18-25. The promise of the King's coming is that creation will be restored to its original harmony before the fall.

Share with each other some of the areas of creation that you look forward to seeing restored.

ACTIVITY

We live in a troubled world and can sometimes feel overwhelmed by the darkness around us. Write down three areas that trouble you about this world and then beside them write 'The Lord reigns'. Take a moment to share some of them with the group.

PRAY TOGETHER