

## Thoughts From Other Minds:

1. Whatever else is doubtful, it is certain that the *Lord reigns*, that the Scriptures lay great stress on this truth, and that both the fact and the truth have vast bearings on the joys and sorrows, hopes and fears of both good and bad men, v. 1. However surrounded and beset by foes human and Satanic, let us fear God and nothing else. His kingdom ruleth over all. Amesius: "The reign of God terrible to the world, if rightly viewed and considered, is with believers a powerful argument to stir them up every way to glorify his name."
2. All this is heightened by the consideration that Christ is King. The God-man reigns.
3. Dickson: "The Lord's people do not worship an unknown God, they know who he is and where to find him, to wit, in his ordinances, on the throne of grace, reconciling the world to himself in Christ: *he sitteth between the cherubim*, v. 1.
4. The supremacy of Christ in the church and in all the world is a cardinal doctrine in the writings of the prophets and apostles, v. 2. Horne: "The power and preëminence of the Redeemer, whom no creature is able to resist, are reasons why all should save themselves, by yielding in time to his sceptre and by taking the benefit of his protection, instead of incurring his displeasure."
5. God is greatly to be praised, v. 3. Especially is God in Christ the wonder of wonders, before whom all the angels of heaven and all the spirits of just men made perfect bow and adore.
6. Amesius: "The rectitude of the administration of his kingdom in the church supplies abundant matter for glorifying God," v. 4. Could men or angels by searching find out one case of error, wrong, or want of equity in the divine administration, the happiness of holy creatures would be at an end." Calvin: "There is nothing that more animates and encourages the faithful to render obedience to God, or inspires them with greater zeal to observe his law, than to find in this course of action that they are the objects of his paternal care, and that the righteousness which he requires from his own people in words, is on his part reciprocated by kind deeds."
7. God's holiness cannot be too often mentioned to the honour of his name, vv. 3, 5, 9. The rectitude of his nature and ways is an element in the 'worship of the temple not made with hands, Isa. 6:3; Rev. 15:3. The more we know of God, the humbler shall we be. The worship of heaven is more profound than that on earth ever is. And the more God's holiness appears, the more vile and abominable must sin appear to be; and the more dreadful our ruin, the more glorious and amazing is salvation by Christ - a salvation which in nothing impinges upon justice or holiness. Therefore let us not measure the service we render, or the humility we exhibit to God. *Let us bow down at his footstool.*

W S Plumer, Doctrinal and Practical Remarks on Psalm 99, *Psalms*, p. 893.

## Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Charge

3 January 2016

**Sermon:** 'Worship Him who is holy' (text: Psalm 99)

**Scripture:** Psalm 99:1-9; 1 Peter 5:1-11

### Sermon Notes

**Introduction:** We begin the New Year with studies in psalms that call us to worship with psalm 99, because of its two-fold call to worship (vs. 5 and 9). This is the only psalm with two calls to worship, and so we expect it will have something basic to teach us about worship good for us to hear at the beginning of another year.

In the Protestant tradition, 'worship' happens in church—prayer, sung praise, tithes and offerings and responding to God' word read and preached with saving faith. Some say this is too narrow, teaching that worship is 'whole-of-life' (cf. Rom 12:1); others regard worship as singing, so the worship leader is the song-leader!

In the scriptures the words translated 'worship' mean 'to prostrate oneself', to fall face down on the ground as an act of submission to a recognised superior. Whether such prostration is 'worship' depends on whether the prostrator is prostrating themselves to someone or thing they believe to be divine.

So 'worship' is submission, and Christian worship is submission to the one living and true God—and from worship comes 'service' (cf. Matt 4:10; Deut 12:30-31). A 'church service' is really as 'service of worship'; worship is submission to God as our God—and that means serving him by obeying him in church and in daily life.

### 1. The Lord's great reign

Psalm 99 is in three parts, each ending with 'he is holy' (cf. Isa 6:3). The Lord is holy, separate from his creation, separate from sin and sinners, so that while loves sinners, he is hostile to their sins.

"Holiness is the harmony of all the virtues. The Lord has not one glorious attribute alone, or in excess, but all glories are in him as a whole; this is the crown of his honour and the honour of his crown. His power is not his choicest jewel, nor his sovereignty, but his holiness." (C. H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*)

God is 'majestic in holiness'; at his presence sinners tremble (Ex 3:4-6; Lk 5:8). So while psalm 97 begins, 'The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad', psalm 99 begins on another note: 'The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake.' These were the golden cherubim upon and over the lid or cover of the Ark of the Testimony (Ex 25:10-22).

The Ark symbolised the presence of the Lord with his people; it led them in the wilderness and into the Promised Land. It was a kind of throne for the invisible God of Israel, and the Ark was in Zion—and so 'Great is the Lord in Zion, he is exalted over all the nations. Let them praise his glorious name; he is holy! (v. 2).

## 2. The Lord's just reign

The psalmist now turns to the effect of the Lord's kingly reign among his people; he loves justice, so he has established equity; in Jacob—among his people—he has done what is just and right (vs. 4-5). Enthroned between the cherubim the Lord gave his people just and right laws (Ex 25:22).

He established equity—fairness, impartiality—and his people were to obey the laws that he had given them to deal fairly and rightly with each other. The rich and the powerful were not to be favoured, nor the poor and the weak discriminated against, for the Lord loves justice; he is holy, and his people are also to be holy.

## 3. The Lord's forgiving reign

While the people were unfaithful and did not obey the laws God gave them, he continued faithful; he gave them faithful leaders who prayed for them against his holy wrath on account of their rebellion, Moses, Aaron and Samuel (vs. 6-7).

These men were not perfect, but they fulfilled the conditions of answered prayer; they did not cherish sin in their hearts; they kept the statutes and the decrees that the Lord had given them and their prayers were effective: the Lord answered them; he was to Israel a forgiving God, though he punished their misdeeds (v. 8).

For example, when Moses was on the mountain with God the people made an idol—a golden calf, and sacrificed to it; the Lord told Moses to leave him alone so that he might destroy them—but Moses prayed for them, and the Lord relented (Ex 32:9ff). The Lord forgave their sin, but struck them with a great plague (Ex 32:35).

How can the Holy One forgive sins? True, he punished their misdeeds—but this was discipline, rather than the justice, the complete destruction they deserved. Because he reigns 'enthroned between the cherubim' (v. 1), over the cover, the *kaphoreth*, often 'mercy seat', but which means 'cover over, pacify, make propitiation'.

On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would enter the Most Holy Place to sprinkle blood on the *kaphoreth*, to confess guilt and to show justice done, not on the sinners who deserved it, but on their substitute, the sacrifice that had died in their place, and so make atonement for the sins of the people (Lev 16).

The Greek OT translates *kaphoreth* by *hilasterion* [propitiation]—and the apostle Paul uses this word to describe Jesus' death on the cross: 'God presented him as a propitiation by his blood' [NIV 'sacrifice of atonement']. By nature we are all under God's wrath; there is 'none righteous, no, not one' (Rom 3:10)—but by the death of Jesus Christ, God had provided a remedy for his wrath (Rom 3:21-26).

God's Old Covenant people had good reason to worship him; we have a better reason; we know him as the God who made propitiation for us by the blood of Christ Jesus his Son, to be received by faith. He is worthy of our worship, worthy that we should serve him, worthy of first place in our everything, for 1. he is God; 2. in Jesus Christ his Son his wrath no longer rests on us, for we are at peace with him.

## My Notes:

### Questions for Reflection:

1. Reflect on the fact that the Hebrew and Greek words translated 'worship' in our English bibles mean 'to prostrate oneself [before God]'; how does this 'fit' with your understanding of worship? What follows from real worship of God?
2. Psalm 99, like Isaiah's vision of the Lord (Isa 6:1-3) and John's vision of heaven (Rev 4:1-11), celebrate the holiness of God. What is common to these scriptures, and what does it tell us about the character of God?
3. How is God holiness revealed in psalm 99? Why does the psalmist call on the nations to praise the Lord's great and awesome name, and on himself and those with him to 'exalt the Lord our God and worship at his footstool (v. 5) or his holy mountain (v. 9)? How might this have present day application?
4. God's wrath is a concept many people want to confine to the Old Testament or dismiss completely. Reflect on the following texts: Matt 3:7; Jn 3:36; Rom 1:18, 2:5, 8, 3:5, 5:9: what do they have to teach us about God's wrath?
5. 'Propitiation' is not an 'easy' word; NIV has 'sacrifice of atonement'; why should we retain it? (cf. Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17; 1 Jn 2:2, 4:10, ESV or NKJV).