

When life is tough and things feel very difficult, it is hard to see how we can praise God. It may seem that things are difficult and bad, and that the circumstances we face are not pleasant or acceptable, but such are times when praising God will bless us most. I know from my own experience that by standing firm against the devil's temptations to feel sorry for myself, praising God can and will change my perception of life. Often, if I stand against the evil and proceed with what I know God wants me to do, this will trigger my soul to return to praise again. Then, when looking back on things, there is indeed a very close connection between praise and real, practical salvation!

#### Ideas for discipleship programme

- In what circumstances of life have you found yourself feeling very upset and distraught recently? Looking back on these times, what could you have done to put yourself in a better place to overcome the problems? Would it be right to say that you would have overcome the problems by praising God? Think about what this means carefully.
- Pray for any members of your own family who experience difficulty in rising above problems and being 'happy', or truly 'praising God'. For whatever reason, offer these people to God with care, and bless them.

## Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, You have done a good work in me; may I not fail to stand firm in my faith and hold on to the truths You have taught me. Help me to face my own problems rather than ignore them, and I ask You to liberate me from their power. Lift my heart to praise Your name, Lord Jesus, both now and forever more: AMEN

## Prayer

Praise the Lord for the way that He reveals Himself to His people;  
Praise the Lord for the great wonder and power of His resurrection;  
Praise the Lord for the love He has shown to all people everywhere;  
Praise the Lord for the forgiveness He has shown towards us all;  
Praise the Lord for the eternal future that He opens up before us!  
Thanks be to God, for the glories of Easter! AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Security

Pray for governments who are charged with the responsibility of maintaining a nation's security. Pray that they will balance this properly with the security of the whole world.

### On-going prayers

- Pray for children born with disabilities and their parents
- Pray for countries of the world that experience internal strife
- Give thanks to God for the victory of love over all evil

## Meditation

The glory of God is incredible,

It is impressive, and beyond our understanding;  
For we see it in His total command of all things.

The glory of God is revealed,

It is made known through the empty tomb at Easter,  
The good news of eternal life for all who believe!

The glory of God is essential,

It is established in the moral nature of our world;  
And enshrined in Jesus' victory of good over evil.

The glory of God is prophetic,

It is certain that the purposes of God will prevail;  
And the destiny of our world lies in truth and love.

The glory of God is a mystery,

It is a wonder that can never be defined or grasped;  
Yet He allows us to see just enough to be sure ...

That the glory of God is Himself, and much more!

## Bible Study - Psalm 98

A Psalm.

<sup>1</sup> Sing to the LORD a new song,  
for he has done marvellous things.  
His right hand has given Him victory  
and the strength of His holiness.

<sup>2</sup> The LORD has made known his  
salvation;  
He has revealed His righteousness  
in the sight of the nations.  
<sup>3</sup> He has remembered his steadfast  
love

and faithfulness to the house of Israel.  
 All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

<sup>4</sup> Shout in joy to the LORD, all the earth!  
 break into joyful song and make music!

<sup>5</sup> Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,  
 with the lyre and the sound of singing.

<sup>6</sup> With trumpets and the sound of the horn  
 shout for joy before the King, the LORD.

<sup>7</sup> Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;  
 the world and those who live in it.

<sup>8</sup> Let the rivers clap their hands;  
 let the hills sing together for joy

<sup>9</sup> Before the presence of the LORD,  
 who comes to judge the earth.  
 He will judge the world with righteousness,  
 and the peoples with impartiality.

### Review

Psalm 98 is a powerful song of worship to God, giving Him thanks and praise for what He has done. Of course, a psalm such as this could have been composed at almost any time in Israel's past, in celebration of a great event such as some of David's great victories in the early days of His reign in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 8,9,10). Other great events could be the completion of Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 6), or in later years, the miraculous relief of Jerusalem after the Assyrian siege (2 Kings 18). However, the introduction to Psalm 98 does not tell us anything about its origins, and the contents are entirely general in nature. So if the theme of the psalm does not come from any event in Israel's history, it must come from the nature of God as one who saves; 'Sing to the Lord ... for His right hand has given Him victory ... He has made known His salvation ... to the ends of the earth' (98:1-3).

#### **A psalm of pure praise**

Our psalm is a classic example of pure praise because it directs us away from the circumstances of life, and turns us towards God. It would be a great psalm to say or to sing in giving thanks to Him for some special event of deliverance or salvation, but even this might be to miss the point. Just like the story of Easter and the death and resurrection of our Lord, the psalm tells us that it is God's nature and His desire to save us and help us, and He does not change. More than this, He saves us publicly so that people know He is a great God, and He longs to do the same for others, as well as those who have turned to Him so far; 'He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations' (98:2).

#### **Praise for salvation and justice**

At Easter, we celebrate the saving power of God who raised Jesus from the dead and overcame the power of death; Jesus is the first to be 'raised from the dead' and the evidence of what happened to Him is the proof of God's saving power. However, the Old Testament was convinced that it was always God's intention to save His people and show His control of the world. Before God revealed Himself in Jesus, He revealed Himself in an impressive array of events such as the Flood, the Exodus, the establishment of Kingship under David, the return from Exile, and many other personal stories from Ruth to Job and Esther. As we have seen, however, the psalm does not illustrate any of these, except that it uses the same words found in them all to describe God. The Psalm begins by proclaiming that God will always have victory, or salvation, because He is the One and only 'holy' God (98:1). He would not be God if He could not be victorious and if He was not able to have the last word; as the final verse says, 'He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with impartiality' (98:9).

#### **Praise for love and faithfulness**

In verses 2 and 3, we are told about God's nature as Saviour. Firstly, His salvation is something that is there for all people to see. It is not hidden or private, but public and open to scrutiny; He shows His righteousness 'in the sight of the nations' (98:2). There is no need for God's people to 'defend' Him to the society in which we live. We may feel cautious about our ability to be 'relevant', but God is always content for His name and His Gospel to be spoken. This is because God wants to say openly that He is a God of constant love and faithfulness (see 98:3), and there is no embarrassment in this. Of course, this is the unerring message of Easter, for what Jesus has done in rising from the dead is to offer the world hope, peace and love. When we read verses 2 and 3 of Psalm 98, they read like a prophecy, fulfilled by the Easter story!

#### **Praise and rejoicing**

The central verses of Psalm 98 speak about rejoicing. They emphasise the sudden and spontaneous nature of praise that breaks out amongst God's faithful people in music and song. How we would love to know what kind of music was produced in ancient times by trumpets, lyres and rams horns! The Hebrew words (98:4,5) also indicate 'shouts' of praise, and what could this mean? Was music written down, and how? Was it performed without recourse to anything except the memory, as happens in African and other indigenous music to this day? Music has always conveyed exuberance and joy, and as anyone who has been involved in music will know, it also conveys a vast range of other human emotions, many of which can hardly be put into words. This is why music remains an essential part of worship, preferably as wide a range of music styles as possible!

#### **Praise throughout the world**

It is difficult for us to appreciate this at first reading, but from the point of view of ancient people, verses 7 to 9 speak about the limits of human experience of the world around them. For them, the earth was like a disc upon waters with the oceans stretching out as far as the eye could see. They had no idea of 'topography' or of 'north south east and west' as we think of them now (the Hebrew words for these mean 'desert', 'coast', 'mountain', for example, from the view of the one speaking or writing). So when the psalm describes the 'sea' and the 'world', together with the 'rivers' and the 'hills' praising God, then it is rather like us saying 'everything all around, and also above and below' praises God!

At Easter time, our hearts are filled with joy at the fact that God who has made all things loves us so much that He is prepared to pay the price of our rejection and still save us through His Son Jesus Christ. We cannot escape God or His judgement, but we can accept the evidence of Easter, and also the prophetic joy of this psalm, as evidence that God's saving power and love does not change. The faith we enjoy is permanent.

### Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in what circumstances do you like to 'sing for joy', especially when you would do this for Jesus.
2. Which words in this psalm speak to you most about the way you perceive God's saving work according to your experience?
3. How can the world be saved according to God's justice and righteousness?

### Discipleship

#### **Personal comment:**