

Psalm 97

Psalm 97 ends in with a ringing exhortation. “Rejoice in the Lord always... and give thanks to His holy name.” The statement is familiar but it is rife with problems if its not rooted in its proper context. How are we to rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS? Should we rejoice when we are being persecuted? Should we rejoice in the trials and tribulations? Should we rejoice with the real and present evil that lurks in our private and public lives? The answer is yes but the answer is grounded in the preceding truths that comprise the Psalm. The Bible never gives us an imperative (what we should do) without a stated, or implied, indicative (what is true). In this case, verses 1-11 provide the ground for the command to rejoice.

1. A specified exhortation

- a. The first thing that we must mention is that a certain subset of people is addressed
- b. Notice that those who are to rejoice are defined as “you who are righteous”
 - i. The righteous, biblically speaking, are not the naturally moral
 1. In fact, the Bible makes it clear that no one is good, not one!
 2. Does this mean that this command is rightly applied to no one?
 3. No! The larger biblical teaching is that the righteous live by faith and this means that those who are to rejoice are those who have faith in the Lord (they are His people) and, therefore, are righteous in His sight
- c. Simply stated, there is no rejoicing with relationship
 - i. If we don’t know God, believe in God and commune with God, there is no reason to rejoice in this world
 - ii. But those who do believe in Him have ample reason to rejoice

2. A reasonable exhortation

- a. What are some of those reasons? Below I give you three that are mentioned in the text
 - i. First, we are to rejoice because God reigns over all places
 1. The ESV translated verse 1 this way “let the many coastlands be glad!”
 - a. While this is an adequate rendering of the Hebrew, I do believe it leaves much to be desired
 2. The NIV renders the passage this way, “let the distant shores rejoice”
 - a. This, I believe, gets to the heart of the matter
 - b. You see, in antiquity, the distant shores represented the very far lands of creation
 - c. In fact, the distant shores were largely out of reach for the average person
 3. The point then is that God reigns even over the places that are farthest removed from us
 - a. Stated more specifically, the idea here is that there is not a country or sea that the Lord does not reign over

4. This is good news!
 - a. It means that evil has no place to hide and reorganize
 - b. It means that there is no locality that operates independent of the Lord's oversight
 - c. It means that God is able to bring all things and all people into subjection to His good plan by virtue of His authority as ruler over all
5. Folks, we have reason to rejoice because our God reigns
- ii. Second, we rejoice because God reigns over all competing deities
 1. God does not just rule the seen, He rules the realm of the unseen, spiritual principalities as well
 - a. There is not a cosmic war that has to be won
 - b. We are not anxiously awaiting news regarding who prevailed in the skirmish between the Lord and all other gods
 - c. Instead, we are reminded that all false gods and all worshippers of such gods are brought to shame (v. 7)
 - d. There is no force in the universe that threatens our great God and this means we have every reason to rejoice
- b. Sometimes, the greatest help in our time of need is to turn our attention off of our problems and obstacles, as real as they may be, and fixate on the glory and majesty of our great God
 - i. When was the last time you rejoiced that you know the maker and ruler of all things?
 - ii. When was the last time you considered the hope that you have in Him alone?