



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Psalms 98: 1-9

Summer 2021

"Salvation's Song"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth. Well, next week we begin a new series. We're going into the Book of James, so we'll do a series in that book. But this morning I thought we'd do a Psalm; and it's a glorious Psalm. Psalm 98, and I'm going to read verses 1 through 9.

98 O sing to the Lord a new song,
For He has done wonderful things,
His right hand and His holy arm have gained the victory for Him.
² The Lord has made known His salvation;
He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations.
³ He has remembered His lovingkindness and His faithfulness to the house of
Israel;
All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

⁴ Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth;
Break forth and sing for joy and sing praises.
⁵ Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,
With the lyre and the sound of melody.
⁶ With trumpets and the sound of the horn
Shout joyfully before the King, the Lord.

⁷ Let the sea roar and all it contains,
The world and those who dwell in it.
⁸ Let the rivers clap their hands,
Let the mountains sing together for joy
⁹ Before the Lord, for He is coming to judge the earth;
He will judge the world with righteousness
And the peoples with equity.

Psalm 98

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it.

(Message) I read a sailor's account of his rescue from a watery grave. Stephen Young was a Seaman First Class on the Oklahoma when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The ship was hit and sank: And along with it he and a lot of sailors, some 30, were trapped with Young inside a compartment. They had a pocket of air to breathe—but not for long. As the hours passed he was sure he would die either by suffocation or drowning.

Twenty-four hours after sinking, when the air was thin and all seemed hopeless, he heard men outside sawing through steel. As a square was cut the compartment began to fill with water. But the men were able to squeeze through the jagged hole in time to emerge out of the darkness and into the sunlight. He wrote about it. He celebrated it, celebrated his seemingly miraculous deliverance.

And that's what the psalmist did in Psalm 98. It's a call to worship, it's a call to praise God for His miraculous salvation of Israel. In verse 3, he praises God for remembering "His lovingkindness", which suggests something, it suggests that the people thought that their situation was hopeless and that they feared that the LORD had forgotten them. But He "remembered"—the LORD never forgets His people. He's always faithful. He is able, and He does what the psalmist calls "wonderful things". And that's what Israel experienced. The great deliverance—salvation.

The Psalm is a victory celebration—the kind of triumph given with trumpets and songs to a king returning after winning a great battle. But the event of this Psalm isn't named; we don't know what it was, and the identity of the author isn't given either. The language suggests something great, something supernatural, like the Exodus, (Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt), or the release of the Jews from captivity in Babylon.

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, names David as the author. If that's so, it could be remembering his victory over Goliath. That was unexpected and that was miraculous. It was celebrated with victory songs and musical instruments. Whatever the event, and we can't be certain of it, it's only typological of something else. The Psalm looks beyond it, beyond this national deliverance to a far greater victory, one that is world-wide in its scope.

There are three stanzas, each with three verses. And with each stanza, the Psalm's call to praise increasingly widens from Israel to the whole earth; and finally to all of nature. We sing this at Christmas in the hymn, *Joy to the World*, and the lyrics,

"Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room.
And heaven and nature sing."

Isaac Watts based that on Psalm 98. What he saw, and the Psalm indicates, is this is more than a remembrance of a past deliverance. It is a prophesy of a future world-wide salvation that includes both humankind and nature. The hope of that is expressed in the last verse where the reason is given for the sea and rivers and mountains singing together (vs6&7); for the LORD is coming to "judge" the earth "with righteousness." (vs9). Everything's going to be put together well. Everything's going to end righteously.

It's really a multi-layered Psalm—certainly in its application. It is about an historical, material deliverance: but also about spiritual deliverance; a national rescue; and also a world-wide rescue. As one commentator put it, "The application relates to all God's delivering providences, ordinary or special." So the Psalm directs us to praise the

LORD whenever we experience His mercy—but certainly to worship Him for the greatest rescue; that of salvation in Christ. That is really the subject of the Psalm.

The event that occasioned the writing of it was a stunning and unexpected victory. Perhaps a military victory, one that came when hope was low. It was a miraculous salvation. That's how the Psalm begins, "O sing to the LORD a new song, for He has done wonderful things, His right hand and His holy arm have gained the victory for Him." And that sets the tone of what one of the commentators described as, "One of the most exuberant Psalms in the Bible. It's all about joy due to rescue and all about expressing praise for that rescue." The LORD has done "wonderful things". Single-handedly He won a great victory. "His holy arm" is a symbol of power that accomplished this mighty triumph. It was supernatural. That's the idea in "wonderful things."

That's a term that's used throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. It's used, for example, in Psalm 106, verse 7, of the "wonders" God did in Egypt which ended in Israel's deliverance through the sea and the drowning of Pharaoh's chariots. But it could equally describe deliverance from Babylon, when God moved the heart of King Cyrus to let the Jewish remnant return to Judah and rebuild the temple. That was every bit as miraculous.

The LORD controls the events and the agents of this world; from the elements of nature to the decisions of a man's heart. Now that's Proverbs 21, verse 1. And it's just as supernatural as a plague on Egypt. Whatever the event was, God did a mighty and amazing thing: And it called for rejoicing; it called for worship; it called for a song—but not just any song, "a new song."

This is a common expression in the Psalms. Psalm 40, verse 3 speaks of singing "a new song". It also speaks of the wondrous things, the wonderful things that God did. David wrote that Psalm, and so that would, maybe, suggest that the similarity between the two indicates his authorship here. But again, we can't be certain of that. But this is a common expression, 'a new song'; and it's used of celebrating a new experience with new joy and fresh enthusiasm; celebrating new mercies from God. The phrase is picked

up in the New Testament, twice in the Book of Revelation, (in chapter 5, verse 9, and chapter 14, verse 3), and there it has to do with the new, unique mercy of God. In both cases it is about redemption. It is a singular song about the unique event of salvation by the blood of Christ. There is no deliverance like it. It is new, so it's described as "a new song."

Again, ultimately, this is what this new song of our Psalm is about. That's what heaven and nature sing about—the Savior and what He has brought to us and to all nature. Israel's deliverance in the Psalm pictured that because the LORD intervened miraculously to rescue His people from certain defeat and doom when they were helpless. That's when He saved.

The right response is to sing. The right response is to be joyful. And really, that's the key to lasting joy in life. I'm not sure I'm the right person to tell you what the key to joy in life is, (or the key to anything in life is), but I certainly think from reading this Psalm, and reflecting on it, that that is a key to joy in life—it is recalling the "wonderful things" that the LORD has done. When we are in a difficult situation, when life seems burdensome to us, when it's not full of joy, how do we get the joy that we're to have? —By reflecting on the LORD and what He's done in our life, the wonderful things, because He's done wonderful things in the lives of each and every one of us.

Well, in verses 2 and 3, the psalmist gives further clarity or definition to the victory that God won. He calls it "salvation". And it was done in the open, so all could see. The nations witnessed it. Now that was true of the Exodus; it was true when the Philistines saw Goliath fall; it was true of Judah's release from Babylon. The nations saw those events and it was salvation for God's people. Jonah used this same word, *salvation*, in Jonah, chapter 2, verse 9, to describe his deliverance from a watery grave in the belly of the fish. It was a wonderful thing and altogether of the LORD. And as Jonah says, 'that's true of salvation'—it is altogether of the LORD.

And that's the idea here in the Psalm. The salvation, this salvation that they celebrate, is an act of the LORD's faithfulness based on His righteousness. He never

achieves His ends by compromising His character or by compromising His righteousness. He is holy. He does all things well. And we see that reflected in our LORD Jesus Christ in His life. And it's, of course, to be reflected in the lives of His people; not to compromise but to do all things according to righteousness. He always does the right thing. He always does the right thing in the right way; justly, righteously. And it is always done in faithfulness to His promises to His people. He never forgets them.

The psalmist wrote, "He remembered His lovingkindness." Well that's the word *chesed*. Some of these Greek and Hebrew words you are familiar with, even though you haven't studied those languages. But *chesed* is a very familiar term, and we speak of it in the Hebrew and it speaks of lovingkindness. And it speaks of His special love and kindness that God has for His people. It's not love for the world, it's love for those who are in a special relationship with Him, a covenant relationship with Him. Historically that was Israel, but more broadly and ultimately, it is His elect ones from every nation. He is faithful to us, unconditionally, and will deliver us in all kinds of ways; ordinary or special ways.

This salvation was special, miraculous, and called for a song of praise, but one sung in the right way. That instruction is given in the second stanza in verses 4 through 6—the method of praise. So, in verses 1 through 3, the Psalm states the reason for praise, it's salvation. And now, in the second stanza, verses 4 through 6, the proper way to praise and worship is given:

"Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth;
Break forth and sing for joy, and sing praises.
Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,
With the lyre and the sound of melody.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
Shout joyfully before the King, the Lord."

There are two emphases here. The first emphasis is the means of praise: Joyful shouts and musical instruments. Some have interpreted this as authorizing the use of instruments for worship in the church. In fact, one of the commentators criticized Scottish churches that only sing the Psalms—and sing them without instruments. He thought that that was a strange practice in light of this Psalm—this very passage. And this stanza would seem to support the use of instruments for worship in the church, but not necessarily. John Calvin believed that the use of instruments in the temple was Old Testament worship. Under the New Covenant the church should sing without them.

I don't think the Scriptures prohibit the use of instruments in worship, but I think the point here goes beyond instruction on that—on instruments. The lesson is, we are to worship seriously. We are to worship beautifully. But beautiful worship, genuine worship begins and occurs in the heart. It's part of our inner life, and it is to be lively, it is to be real, it's to be robust, as though accompanied by an orchestra—but completely natural.

In other words, worship is to be as natural in the heart as breathing is to us. —It's to be full of joy. How do we get that? Well, we've already touched on that, but again, we get it by the knowledge of God, by knowing His person and knowing His work; who He is, what He's done, and what He's done for us. And again, we need to reflect upon that. In fact, one of the commentators stated that the outstanding lesson of the Psalm is that “The acknowledged sovereignty of the LORD always produces song in the heart.”

I think that's true. We reflect upon the Word of God and recognize that it is God's revelation, it is His word. And we believe it, even though some things may trouble us—they shouldn't trouble us but being what we are, they do. Nevertheless, if we begin with this as the Word of God, that's our presupposition position, that's where we begin. And if we're doing that, then we will understand that God is absolutely sovereign. If He wasn't, this Psalm wouldn't have been written. But because He is, we have reason to rejoice and be glad. God is in control of things. Man is not in control of things—God is. Regardless of what we read and see in the news, or what troubles us at our employment, or in our home, or whatever, God is in control. —And that should cause us to sing and rejoice.

Choirs and a variety of instruments can facilitate robust worship, beautify it, and enhance the expression of it in our minds. But the real beauty of worship, what truly pleases the LORD, is a pure heart. But to have that naturally we need a vital relationship with the LORD and a clear knowledge of who He is and what He has done: He is faithful; He is sovereign; He saves; and we're to reflect on that.

The second emphasis in this stanza is the range or the extent of worshipers. It is beyond Israel and to include all the nations and clearly indicates that what is celebrated in this Psalm is not merely local, it's global. It is a world-wide salvation. That's how it begins, with verse 4. "Shout joyfully to the Lord all the earth." Not just Israel, but "all the earth." That is the scope of the worshipers.

And that's the second stanza. But the third division, verses 7 through 9, expands the scope of worship even more—and it's unusual. It includes the animate and inanimate parts of creation.

"Let the sea roar and all it contains,
The world and those who dwell in it.
Let the rivers clap their hands,
Let the mountains sing together for joy
Before the Lord, for He is coming to judge the earth;
He will judge the world with righteousness
And the peoples with equity."

Well, this isn't literal; I think you know that. It's poetry, it's personification; ascribing life to a nonliving thing to express the greatness of the event that's described here—the greatness of the salvation that will affect the whole creation gloriously. And so, the psalmist addresses creation, nature, as though it were sentient; as though it could feel and think—and tells it to rejoice because great blessing is coming onto that part of the universe, of the world. And that's the point that he's making.

Now Paul used similar language in his writings, particularly in Romans 8, verses 19 through 22, where he describes the whole creation waiting "...eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God."(vs20). It pictures creation like a person, craning his neck, stretching it out toward the distance so that he can see what is coming; anxiously hoping to get a glimpse of this glorious event that is coming—and that will affect it.

The reason is, it will be affected. When it happens the creation will be "...set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom", Paul says, "of the glory of the children of God." (vs21). And nature will realize that when we do, (or that will happen to nature when we experience it), when God's people experience it. And that will happen at Christ's return. Well, that's what verse 9 of our Psalm anticipates. "He is coming to judge the earth; He will judge the world with righteousness and the people with equity."

Well that's God's plan for the universe. We know that from the Scriptures. We know that from this Psalm, for one thing. We know that from Romans 8—but we know that from many other passages. That's authoritative because that is divine revelation. And again, that's our presupposition. This is where we begin. If we want to have wisdom, if we want to have understanding, we begin with this book, because it is divine revelation. Without that, without the Scriptures, people are left to themselves, they're left to speculation about the future.

And that leads to dire predictions about the future from environmentalists to scientists and their calculations of *The End Of Everything*. That's the title of a book that came out last year, in which the author, an astrophysicist, laid out various ways the universe could end. It's all theoretical, it's all hypothetical—and it all ends badly. Each possibility ends the same way, doomsday—eternal night. That's what the natural man comes up with when left to his or, in the case of that book, her imagination. It's Godless, and therefore it's hopeless. It's despair.

The reality is very different. The divine King is coming to put everything in order, to "judge the world in righteousness", and regenerate the earth; end creation's

"groaning", as Paul describes it in Romans 8; and end it with glory. That's the future. That's the hope of this Psalm, given in the words, "He is coming." (vs9).

It's made clearer in the New Testament where the Savior's coming occurs first in His initial victory over sin and death at the cross and then the consummation of His victory in His second coming. That's what all this is about.

The "new song" is about redemption. First of all, deliverance from sin, which is world-wide. That's the song of Revelation chapter 5, verse 9. "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from, (*or out of*), every tribe and tongue and people and nation.' " That's the reason all the earth is to shout joyfully and sing praises.

So sin is the problem that's going to be resolved. And sin does two things. It separates and destroys. Where there is sin, there's always chaos. The death of Christ gives every believer in Him deliverance from that; salvation from that; and victory over it.

The penalty of sin is hell; eternal damnation; separation from God forever; separation from all that comes from the LORD God; separation from goodness and beauty. Damnation. —It's a terrible word, even more terrible, is it, as a thought, and even more terrible is it as reality. It's also a necessary reality.

God is just. The psalmist speaks of the LORD's righteousness in verses 2 and 9. It is righteous to punish sin, to right wrongs, and to give justice evenly to the guilty. That's what God will do. He will right all wrongs. He will put everything in its right place, and deal with all of the errors and all of the sins that have occurred. And that's reality. That's true.

But, the psalmist also speaks of lovingkindness and speaks of mercy. Because of mercy, Christ saves from that. There's deliverance from that. And only He saves from that. His work on the cross is necessary and His work on the cross is unique. Only the One who is both God and man could do it. So it is a 'new song'. It's about some new thing, something unique that has never happened before and will never happen again.

That's Hebrews, chapter 10, verse 14. "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." —Those who have been set apart for salvation; those who are being transformed presently by the grace of God. That offering has been made for them and has achieved what it intended to achieve. But it's once for all. So if you have trusted in Christ, you've received the blessings of that cross. You've been purified. You're being purified. You're being fit for eternity.

In that one single sacrifice, He did three things for believers. He delivered us from sin's penalty; He delivered us from sin's power; and finally, ultimately, He will deliver us from the very presence of sin. We have that future hope because Christ's sacrifice will someday lift the curse that God placed upon all of creation—the whole natural realm. Then the true destiny of the universe will be realized; and that true destiny is glory—glory beyond anything we can imagine.

So it, nature, is to clap its hands and sing for joy. Someday Christ will come and He will change it. That's what Christ's sacrifice accomplished. —Salvation for the nations and creation's deliverance from the curse. That's the new song of Psalm 98. It's about that victory. "His right hand and His holy arm" defeated sin, Satan, and death; to give new life, eternal life, in a perfect and pure paradise to come. Something beyond our comprehension.

Well that is our eternal inheritance. It is "the kingdom to come", it is "the new heavens and the new earth". We will inherit a clean world, a universe glorious beyond anything that telescopes have seen. That's our hope. But we also have the "new song" now; and reason to be singing now because we have new life now, in the present; a down payment of the life and the glory that is to come and that we will all enter into some day.

So how should we now live? With the joy of this Psalm and with confidence and boldness. We are not weak, defenseless creatures, (well, we are in and of ourselves, of course). The psalmist tells us we're just dust. But in the LORD God, in Christ, we are God's children. We are sons and daughters of the King.

The psalmist said that the LORD has done "wonderful things". The Exodus and release from captivity in Babylon were 'wonderful things'. But nothing's more wonderful than the cross and what it achieved. Think of all that it accomplished. As a result of it, as a result of Christ's sacrificial death, the believer is saved. Paul began Romans 8, that great chapter Romans 8, with the statement, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (vs1).

Now think of that: No condemnation! We're justified—that is absolute. We are forgiven forever. God has cast all of our sins behind His back, and that is to say He doesn't bring them up again. He's forgotten them, as it were. He doesn't forget anything but He doesn't remember them against us. They're cast behind His back. 'Cast into the depths of the sea', for that matter. (Mic 7:19).

We are now in a position of full acceptance with the LORD—and this is the practical aspect, I think, of understanding justification. We don't need to try to prove ourselves to the LORD God. We don't need to try to gain His approval. Certainly we are to be striving for righteousness, but we don't need to do that in order to 'fill in some gaps', or to achieve something that hasn't been achieved. We don't need to prove ourselves to Him. We are fully accepted by Him. We can't gain His approval because we have His approval completely at the very moment of faith—the moment we're joined to His Son. And we are declared righteous. We're still sinners; in fact, Luther called us 'righteous sinners', sinners but saved and regarded by God as righteous in His sight—in spite of what we are. We're legally innocent before His Law. All of Christ's righteousness has been imputed to us.

Sin is a reality, sin in us. We struggle against it every day. A child of God must and will struggle against it, but the LORD is dealing with it every day, through the process of sanctification. That's the work of the Holy Spirit, the sovereign work.

One of Christ's great victories on the cross is He has broken the power of sin in our lives. And He's done that by defeating the old man, the person that we once were in Adam, our old self. He's been put to death. We are now a new creation in Christ. And that means we are a new creation with real ability. We are to look at ourselves in that

way. We're to see ourselves as new creatures, as a new creation, and we're to act upon it. We're to live in that way. That means looking at ourselves differently, filling our minds with positive truth and godly goals. I can give a number of examples. I'll give one example.

Ephesians 4, verse 28, Paul wrote, "He who steals must steal no longer." Now that suggests to me that in the church at Ephesus, there was some stealing going on among professing Christians—among believers, genuine believers, who were still living a bit like the old person they were. Well he says, "He who steals must steal no longer;..." (There's no room for that in the Christian life. You cannot do that.), "...but rather he must labor," Paul wrote, "performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need."

The cross draws all kinds of people, the best and the worst. It saves robbers; converts and changes them so that they are completely different. They no longer are people who take—but people who work hard so that they can give. Now that's a 'wonderful thing'. That's a miraculous thing. That's every bit as supernatural as turning the Nile to blood or calling fire down on the mountain top.

The LORD changes us, and He's doing that now. He is making us useful for Himself and His work in this world, and making us useful to one another. And we need to be doing that because that is who we are. We are a new creation, able to serve.

We can serve the LORD now. That's our privilege in this all too short life. It will soon end. Then, eternity and our reward, our inheritance, heaven, kingdom to come when Christ reigns on the earth.

In the meantime, in the present, we are to be looking to the LORD for blessing every day: The LORD provides. He does wonderful things. We're to act upon who we are, that we might live for Him in these brief days that we have, but also trust Him for "wonderful things". In fact, using some of Paul's logic, since God has accomplished the greatest salvation, He will surely help us with the lesser acts of salvation, the deliverance from danger and privation—whatever afflicts us in our lives. The Psalm certainly includes that by way of application. The LORD gives help in ways, "either ordinary or

special”, as the commentator I referred to earlier spoke of God's many ways of helping us.

‘Ordinary ways or special ways’...but as I think about that though, there are no ‘ordinary ways’ in which God helps us. All of God's help, whether we want to call it ordinary, (and I understand what he means by that), all of God's helps are “wonderful things”. In His providence, He opens doors of opportunity for ministry. In His providence, He opens doors for work to those who are out of work. We're to pray and be persistent in praying. We're to be seeking, we're to be knocking, as the LORD instructs in Matthew 7:7, "knock and it will be opened." Pray earnestly. God hears. He remembers. He answers. He has unlimited ways of arranging circumstances to meet our every need. So look to Him, and He will provide. Remember who He is.

That is easy for a preacher to get up and say to you, who may be in difficulty. But it's true. It's what the LORD teaches, and we need to persevere in looking to Him, knowing He does wonderful things. And they're all wonderful, whether they seem ordinary or not. And they may seem that way, but that's because we fail to see the LORD's hand in all of them. His hand is in everything that happens. We live and move in His providence. Everything is a gift from Him.

And that's why we pray. If He wasn't involved in everything, we wouldn't pray. We pray because He is absolutely involved in all of the things of life, and all of the things of our lives. The ordinary things are supernatural things.

If God can deliver the universe from chaos, He can deliver you from chaos as well. If He can do the greater, He can certainly do the lesser, He can do the smaller. He can provide for us and deliver us. ‘His holy arm gains victory.’

Now that is reason to sing to the LORD a new song, every day, to sing to the LORD a new song. We should be a singing people, joyful in our hearts. And the way to get that joy and song is, again, knowing who the LORD is, and knowing what the LORD has done for us. “His right hand and His holy arm have gained the victory for Him.” And, in gaining the victory for Him, He's gained the victory for us, as well. Regardless of where you are in life right now, you are a victor. "We are more than conquerors." Paul said that

in Romans 8, verse 37. It's true. Reflect on that. Understand it, and I think you'll begin to sing naturally.

One of our new hymns in the *Songs of Praise* book has the refrain, "Our sins, they are many, His mercy is more." That's true. So the hymn goes on, "Praise the LORD. His mercy is more." Well, that's what the psalmist was saying. Sing a new song. The LORD has done wonderful things.

When I think of Seaman First Class Stephen Young trapped inside a sunken ship, absolutely helpless, unable to rescue himself, doomed to a watery grave, I think, 'That's mankind.' Left to ourselves we're helpless. He was an innocent sailor. We're guilty sinners. But there is a Savior who suffered in our place, so that we could escape from darkness and death, to light and life.

Look to Him if you have not yet done that. Escape an eternal, unending future that is worse than any watery grave. And it's coming—judgment is coming; so come to Christ, the Savior. Trust in Him. And may God help all of us to rest in Him, trust Him daily for all that we have and need.

Father, that's a great truth that we've considered this morning. Your Son is resurrected; He's alive; and He's coming again in that resurrection power and glory. And so, LORD, we thank You that You have brought us to a saving knowledge of Him. May we rest in those great promises and the hope that we have, and constantly look to Him, look to You, look to our Triune God for blessing and enablement. And we know that You remember us. You never forget. We thank You for that.

And now, the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

(End of Audio)