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2001

Psalm 97

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Psalm 97

(NRSV)

- 1 The LORD is king! Let the earth rejoice;
let the many coastlands be glad!**
- 2 Clouds and thick darkness are all around him;
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.**
- 3 Fire goes before him,
and consumes his adversaries on every side.**
- 4 His lightnings light up the world;
the earth sees and trembles.**
- 5 The mountains melt like wax before the LORD,
before the Lord of all the earth.**
- 6 The heavens proclaim his righteousness;
and all the peoples behold his glory.**
- 7 All worshipers of images are put to shame,
those who make their boast in worthless idols;
all gods bow down before him.**
- 8 Zion hears and is glad,
and the towns^(a) of Judah rejoice,
because of your judgments, O God.**
- 9 For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth;
you are exalted far above all gods.**
- 10 The LORD loves those who hate^(b) evil;
he guards the lives of his faithful;
he rescues them from the hand of the wicked.**
- 11 Light dawns^(c) for the righteous,
and joy for the upright in heart.**
- 12 Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous,
and give thanks to his holy name!**

Footnotes:

- a. (v.8) Heb *daughters*
b. (v.10) Cn: Heb *You who love the LORD hate*
c. (v.11) Gk Syr Jerome: Heb *is dawn*

Psalm 97 opens with the announcement that “Yahweh is King,” and bids the whole earth to rejoice in that fact. The call to the world-wide acclaim and praise of God looks forward to the promised future fulfillment of God’s universal sovereignty and dominion, but of course the reign of God is not just a future reality; God reigns in righteousness and justice now and will forevermore.

While we recognize this fact, not all the inhabitants of earth do (yet). The Psalmist's mention of clouds, thick darkness, fire and lightning call to mind previous manifestations of God's presence among his people (see for example Exodus 13:21, 22 and Exodus 19:16-18), and also refer to God's coming in future glory. The power of the LORD is so great, that even the mighty mountains melt before him (compare Micah 1:4; Nahum 1:5).

The beauty and order of creation declare the LORD's righteousness and glory (verse 6) in a way that should be obvious to all (compare Romans 1:18-20), yet many worship images, or practice other forms of idolatry. In spite of God's revelation of himself through nature and the Bible, many choose to ignore or reject him in order to pursue goals they consider more important. They are without excuse states St. Paul (Romans 1:20); they will be put to shame. How foolish these endeavors will look as we and they stand before the judgment throne of the eternal God.

The thoughts beginning with verse 8 return to exalting the LORD for his power and righteous judgments. Perhaps the Psalmist had some contemporary particular event in mind as he penned the remainder of this Psalm; we of course cannot know. But the final word of this Psalm is that the righteous are to rejoice in the LORD and to give thanks to his holy name.

Prayer to accompany Psalm 97:

God our King, you clothe the sky with light and the depths of the ocean with darkness. Among all the peoples you work wonders, and rain terror upon your enemies. Do not try your servants by fire, but bring us rejoicing to the shelter of your home, where with your Son and the Holy Spirit you live and reign, now and forever. Amen.

Linger longer over verse 11:

**Light dawns for the righteous,
and joy for the upright in heart.**

(delightful example of Hebrew parallelism)