

Psalm 97

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Preacher: Adrian Brixey

[0 : 00] Psalm 91 says, He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.

May that be true for not just the psalmist but also true of us, that God is our refuge, our fortress, our God in whom we trust.

Let's turn to God in prayer, let's pray together. Lord, we do sing hallelujah to you, our God. We praise you, Lord, that you are a wonderful, merciful, compassionate God, a God who has loved us through the Lord Jesus Christ, a God who has saved us.

Thank you, Lord, for the mercies that you have done throughout our lives, the times we can remember when you have helped us, answered our prayers.

And especially, Lord, for the moment when you drew us to yourself and we became yours. Lord, we do thank you for the Christians, Lord, in this place.

[1 : 32] Thank you for the testimony that takes place, Lord, in the way that you're working. Thank you for the encouragement to hear of the things that are happening here, that there is a witness and a testimony to the truth, Lord.

And we do pray that that would continue out into all of Whitby, that those, Lord, at the moment in darkness would see the light of your truth, that those, Lord, who are lost would be found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we do pray, Lord, that your abounding love and grace would come upon, Lord, this town and the surrounding areas, Lord, that there may be a revival, Lord, here.

Not just that this place may be full, but that the hearts of men and women and young people may be full with the love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, we yearn that your name would be exalted. Lord, we yearn that we would see men and women and children coming to know you, Lord, receiving hope and mercy.

[2 : 51] And we thank you, Lord, that you have such an abounding love, that you saved such as us. So may you be with us this evening in all that we consider and in our praise and our worship, Lord, that we may be encouraged together to continue on serving you, to continue on proclaiming the truth and continue on, Lord, following your teaching.

And as you guide us, Lord, may we follow you closely, acknowledging you as the only name under heaven by which men may be saved, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. It's interesting because I read Psalm 67 this morning and it was the password given to us when we joined Overseas Missionary Fellowship and that was a wonderful psalm.

But here's another wonderful psalm, Psalm 97, which I shall read now. The Lord reigns.

Let the earth be glad. Let the distant shores rejoice. Clouds and thick darkness surround him. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.

[4 : 16] Fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side. His lightning lights up the world. The earth sees and trembles.

The mountains melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth. The heavens proclaim his righteousness and all the people see his glory.

All who worship images are put to shame. Those who boast in idols, worship him, all you gods.

Zion hears and rejoices, and the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments, O Lord. For you, O Lord, are the most high over all the earth.

You are exalted far above all gods. Let those who love the Lord hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.

[5 : 17] Light is shed upon the righteous and joy on the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, you who are righteous, and praise his holy name.

Amen. If you do want to find out more about some of the things that God has been doing, do ask Antonia at the end.

So, because she explains it more clearly than I do, I think. But, yeah, there's a wonderful thing that God is doing in these days. This morning, if you were here, we considered the Christian character.

Well, this evening, we'll be considering God's character as we look at this psalm together. God's character. When I came to faith, I was in teaching college in Ambleside, in the Lake District.

I was not a believer. I did not grow up in a church. I was very angry against God to the point that I would deface the Christian Union posters with swear words.

[6 : 39] But we had a man speak one time and I just went along to appease the Christian. Roger Carswell. And after that, I recognised that there was indeed a God, but I did not need him.

Roger spoke actually at the Warwick University mission. our son James Brixie was in charge of that sort of evangelistic adventure and Roger said to James, James Brixie, your dad's not Adrian Brixie, is it?

And he even remembered from such long back, what a wonderful evangelist he is. He remembered a little bit from what I must have said at that meeting. But in that interim time between the meeting with Roger Carswell and my acknowledgement of God being God, but I didn't need him, to when I actually came to faith, which I do remember was May 3rd, I did have a sense of God being real, but that I was outside of his protection.

And I remember very clearly in that period being very frightened of God, that God was really powerful. And that stuck with me for many years, that God truly is God in power.

And as I came to faith, I was reading John, I was giving the Bible and I read John, and I came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And therein, I knew the love that God had for me.

[8 : 20] But before I was actually converted, there was a period where I was in a very strange place where it was just knowing God as God, without the love or the hope or the assurance of salvation.

That's actually the place where our Muslim friends are. They maybe know of some God out there, but they have no real hope and have to, by works, try to wrought salvation for themselves.

But that sense of God being truly God hasn't left me. It's just been part of my understanding of the other side and the nature of God as well.

And this psalm reflects that reality as we consider it. The psalm sits between 96 and 98.

96 and 98 paint a picture of God as the king, of the saviour, as the deliverer, and they're wonderful psalms to consider if you look at them when you get home.

[9 : 31] But 97 gives a picture of God not just as deliverer, but also there is the God who judges, the reality of the fullness of who God is, God's character.

And we're going to look this evening, I have Barry's watch so I will not go over time, but we're going to look this evening at three things very simple to remember.

God who is powerful, secondly, God who is unique, and thirdly, God who is deliverer.

God who is powerful, God who is unique, and God who is deliverer. When we begin this psalm, we can see the description of a God of power from verses one to five.

The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad, let the distant shores rejoice. Clouds and thick darkness surround him, righteousness and justice are from the foundation of his throne.

[10 : 56] Fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side. His lightning lights up the world. The earth sees and trembles.

The mountains melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth. earth. God is by nature a powerful, holy, fiery presence.

These words describe fire coming from him, consuming his foes, the lightning lightening up the whole world, the earth trembling, at the knowledge of him, mountains melting like wax.

When we see that poetry, that imagery, it describes a God who truly is the creator God, the mighty God, the God of heaven and earth.

I think in this day, we can easily be deceived and forget how awesome God is, how mighty God is, the fullness of him.

[12 : 24] Of course, for those in the Old Testament and for Israel, they had tangible experiences of that. Hinted at in verse 2, when they talk about clouds and thick darkness around him, remind us of the tabernacle, the holy place, covered and shrouded.

You know, the pillar of cloud, the pillar of fire. So the experiences of those in the Old Testament, in those times, there was a sense of the tangible power of God evident.

We don't often have that, do we? I mean, look at this. A small group sat here in a building singing.

It doesn't seem very powerful, does it? It's very ordinary. And sometimes we can forget that the God we worship, the God we acknowledge, is all powerful.

All powerful. in Bangkok, when there was a thunderstorm, or a rainstorm, you sometimes got a glimpse of how powerful God was.

[13 : 45] I remember one time I went to pick up the children from school, in our old pickup truck, park, and I parked the car, and I went to get them, and it started to rain, and less than five minutes I came out, and it was flooded up to the top of the tyres.

The powerful rain coming down in Southeast Asia, it's extraordinary, some of the thunderstorms, it just reminded you of how great God is.

Another time when I was driving, and I parked on one side of the road, and a tree was blown down on the other side, and I thought, wow, isn't it a good job I parked there and not there?

We see glimpses of God's power in nature, but it is only a glimpse. It is nothing compared to God's mighty power in truth.

The world does not recognise this power. The world tries to harness the power of nature, tries to understand God.

[14 : 57] Men say they do not believe in God. How dare they say that to an almighty, all-powerful God? How dare they say that God does not exist?

Who are they to say that God is not real? God is not real? When you turn to some of the other passages in scripture, when you look in God's word, written by God for us to understand him, you turn to Revelation chapter 6 verse 12.

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair.

The whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth. As late figs dropped from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind, the sky receded like a scroll rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave, and every free man, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains.

[16 : 19] They called to the mountains and the rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?

In that day, there will be no man who will dare say God does not exist. How foolish our world is, as it talks, as if there is no creator God.

But God is all powerful. God does miracles in this day. God heals, and God loves.

us. We mustn't limit God. We mustn't make God so small that we can understand him, because God is beyond our understanding.

He is powerful. He is mighty, and we need to remember that, and never forget it. God is unique.

[17 : 33] God is unique. When we look at verses 6 to 9, it describes false gods, those who worship idols.

When we lived in Thailand, we reached the Muslim community, but the country, as you know, is Buddhist, and recently the king has died, and the country has gone into mourning.

They treated the king almost like a deity, and in our house even, we had to have a picture of the king on the wall, out of respect.

And many people now are in deep, deep mourning, because they believe the king is a representative of the Buddhism. And when you go around Thailand and travelling, you see the temples and the images of Buddha, and it just reminds you that there are many, many millions of people who worship false idols.

In the West, we forget that. We live in the UK, a modern, liberal society, and we don't think about idol worship. But if you travel around Southeast Asia and other places, it's a reality for many millions of people that there is that idolatry.

[19 : 04] In Islam itself, there also is this sense of idolatry. When they go on the hajj and walk around the kabah, their attitude to their prophet as well.

There is this sense of idolatry. In our society as well, people idolize certain things, whether it be money or success or reputation, being known as somebody, achieving something, reality TV, social media.

It's all about the self. The self becomes the idol. And it's a challenge for Christian families. we struggle with our children as they're in schools, the influence that the world has on them.

It's really hard to maintain the teaching to show to them that actually all of that is false. It's empty. There is only one truth and it's in God and there is only one God who is unique.

In fact, there are no other gods. It's not that they are false. There are no other gods. There is one God, the creator of heaven and earth.

[20 : 26] As the man, the Iranian convert, preached to 50 Muslims in Swansea three weeks ago, he said it's the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is the only God.

What faith that man had to do that in the church in front of those Muslims. The God of the Bible is the only God. He is the creator of heaven and earth.

And there are no other gods. It is false. God is all-powerful, God is unique. But God is also the deliverer.

When we go on to the verses 10, 11 and 12, let those who love the Lord hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.

Light is shed upon the righteous and joy on the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, you who are righteous, and praise his holy name.

[21 : 33] It says in verse 10, He guards the lives of his faithful ones. He delivers them from the hand of the wicked. You see, we believe and trust in a powerful God.

We believe and trust in the only true God, and it is that God who guards us and delivers us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. It is that God who sent his Son to die on the cross. As a Christian, since coming to faith, I've had my challenges and my doubts and moments of despair, but one thing through all of my Christian walk is the acknowledgement that God truly is God, and that I truly am his through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And this evening, it is simple truths we're considering when you think about it. It's nothing new. It's the old, old story, but it's a wonderful story.

But when you actually reflect upon it later on this evening, and you think about it yourself, it is such a deep truth that you as an individual sinner, if you have come to Christ, you have been forgiven, and that salvation that you have received, the almighty awesome God, the only God of heaven and earth, has designed that salvation through his Son to save you.

[23 : 33] Think about that for a moment. The God of the Bible, the true and awesome God, the only God of heaven and earth, has saved you from your sins, given you new life, given you a hope for dwelling in eternity.

As the corver says, I was once in darkness, now my eyes can see, I was lost, but Jesus sought and found me.

I was listening to David, the Syrian refugee, share his testimony, and he was talking that when he was in the detention centre in 2013, he was claiming asylum, and he was there, he was one of the first ones out, actually.

He was thinking about this Christian God, and having never met Christians, he didn't really know what questions to ask. And some people came in and invited some people to church, and he decided to go.

And he listened to the service, didn't understand very much, and the German pastor then said a couple of words in English, and he understood those words. This is the God.

[25 : 08] And he then went to church again, and he began to learn German, and then the pastor got in relationship with him, and little by little, and day by day, he began to understand more.

And David said, what really made the difference was he could tell the pastor over the months that he learned German, as he spoke more English, he could tell the pastor what had happened to him in his life, and he was never interrupted.

He saw family members killed, he lost his mother, and he shared hours and hours and hours and hours to the pastor and another person, and he said, they listened, they cared, and then he became a Christian, and he got baptized, and he continues on in faith.

But they listened to him and they cared. Now the challenge this evening is this, as this psalm says to us, there is only one God.

It isn't the God of Buddhism, that is false. It isn't the God of Islam, that is false. It isn't the God of money or success or humanity.

[26 : 30] There is only one God, it is the God of the Bible. This is the one true God. God. And this one true God has saved you if you are his.

If you do not know Jesus yourself, then you are in that wrong place, and God wants to save you, and he wants you to be his.

Turn to him, receive him for yourself, because today is the day of salvation. But if you are his, and you know that this one true God has died on a cross through the Lord Jesus Christ, what are you doing about it?

You know, I talked this morning about life being so long. In truth, we do not know how many days we have. I could be standing up here this evening, and in eight months I could be with the Lord.

I could be with the Lord next week, tomorrow. We never have tomorrow, we only have today. And one of the things that I really earnestly believe is that we as a Christian community, we are not doing enough with what we have.

[27 : 57] and I speak to myself more than I speak to you. We are not doing enough with what we have. We are the people who know the true God.

We are the people who have God's word. We are his people. We have the opportunity to share that with those around us.

Now if I took this and went out on Whitby High Street and said there is only one God, there is only one salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, I don't know what would happen.

happen. If I did that in London, I don't know what would happen. If I did that in Malaysia, I have an idea what would happen.

But that is the truth. And the truth hurts, an old English saying. The truth hurts the world because the world has rejected it.

[29 : 09] But at times, the truth heals the world like it healed me and like it healed you if you're a believer.

So this evening, my encouragement to you is take this God that is all powerful. Take this God that is unique. Take the message of deliverance and live it out every day.

God will work and miracles will happen. Like my wife. You see, there's a human side to serving God.

On the day we visited Gloucester three years ago, it was cold and the kids were grumpy and we just went up a hill to get away from the town because we've been driving around looking at schools and houses.

So we drove up the hill just to have a bit of a break. And then we were walking down and the kids were all grumpy and I said, come on and let's go. Oh no, look, there's a Muslim lady there with a headscarf.

[30 : 16] I know there's lots of Muslims we can see another day. No, no, no, I want to go and see her. Oh, we need to go, we're going to be late. So my wife went and met that Muslim lady.

and then SMS, SMS, SMS, six months later, turns up to be the same lady. Now we would never have known that miracle of God if she had not made the effort to go.

But there's always the human side because like I was grumpy and my kids were grumpy and we'd had enough and I'd been driving all the way from Hertfordshire but sometimes that's what it takes.

We even upset each other. You can be assured that when we are in our home church in Trinity we will upset people in the church because maybe we're bringing in a Muslim person and then they think oh who's this person with the head scarf.

We will make things messy. If God's working it's going to be uncomfortable for us. It's not going to be easy sometimes. So we have to be prepared to be uncomfortable to see God work.

[31 : 25] But he will work. And it's so encouraging when he does and the things that he does. So let's be encouraged that we are the people that have the truth.

Let's take the opportunities we have, the gifts we have, the personalities we have, the people that we know and let's continue on witnessing for him and being his light.

Amen. Father God, may you encourage us Lord to live lives which are devoted to you. We thank you that we have the good news and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you that our lives are new in Christ. Thank you Lord that you are the only true living God and that we are found in you.

May you bless us as we leave, encourage us this week and I pray Lord that you would give us opportunities to witness Lord to you.

[32 : 32] May we give us opportunities to pray for those in need. Give us opportunities Lord where we can declare the praises of God. We thank you Lord and bless us Lord in your name.

Amen. Amen.