A Little Psalm With A Big Message Psalm 117

- 1) In *Let The Nations Be Glad*, John Piper notes, "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man."
- 2) Psalm 117 is all about missions to the nations who do not worship God in order that they may worship Him.
- 3) Psalm 117 is both the shortest Psalm in the Psalter and the shortest chapter in all of the Bible. Luther loved it, and wrote a 36 page commentary on it.
- 4) It is a part of a sextet of songs, Psalms 113-118, known as the "Egyptian Hallel." Built around the emphasis of Psalm 114, a celebration of the Exodus, these 6 songs were sung as the Hebrews gathered to celebrate the Passover. Psalms 113 and 114 were sung before the memorial meal, and Psalms 115-118 were sung afterwards. Jesus and His disciples would have sung these very psalms on the night they celebrated the Passover, just before His betrayal and arrest (Matt 26:30; Mark 14:26).
- 5) Interestingly Psalms 120-136 is called the "Great Hallel" and Psalms 146-150 conclude the Psalter on a Hallelujah or praise note.
- 6) Psalm 117 is anonymous and the fifth of the Egyptian or Exodus hallels. Paul quotes this little jewel in Romans 15:11 as evidence that God's redemptive love and purpose has always included the nations, just like He promised Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. Psalm 117 brings the whole world before our eyes. Now, just what do we see?

I. The Lord is to be magnified among the nations. 117:1

- The Psalm follows a command/reason pattern. We are told <u>what</u> to do in v. 1 and <u>why</u> we do it in v. 2
- Further, the Psalm opens and closes with the same word, "praise" or "hallelujah."

1) God desires that all the nations praise Him.

- The psalm begins with a call to praise (Heb. *hallu-yah*) the Lord (*Yahweh*).
- Normally it is the people of God, the covenant community, who are called to praise the Lord. But not here. No, it is the *govim*, the "nations" (*NASV*, *NIV*, *ESV*, *HCSB*).
- "Nations" does not refer to political states but people groups, different ethnic and linguistic groups. The "Joshua Project" (www.joshuaproject.net) list 16,320 different people groups in the world with 6,741 as unreached. The percent of unreached people groups is 41.3% totally 2.72 billion people. At this moment, 4,100 language groups have no hope of praising King Jesus as Lord of the universe.

2) God desires that all the nations extol Him.

- The word "extol" means to boast, laud or praise. It has the idea of bragging on someone. It means to make much of someone.
- "Peoples," like nations, refers to ethnic, language and cultural groupings of people. "Tribes" is a good word to capture what is being said. Note it is in the plural (peoples). It occurs this way more than 230 times in the *ESV*.

- Missions is a cross-cultural strategy and lifestyle that aims to help people stop making much of themselves and to start making much of Jesus.
- John Piper says, "The reason God seeks our praise is not because He won't be complete until He gets it. He is seeking our praise because we won't be happy until we give it....Missions is calling the world to do what they were created to do, namely, to enjoy making much of Christ forever."

II. The Lord is to be magnified because of His nature. 117:2

- There is a rhyme and reason to God's call to magnify Him among the nations. It is a call rooted in the very nature and character of God.
- And what can we say about this God? He is great in His love for us and He will be faithful to love us forever.
- Verse 2 is based and grounded in one of the greatest Old Testament verses in the Bible, Exodus 34:6.

1) Our God is a God of love.

• Once more the beautiful and rich Hebrew word *hesed* appears in our text.

NKJV: merciful kindness NIV: love

NASV: lovingkindness ESV: steadfast love HCSB: faithful love NLT: unfailing love

- His lovingkindness is "great." This is a strong and vigorous word used of the stronger side in a battle or overflowing flood waters. Ideas like "mighty" or "prevailing" capture something of the significance of the word.
- Our God is a God of love. He loves you. He loves me. He loves the world (John 3:16). First John 4:8 and 16 tells us it is the essence of His nature and character.

2) Our God is a God of faithfulness.

- If our Lord's steadfast love is great, His faithfulness is eternal, everlasting, it endures forever. God made a promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 that all the earth, all the peoples, would be blessed by his descendents. From Abraham came Israel. From Israel came Jesus. God kept His word.
- "Truth" in the *NKJV* is once again better translated as "faithfulness" (*ESV*, *NIV*, *HCSB*). The root meaning of the word is "to be firm or unshakable." It is also the basis for our English word "amen." Of course the two ideas are interrelated.
- What God has promised to do for us in Christ is as certain and sure today as on the day He made them. And, it will always be this way, now and forever.
- Call on Him and you will be saved. But, to call on Him, you must know about Him.

Conclusion

- * Derek Kidner was right when he said, "this tiny psalm is great in faith, and its reach is enormous" (411). He is also correct when he notes it finds its prophetic fulfillment in Revelation 7:9-10.
- * Let's get busy for Jesus and see Psalm 117 fulfilled so that all the nations might sing "Hallelujah" to our God and to the Lamb.