

"OLD HUNDREDTH"-PSALM C

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The Psalms have with warrant endeared themselves to the hearts of countless millions, whether of the Jewish Synagogue or the Christian Church. Indeed, even the professor of no established religion delights to meditate and study this portion of the Bible. The Psalms sweep over the entire range of the trials and joys of human experience. They are "The Garden of the Scriptures" and "The Soul's Anatomy." A boundless source of comfort, uplift, hope, and consolation have they been through all the centuries. Since such is the case, many will be surprised when we maintain that the Psalms, though one of the most familiar portions of the Word of God, are yet among those books perhaps least understood. How is this to be accounted for? The reasons are these: (1) there has been woeful failure to realize that the Psalms constitute and were in reality the divinely inspired prayer and praise book of God's ancient people, Israel. Overlooking this fact, or unaware of it, all too many have applied to the Church that which was never intended for her, and have found themselves bound by the problem of fitting many elements of the Psalter into the scheme of the Church. Confusion worse confounded has been the inevitable outcome of such a procedure. (2) There has been an insupportable failure to discern the vital prophetic character of the book. The prophetic nature of the Psalms is readily to be seen from (a) a comparison of the combined testimony of the Old Testament Scriptures. Many themes and movements, if not all of them, treated by the prophets are reckoned with in the Psalms. (b) The testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 21:42f.; 22:41-46) and His apostles confirm beyond a doubt the prophetic content of this revelation. See also Acts 2:25-28, 34-36 and numerous other passages. If these so important and leading interpretative principles are thrown to the winds, irreparable loss must result.

Outstanding in the entire range of the Psalms is the much-beloved and cherished "Old Hundredth." It is among

the five psalms (Pss. 15, 43, 125, and 127, being the others) that have but five verses; only five others (Pss. 117, 123, 131, 133, and 134) are shorter than it. Our psalm has less than half a hundred words. You may be fully assured that, once having studied the comprehensiveness of the portion, the inescapable conclusion will be: only divine inspiration can account for so much in so little. It has never been surpassed tale elsewhere, indeed, never equalled. Delitzsch tells us that "When Basil . . . says that at break of day the Church, as with one heart and one mouth, offers to the Lord in prayer the sacrifice of the 'Psalm of thanksgiving' ... he means this Psalm."¹ The position of the Psalm is peculiarly adapted to set forth the importance attached to it. All students of the Psalms have seen a series from Psalm 93 to 100 (some, indeed, include Psalms 91 and 92, but these do not conform either in content or outlook to the series before us). The theme is the coming of Jehovah and His glorious and righteous reign over the earth. Note the refrain: "Jehovah reigneth," occurring in 93:1; 97:1; and 99:1. Dr. James M. Gray understood this portion after this manner, for he saw Psalm 93 as setting forth the entrance of the King upon His reign; Psalm 94--the appeal for His judgment on the wicked; Psalm 95--the exhortation to Israel to praise Him and the admonition against unbelief; Psalms 96 to 99--the substance of which is to be found in 1 Chronicles 16. Our Psalm is the concluding one in the series and is the doxology. Delitzsch has beautifully styled the whole series : "one great prophetic oratorio," and added: "Among the Psalms of triumph and thanksgiving this stands preeminent, as rising to the highest point of joy and grandeur."² Hengstenberg has seen design in the placement of the group of Psalms now under consideration. Says he, "The Psalm forms not merely a conclusion to Psalm 99: it is assuredly with design that it is put at the end of the whole series; the ecumenic character of which becomes very obvious in it at the close."³ The

¹ *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, Vol. III, p. 70.

² Perowne, J. J. S., *The Book of Psalms*, Vol. II, p. 203, quoting from Delitzsch.

³ *Commentary on the Psalms*, Vol. III, p. 199.

spiritual. and discerning writer, F. W. Grant, notes in his excellent volume on the Psalms: "The hundredth psalm closes this series with the full anthem of praise. Naught else remains. Perfection is found and rest; and both are in God."⁴ We need have no fear, then, that we are dealing with some obscure and secondary portion of Scripture; Psalm 100 takes its place among the foremost poetic and prophetic utterances of the whole revelation of God.

Although prophetic in character and originally written under the direction of the Spirit for the worship and praise of Israel, the passage has precious spiritual truth for us today. Against the dark background of the world's travail the Psalm has its timely message. It is a word for the hour in which we find ourselves. The world lies literally bathed in a blood bath with nation trampling under foot a weaker nation; atrocity upon atrocity is moment by moment perpetrated upon the scene of the world's history; the earth has a tremendous headache. At times it appears that the cup of suffering and woe is so full that more cannot be added, and yet every fresh dispatch adds to the gruesome and solemn story. Is God's sovereignty recognized in the earth today? Do men own allegiance to the Lord God of all the earth? The very earth itself, reeling to and fro as a drunken man or a mad man, shrieks back into our ears with deafening cry the all too obvious answer. Whatever the Psalm meant for Israel of old, and we must believe that it had great value for them, it will not convey its fullest message to us, unless we are Prepared to place it in juxtaposition to the conditions of our day. Then it will be seen to shine with lustrous and radiant beauty, full of comfort and hope and blessing for us all.

Before we essay an exposition of the Psalm, we translate it as follows:

A Psalm for thanksgiving.

- 1 Shout for joy unto Jehovah, all the earth.
- 2 Serve Jehovah with gladness
Come before him with singing.

⁴ *Numerical Bible*, "The Psalms," p. 365.

- 3 Know that Jehovah, he is God
It is he that made us, and we are his;
We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
- 4 Enter into his gates with thanksgiving,
Into his courts with praise
Give thanks unto him, and bless his name.
- 5 For Jehovah is good; his lovingkindness is for ever,
And his faithfulness to all generations.

The title to the Psalm reveals that it is one of the so-called orphan Psalms, those without ascription of authorship. Its superscription, however, is capable of two interpretations. The word תודה can and does mean either "thanksgiving" or "thank-offering." The same noun is found in verse 4 where also occurs the verb which is so frequent in the *Hodu* Psalms. Delitzsch feels that we must take לתודה liturgically (so also Conant in Lange's *Commentary* and many others); what is meant is not the thanksgiving of the heart, but the thank-offering, the תודה זבח of Psalm 107:22. Our translation, though seeming to contradict this position, does not do so in reality. We feel that this is not a case of either this or that, but a case where both are true. The Psalm received its name because it was sung when the thank-offering was presented. Obviously, only a hymn of thanksgiving would be appropriate at such a time. As such, the title is unique for this is the only Psalm in the Psalter so designated.

ACCLAMATION, verse 1.

A division of the Psalm, on the basis of the thought groups and the Hebrew parallelism so clearly a part of Hebrew poetry, shows that the first verse stands grandly alone. The word הריעו is both vivid and full of meaning. It has been translated by both the Authorized Version and the American Standard Version as "Make a joyful noise." This rendering is entirely permissible, but perhaps conveys less meaning than the one given in the translation above. The word is used of the welcome accorded a king upon his enter-

ing his capital or upon taking possession of his throne. The subjects of the King shouting for joy is a signal that Jehovah indeed reigns as stated in the previous Psalms. Since the verb may also mean *to sound a trumpet*, the comment of Delitzsch is apropos: "The first verse, which is without parallelism [the essence of Hebrew poetry] and which is so far monostichic, is like the signal for the sounding of a trumpet."⁵ The exhortation, mark it well, is addressed to all the earth. When in the history of human affairs thus far has there been an occasion when God could warrantedly call upon all the peoples of the earth to shout for joy? Never. But in the millennial era to come, for this Psalm is millennial--a fact more and more clearly seen as the theme progresses, will see all the earth summoned to cry aloud for joy, because the righteous and blessed Son of David will enter upon His reign and assume universal dominion on the throne of His glory. Oh, earth, earth, earth, hear this word! Thou that travailest, groaning and moaning, shalt yet rejoice with exceeding joy. Israel's King is now become in realization the King of all the earth. The Desire of all nations has indeed come. Talk you of premillennial pessimism, as is the custom of our day? Say on; but the living God has stored up for us in His blessed Son everlasting consolations in that the hope of this world for a righteous and benevolent rule resides not in frail and faithless man but in the omnipotent Lord of glory. What glory will greet our adoring eyes when earth acclaims its rightful King. Such is the clap of thunder with which the Psalm begins.

EXHORTATION, verses 2 and 4.

After the initial keynote of acclamation there follow several staccato chords of exhortation. All the earth is enjoined to serve Jehovah with gladness. Ecumenicity and joy characterize the Psalm throughout. To the rebellious nations defying the Lord and His Anointed the Second Psalm had counselled: "Serve Jehovah with fear, And rejoice with trembling" (v. 11). Now, the open revolt against the author-

⁵ *OP. cit.*, p. 71

ity of God and the Lord Jesus Christ has been quelled, and men may serve the Lord with gladness. The thought of joy is expressed in the first verb of the Psalm ("Shout for joy"), and in the words: "with gladness," "with singing," "with thanksgiving," "Give thanks unto him," and "bless [or *praise*] his name." Since God is Lord He is to be served ; since He is gracious the service is to be gladsome and joyful. Approaching God in service and worship is indeed a solemn and awe-inspiring act, but it need not be therefore a melancholy one. In coming into His presence singing is to be upon the lips issuing from grace in the heart. Venema says: "To serve the Lord in joy implies, that submission is rendered to him as *King* and *Lord* willingly and joyfully in all things.)⁶ Singing is a delightful means of drawing near to God. We can all appreciate the thought that prompted Watts' words

"Let those refuse to sing
Who never knew our God;
But children of the heavenly king
Must speak his praise abroad."

Christianity came into the world on the wings of song, and has implanted lasting song in redeemed hearts. Through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ upon Calvary the malady has been changed into melody. Unbelief has no music. We challenge them to produce their anthems, their hymns; they have no anthems, no hymns, no oratorios, and no symphonies. When Robert Ingersoll, the noted agnostic, died, the printed notice of his funeral said: "There will be no singing." How could there be? Ours is a happier and more blessed portion, expressed by Maclaren : "There is no music without passages in minor keys; but joy has its rights and place too, and they know but little of the highest kind of worship who do not sometimes feel their hearts swell with gladness more poignant and exuberant than earth can minister."⁷

That this worship appointed for all the nations of the

⁶ Hengstenberg, *op. cit.*, footnote, p. 200.

⁷ *The Book of Psalms*, Vol. III, p. 79.

earth is intended for the yet future age of righteousness which follows the period. of the Great Tribulation, is even more emphatically brought out by the exhortation of verse 4. (See also for this position, Gaebelein, A. C., *The Book of Psalms*, pp. 369-370.) All the earth is invited to enter into God's gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise, thanking Him and blessing His name. What gates and courts are these? They are those of the millennial temple set forth by the prophet Ezekiel in chapters 40-48 of his prophecy. The fourfold call to the nations to engage in the praise of God finds the temple gates standing ajar; no longer is there a Court of the Gentiles. Perowne has pointed out that what appears in Isaiah 2:2, 3 (we may also add Isa. 60; Zech. 2:9, 10; 8:20-22; 14:16) as prediction, is here given in the form of an invitation. But those who do not see the distinctive features of Israel's and the world's history (apart from the destination of the Body of Christ, the Church) make these charges merely symbolic. Says Delitzsch: "The pilgrimage of all people to the holy mountain (*vid.* Deut. 33:19, the primary passage) is the Old Testament way of expressing the hope of the conversion of all peoples to the God of revelation and the close union of all with the people of this God."⁸ This position is stated even more clearly and emphatically by Alexander: "That the reference to the sanctuary at Jerusalem is merely typical or metaphorical, is clear from the analogy of Isa. 66:23, where all mankind are required to come up every sabbath, a command which, if literally understood, is perfectly impracticable."⁹ Those who reject a literal interpretation of prophecy will, of course, find it necessary to refuse a literal millennial temple, whether it be stated in Psalm 100, Isaiah 66, Ezekiel 40, or Zechariah 8 and 14. To be sure, the whole of this Psalm is to be taken literally, they would tell us, but the two words "gates" and "courts" must needs be shrouded in symbolism and metaphor. All may receive such who will, but we prefer to stand upon the literal sense, confirmed and substantiated every whit by

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁹ *The Psalms*, p. 405.

comparison of Scripture with Scripture. Even the great scholar, Calvin, aligns himself with the spiritualizing interpretation. Did we not properly warn the reader in our introductory word concerning the confusion of Israel with the Church? Then hear Calvin: "And since he invites the whole of the inhabitants of the earth indiscriminately to praise Jehovah, he seems, in the spirit of prophecy, to refer to the period when the Church would be gathered out of different nations."¹⁰ Paul tells us in Ephesians 3 that the Church as a mystery was "hid in God" and not "hid in the Old Testament." Therefore, only a revelation from God (and not the illumination of the already existing Old Testament) could suffice to make it known.

In that day will the blessing of Abraham become the portion of all the families of the earth. The Abrahamic Covenant, oft reiterated and confirmed, will then be fulfilled. This universal feature of the Psalm (howbeit, without the millennial aspect just contended for by us) is expressed by Augustine: "*Et tamen hanc vocem audivit universa terra. Jam jubilat Domino universa terra, et quae adhuc non jubilat jubilabit.... In malis murmurat omnis terra; in bonis jubilat omnis terra.*"¹¹

FOUNDATION, verses 3 and 5.

Having exhorted the nations to render God unstinted praise and service, the Psalm now presents the reasons or the foundation for such action upon the part of the earth. How ample is the ground for the earth's praise of the living God. First and foremost, the nations with their many gods and lords are to acknowledge the one true and living God. God can never be praised aright or worshipped if He be not owned as the only God. Such recognition of the true nature of God will be in strong contrast to the arrogance of the man of sin in the previous period claiming divine prerogatives and honors. See 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 13, as well as Daniel 11. The verb **לָמַד** speaks of learning by experience,

¹⁰ *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Vol. IV, p. 83.

¹¹ For the entire quotation see Perowne, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

and this Theodoret (according to Delitzsch and Perowne) interpreted as δι' αὐτῶν μάθετε τῶν πραγμάτων. Spurgeon quotes Matthew Henry as having aptly said: "blind sacrifices will never please a seeing God." The worship of God is to be intelligent. "Know that Jehovah, he is God" reminds us of the wording of Psalm 46:11 (Hebrew). The setting is the time immediately after the putting down of the insurrection portrayed in Psalm 2. Then, as Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer has so cogently said many times, the Lord Jesus Christ will lay hold of that archenemy, Satan, binding him, as He says "Be still [for a thousand years], and know that I am God." Not only will Satan be brought to this place by compulsion, but the nations altogether through God's mercy will know Him to be God alone. They must know whom they worship, and to this knowledge they will come by experience, not rote memory. We are to know Him in His works (as seen in the remainder of verse 3) and in His Person (set forth in verse 5). These are the two foci around which all acceptable worship of God must adjust itself: the Person and work of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, together with the blessed Holy Spirit, the ineffably glorious Trinity. There are outlined for us immediately the three grounds for our worship of God, or the three rights that belong to Him:

1. The right of creation. "It is he that made us, and we are his" (Psalm 95:6; Isaiah 60:21). God deserves all praise for His creative work. The Authorized Version translates the text וְלֹא לָנוּ, "and not we ourselves," while the American Standard renders it as we have translated it above. The difference is much greater in English than in the original, where the marginal reading changes the text by one letter, from וְלֹא לָנוּ to וְלֹא לְהוּ, from "and not we (ourselves)" to "and to him we (belong)." Each reading has its supporters among students of the Psalm. Hengstenberg and Alexander (whose work is practically a condensation of that of the first) prefer the reading of the text: "and not we ourselves." The former states simply that the marginal reading is unsuitable. The latter feels his choice is based upon the greater antiquity of the text, its greater significance, and its appropriateness to

the passage. The LXX supports the text in preference to a changed reading, giving us καὶ οὐχ ἡμεῖς. In this the Syriac and Vulgate concur.¹² The evidence for the marginal reading is this: it is found in 19 MSS. of De Rossi and 9 of Kennicott; it agrees with the parallel passage (Psalm 95:7) ; it is adopted by able modern scholars (so Perowne's arguments) ; Jerome, the Chaldee, and Bishop Lowth favor the margin (so Calvin, although he translates according to the text). Delitzsch points out 15 Old Testament passages where the Masoretic scholars read וְלֹא instead of אֲנִי, this verse being one of them. We feel that Delitzsch takes the common sense view: both variants are in harmony with the context and Scripture as a whole, but the preference should go to the Qeri. Symmachus (the same view is taken by the great Jewish scholar, Rashi) renders the text (which he prefers): αὐτὸς ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς οὐκ ὄντας, that is, "he made us when we were not." This is contrary to Hebrew grammar. Conant, explains that the translation, "not ourselves," is supposedly in contrast to Pharaoh's boast in Ezekiel 29:3. Perhaps the truer meaning of that passage is, not that Pharaoh boasts of making himself, but that he made the Nile for himself.¹³ The truth is clear enough: God made man, therefore he did not make himself, and since God made man, he belongs to God. But who are the "we" and the "us" of this verse? Every other pronoun or pronominal suffix in the Psalm refers to Jehovah. The "we" refers to Israel. We have here the fulfillment of Psalm 67: Israel in blessing means blessing for the world. Though he fails to see the dispensational aspect of these things, Maclaren has beautifully stated the truth of the verse thus : "The psalm is . . . a song which starts from national blessings, and discerns in them a message of hope and joy for all men. Israel was meant to be a sacred hearth on which a fire was kindled, that was to warm all the house."¹⁴

2. The right of redemption. If Israel (and by so much

¹² Calvin, *op. cit.*, *in loco*.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 515.

¹⁴ *OP. cit.*, p. 80.

the other nations of that day as well, for all must have cause before they can praise aright) is God's by creation, she is His all the more so because of His redemptive work for her. This is the truth of the words: "We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." In the Old Testament these expressions speak of Israel (cf. Psa. 74:1; 79:1.3; 95:7) but in the age we are studying it will be true of the nations also. See Zechariah 2:14; Isaiah 14:1. Israel can say from a full and long experience: "The goodness God has extended to us, He will not withhold from you all." And the nations, viewing God's dealings of old with His people, will be all the more encouraged to render Him all praise and adoration. What blessed truths are these: man's Creator is also his Owner. We are God's by two creations, two births. His is the right of the Kinsman-Redeemer, the Ransomer. All nations will yet own these irrefutable facts.

3. The right of preservation. To say that Israel is the sheep of His pasture implies a wealth of meaning. There is no good English equivalent for the verb **רעה**, from which come the words for "pasture" and "shepherd." Included in the word are all the blessed experiences of divine care, guidance, and provision. He sees that every need is provided. God is mighty to save and equally mighty to preserve. For this reason we prefer to speak of the preservation of the saints, rather than the perseverance of the saints.

The Psalmist has outlined sufficient foundation for the world to praise God for all His benefits. But there is a yet higher reason to adore God it is because of His blessed Person, because of who He is. He is infinitely good in Himself, apart from any or all good that He can bestow. He is full of lovingkindness, not severe, forbidding, but warmhearted and compassionate. He is everlastingly faithful: every word of His promises, He will fulfill. If His lovingkindness and faithfulness are forever, everlasting, then men will never be at a loss for a cause to praise and thank God. All is founded and grounded on inherent goodness, everlasting lovingkindness, and unchanging faithfulness. We should be constrained to cry in the fourfold refrain of the 107th Psalm:

"Oh that men would praise Jehovah for his lovingkindness
And for his wonderful works to the children of men!" (vss.
8, 15, 21, 31). And above all for Himself.

What value has the Psalm for us believers today? Once having ascertained the proper interpretation, it is legitimate to apply every spiritual blessing to the child of God of this age. He will find through contemplation of the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ ample foundation for shouting to God for joy, for serving Him with gladness, for coming before Him with singing, for knowing that Jehovah alone is God, for realizing His work of creation, redemption, and preservation, for coming to God directly (without need of earthly temple or sanctuary) through the Mediator, Christ Jesus, with thanksgiving and praise, for thanking Him, and for blessing His name because of His blessed character. He needs not to await the millennial hour to perform any of this reasonable, spiritual service. Does the dispensational view, then, rob the believer of blessings he may have had? Never. It places truth in proper position and the result is greater ultimate blessing for all.

Though the Psalm is short, it is exceedingly full. There are seven thoughts relating to praise: (1) "Shout for joy"; (2) "with gladness"; (3) "with singing"; (4) "with thanksgiving"; (5) "with praise"; (6) "Give thanks"; (7) "bless his name." There are seven distinct exhortations: (1) "Shout for joy"; (2) "Serve Jehovah"; (3) "Come before him", (4) "Know that Jehovah"; (5) "Enter into his gates" ; (6) "Give thanks unto him"; (7) "bless his name." There is a seven-fold picture of God as (1) Lord of all the earth; (2) King of the nations; (3) Creator of all men; (4) Shepherd of His flock ; (5) Guardian of His Own; (6) Object of all true praise; (7) God of infinite goodness, eternal lovingkindness, and lasting faithfulness. Hengstenberg has so masterfully summarized the Psalm that we quote him at length : "There can be no doubt that Ps. xci.-c. belong to the same time and same author, that they form a connected series, that they are on the territory of the Psalm poetry, what the second part of

Isaiah is on the territory of prophecy, and that we have before us in them a decalogue of Psalms intimately connected together. The reference to the relation in which Israel stands to the might of the world, is common to all these Psalms. The objective view of suffering also is a common feature: the Psalmist stands everywhere above it, no crying from the depths, no conflict with despair--the explanation being that the Psalmist has to do with *future* suffering, and is preparing for it a shield of consolation. These Psalms also are in common characterised by a confident expectation of a glorious revelation of the Lord, which the author, following up the prophetic writings, sees with the eye of faith as already present. It is common to them all to quote with marked intelligence from older passages, especially from the Davidic Psalms, and from the second part of Isaiah, in connection with an originality of thought and expression which it is impossible to mistake. It is a common feature also that these quotations are in all cases taken from writings of a date prior to the captivity, in accordance with a series of other marks of a pre-Chaldaic era which are scattered everywhere throughout these Psalms.--It is common to them all that the tone never rises above a certain height, and never sinks beneath it, just as in the second part of Isaiah, in common with which our Psalm bears the character of mild sublimity. There are common to them all a great many parallel passages, the use of anadiplosis, the predilection for the mention of musical instruments, proceeding from the *joyful* character of the Psalm. It is impossible also not to notice design in the arrangement. Two introductory Psalms of a general character stand at the head: Ps. xci., an expression of joyful confidence in the help of God in all troubles and dangers; Ps. xcii., the greatness of God, which brings on the destruction of the wicked, and the salvation of the just; Ps. xciii. is then opened with the watchword, "the Lord reigneth," which henceforward is uttered on all sides, and applied for comfort and exhortation. The whole ends in the exhortation addressed to the whole earth to serve the Lord and to praise him and to give him glory for the abundant salvation which he imparts,--

the full-toned chorus of all nations and tongues who know that the Lord is God."¹⁵

We conclude with the truly beautiful Scotch version of the Psalm:

All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice,
Him serve with fear, His praise forth tell;
Come ye before Him and rejoice.

"The Lord, ye know, is God indeed;
Without our aid He did us make;
We are His flock, He doth us feed,
And for His sheep He doth us take.

"O enter then His gates with praise,
Approach with joy His courts unto:
Praise, laud, and bless His name always,
For it is seemly so to do.

"For why? The Lord our God is good,
His mercy is for ever sure;
His truth at all times firmly stood,
And shall from age to age endure."

"Let us sing the Old Hundredth."

Dallas, Texas.

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, pp. 202, 203.

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