

April 16, 2009

Psalm 149 (ESV)

**Praise the LORD!
Sing to the LORD a new song,
His praise in the assembly of the godly!
Let Israel be glad in his Maker;
Let the children of Zion rejoice in their King!
Let them praise his name with dancing,
Making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!
For the LORD takes pleasure in his people;
He adorns the humble with salvation.**

**Let the godly exult in glory;
Let them sing for joy on their beds.
Let the high praises of God be in their throats
And two-edged swords in their hands,
To execute vengeance on the nations
And punishments on the peoples,
To bind their kings with chains
And their nobles with fetters of iron,
To execute on them the judgment written!
This is honor for all his godly ones.
Praise the LORD!**

This psalm begins in familiar territory but takes us somewhere unexpected. The second half of this psalm is so unfamiliar to me, that I wonder how long it's been since I've read it. I wonder if, in times past, I've started to read this psalm and, after a few verses, said to myself, "Well, this is just another praise psalm" and moved on. But now, having really read it and thought about it for awhile, there is a lot that intrigues me about this psalm. Here are some thoughts I plan to wrestle with, and maybe you will, too.

1. The praise described here looks different than the kinds of praise I give to God. Maybe it's my personality, or maybe it's my faith tradition, but I don't usually get this animated with my praise. I can't help but wonder if I'm missing something. I think of David in 2 Sam 6 as he sang and danced before the Lord as the Ark of the Covenant was being brought into Jerusalem. Is that an example of the kind of worship and praise envisioned in this psalm? I think so. Maybe my praise is too cerebral—too subdued. This challenges me.
2. I'm also challenged by the glee of this psalmist in the second stanza. I can understand and appreciate his being thrilled with a Lord who loves His people and blesses them with salvation. That makes sense. But the psalmist is also excited about executing vengeance and judgment on the people and nations around him. This kind of attitude might offend our sensibilities. It is too violent and vengeful for our taste, and with good reason. We are Christians. But the Old Testament is teeming with references to God's judgment and to God using people to deliver His judgments. Even the New Testament reminds us that this same holy God will again judge the world and punish all wickedness. But we are not called to be the same kind of sword-bearers. Our weaponry has changed, and according to Paul, we fight against evil and injustice with the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17). But we do have a strong point of contact here with this psalmist. He rejoices and praises God because he feels honored to be used by God. It is still an honor for us to be graced with a role in the work of God. This gift of purpose should give us a powerful reason to praise the Lord.

My mind is racing with ideas of things that we ought to praise the Lord for! I think I'll make a list and say a prayer and live more focused today. There are so many reasons to rejoice—so let's get to it.

May you find your place in God's mission and do your duty with joy and praise! You are loved by God.

In Him,
Patrick Barber