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SERMON TITLE: Choosing Heaven Over Earth!
SCRIPTURE: Psalm 96, Why Worship? Series
DATE: November 18, 2018
Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Read also Luke 19:36-40

Who is the King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. . . . Lift up your heads, He is the King of Glory! The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory! Ps 25:8, 10

Those words were put to music by George Frideric Handel in 1741 when he wrote *Messiah*. Once a successful composer, times had changed and his music had fallen in popularity. Audiences dwindled. His projects failed, causing his bankruptcy. He fell into depression. He developed some sort of palsy that crippled some of his fingers. It seemed that his inspiration was exhausted.

That is when Handel received a manuscript from a man named Charles Jennens who had put together a collection of Old Testament texts to prove that Christianity was a truth planned from eternity. Handel wrote *Messiah* in twenty-three days. He later said he did not know whether he was in the body or out of the body as he wrote it.

Christianity was planned from eternity—and the story has been shared from the beginning in large part through song; through worship. Music is an expression of the soul. The first mention of God's people singing was in Exodus 15, after Israel was rescued from Egypt:

"Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name." (Exodus 15:1-3).

Many of the Psalms were hymns written by David and a musician named Asaph to praise God and communicate God's glory to the nations. These songs and prayers are a record of people's quest for God. In his pursuit of God, David experienced God's power. He, Moses, and others wrote about it.

It has been 3,000 years since then, and we still use their Psalms nearly every week in our worship.

We still sing "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," written by Martin Luther in 1529. It is based on Psalm 46, and is a

celebration of God's sovereign power over all earthly and spiritual forces, and of the sure hope we have because of Christ.¹ It became a popular hymn and was sung in the streets during the Reformation, a time of immense upheaval in the church.

The power of God, the reality of heaven inhabits expressions of worship. These lift us up at all hard times. Are you experiencing hard circumstances? Is our nation experiencing difficulties? Perhaps you should go around singing hymns and teaching your friends to worship (rather than discussing political views!).

Worship positively affects your personal life too!

In 1779, "All Hail the Power of Jesus Name" was written by a man named Edward Perronet. He was a missionary to India. The title was not a misnomer. Pastor E. P. Scott worked in India about that time. He felt a burden for a tribe that was known to be barbarous. People warned him to avoid the tribe, but he went anyway. But before he even reached their village, he suddenly found himself surrounded by them with swords and weapons.

He had nothing to defend himself; he had only his violin. He closed his eyes and began to play and sing "All Hail the Power of Jesus Name" anticipating this was it—he was facing eternity. But after a few minutes he opened his eyes and much to his surprise they had dropped their spears and were looking at him in awe and curiosity. They welcomed him and he was able to share the Gospel and many became believers.²

This is the power and glory of God which is spoken of in our Scripture today. Hear Psalm 96.

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of nations,

¹ Hymn Stories: A Mighty Fortress is Our God, at <https://www.challies.com/articles/hymn-stories-a-mighty-fortress-is-our-god/>, accessed November 15, 2018.

² Church Choir Music website, "The Story Behind All Hail the Power of Jesus Name," see <http://churchchoirmusic.com/the-story-behind-the-song-all-hail-the-power-of-jesus-name>, accessed November 14, 2018.

ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.

The Psalm is filled with the attributes of God: power, splendor, strength, vastness, righteous judgment and equity. These qualities affect all nations and all nature. God's reign brings fear. It also brings joy.

Last week we talked about Job's most difficult troubles and his friends who tried to figure it all out, just like we try to resolve our national troubles with the ideals of our two dramatically opposed political parties. Finally, Job and his friends got to the end of the discussion to no avail; they were stuck.

It was then that God spoke. You heard a very small piece of the conversation in the Call to Worship. The gist is that God's presence is so great, so vast, so powerful that nothing can stand without it—not nature, not nations, not you!

God expressed to Job all the things we express in worship songs to lift Job out of his troubles so that Job turned to the One who could truly help him.

"Lift up your heads and be lifted up!"

*Our God is the Lion, the Lion of Judah
He's roaring with power and fighting our battles
And every knee will bow before Him³*

That is our modern-day expression of who God is. Every generation has its worship music which helps us lift our heads to the heavenly realm.

Are you daily lifting your head to the God who made heaven and can really help you?

God asked Job, essentially, 'what power do you truly have?'

Job, having lost everything said,

"None. I said things I knew nothing about; things so great and unfathomable that I can't possibly know them." (42:3)

"So I repent. I'm sorry God. I'm sorry for being such a know-it-all."

Then he said something curious. He said, "I've heard about you, but now, through all these struggles I now have seen you. So I repent."

That means I just simply turn around and follow you now. No more self-solutions; self-driven, self-seeking, "blaming" God living.

The minute he said that, God changed Job's entire circumstance.

After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before. All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought upon him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring. The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first. [He restored all of his flocks and gave him ten children. And all the girls were beautiful. He lived to 140, and saw his children and grandchildren to the 4th generation.] The Scripture ends: "And so he died, old and full of years." (42:10-17)

Satan was nowhere to be found.

Every generation has its music to lift up our heads to the One who must be worshiped. The choir embarks this week to New York City to sing their faith to a city and a nation that will not be healed without the Lord. This church and this community could not do anything more important. They proclaim the best news—news from heaven.

What do you cling to? Only earth? Or heaven first?

Be wise. Then tell the story. Sing it, because you are full of joy.

AMEN

³ "The Lion and the Lamb," written by Leeland Mooring, Brenton Brown and Brian Johnson, and recorded by Big Daddy Weave in 2015.