

Praise Of Thunder

Psalm 98 December 28, 2025

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! It's the 28th, so we're right in the middle. Three days from Christmas, three days till New Year. Whether you're a New Years resolutions person or not, at the close of December we tend reflect on the year behind and anticipate the year ahead.

And the truth is, that's a good practice for our spiritual lives. It's up to *you* if you want to exercise more in 2026 or quit a bad habit or make some financial goals. But Christians should make it a habit of remembering what God has done, both personally and throughout history and we should think forward about what He might want to do in our midst and through our lives in the days ahead. Because our lives belong to Him - it's *His* breath in our lungs. And none of our plans really matter if they're outside of *His* plans for us.

The Apostle Peter was big into this in his writing. At one point, as he was talking about the work of God in the lives of Christians, he said, "I will *always* remind you about these things, even though you already know them." And he goes on to talk about what the Lord has done in the past and also about the coming, future Kingdom. His argument is that this sort of spiritual reflection of both past and future will help us *remember* what God has called us to, give us *hope* in His promises, and help us *prepare* for the days ahead.

Psalm 98 fits in really well with this theme. It's a great end-of-year/new-year song because it looks back *and* it looks forward. It even has Christmas ties, because when Mary sings *her* song of praise in Luke chapter 1, she echoes words and themes from *this* Psalm.¹

In many ways, this is a very straight-forward song. It breaks up well into three sets of three verses. Charles Spurgeon said that verses 1 through 3 show us the subject of praise, verses 4 through 6 the manner of praise, and verses 7 through 9 the universal extent of the praise.²

So let's take a look together, starting in verse 1.

Psalm 98:1 - ¹ Sing a new song to the LORD, for he has performed wonders; his right hand and holy arm have won him victory.

Psalm 98 is not *only* a call to *reflect*, it is a call to *rejoice*. All of us. *All the world!* After realizing the power of God, the goodness of God, the promises of God, all the work He *has* done and *will* do in the world - all of that should make us join in an orchestra of praise.

The song this great orchestra performs is a celebration of God's *victory*. Music used to be a way of commemorating great battles and victories. That's where our own national anthem came from: The

¹ Christopher Ash *The Psalms: A Christ-Centered Commentary*

² Charles Spurgeon *The Treasury Of David, Volume II*

defense of Fort McHenry and the American victory in the Battle of Baltimore.³ Tchaikovsky's famous *1812 Overture* celebrates the Russian victory over Napoleon's invasion.

God's work deserves musical celebration. We see that happen many times in the Bible. After the Israelites escape Pharaoh through the Red Sea, Moses writes a song and teaches it to the people. Then right after that, Miriam sings a song of her own. In the book of Judges, Deborah composes a song of victory after God delivers them from the Canaanites. I already mentioned Mary's song, commonly called the Magnificat, after her visit from Gabriel.

We can move through Christian history and see again and again the presence of celebratory music commemorating the wonderful acts of God. Great hymns coming out of the Reformation and the Wesleyan Awakening.⁴ Skip forward to the Jesus Movement of the 60's and 70's and all the songs that came out of that work of God - songs we still sing today.

These songs, from *I Love You Lord* to *Amazing Grace* to *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, can serve as landmarks of what God has so faithfully and so powerfully done generation after generation.

Psalm 98:2 - ² The LORD has made his victory known; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.

The focus of this opening stanza is the *victory* of God. But there's something important for us to understand: *Man's* victory often comes by means of *destruction*. *God's* victory is about *deliverance*. Verse 3 will say, "The ends of the earth have seen God's victory." The word there is Yeshua. It means "deliverance," or "salvation."⁵ But most of you know it's not just a noun, it's a *proper* noun, too.

You see, after Jesus was born, He was presented in the Temple. There was a man there named Simeon. He was a devout man, *full* of the Holy Spirit. God promised Simeon that before he died he would see the Messiah - the *Deliverer* - with his own eyes. When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus into the Temple, the Holy Spirit told Simeon that *this* Child was that Deliverer. And Simeon says (in *his* commemorative song of praise), "God, You've kept Your promise. I have seen Your salvation."

God's victorious deliverance has a name, and it's Jesus. As many of you know, His name is the Greek version of the Hebrew word we're reading in Psalm 98. Jesus *is* salvation. He *is* victory. He *is* the Deliverer not *only* for a select few, but for all the nations.

We remember that famous hymn from 1939: Oh *victory* in Jesus, our Savior forever. Victory has a name. A name above any other name. Any other power. Any other leader. Any other victor.

Psalm 98:3 - ³ He has remembered his love and faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen our God's victory.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_McHenry

⁴ Donald Williams and Lloyd Ogilvie *The Preacher's Commentary, Volume 14: Psalms 73-150*

⁵ *NASB Dictionaries*

God *gives* victory to His people. They don't receive it because they have anything to trade. They don't receive it because God owes them something. It is a gift given purely out of grace and kindness. We are totally dependent on God's love and mercy. Without that, there's no victory, there's no forgiveness, there's no deliverance, there's no hope.

But the good news is that God doesn't just *have* a little love, He *is* love.⁶ And His love cannot be exhausted. His love is *hesed* and is *agape*. It is generous and devoted and compassionate and faithful. It is *active* on our behalf.

As we think back over 2025, we should remind ourselves of how God has loved us and how *well* God has loved us. The ways He provided and sustained and blessed and strengthened us. And as we think about what 2026 might hold, we should consistently remind ourselves that - no matter what - we are *loved* by God. *Actively* loved by Him. And that *nothing* can separate us from that love.

Maybe you're here and you haven't received the love of God. It's not because God doesn't want you to have it. He does. It's because the *only* way to get it is through being in covenant relationship with Him. You must believe and receive. Believe that Jesus Christ *is* the only way for you to be saved, and receive Him as Lord and Savior and Friend. You start with belief and then the Lord will come into your life and *deliver* you from sin. He will start accomplishing the wonderful work that this psalm sings about in your life. And you will grow in your knowledge of Him and your love for Him. But it begins with a choice to believe. If you confess with your lips Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. You receive deliverance.

And if you're wondering whether God can be trusted, whether He can be counted on, whether He really keeps His promises, look at Israel! The nation of Israel is one of the greatest proofs of how faithful and how powerful God's love is. How He will *never* fail.

Psalm 98:4-6 - ⁴ Let the whole earth shout to the LORD; be jubilant, shout for joy, and sing. ⁵ Sing to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and melodious song. ⁶ With trumpets and the blast of the trumpet shout triumphantly in the presence of the LORD, our King.

Here we see many different parts. Trumpets and stringed instruments and voices. Later we'll see percussion. It's an orchestra.

The Guinness World Record for largest orchestra was set in Venezuela in 2021 when 8,573 musicians performed *another* Tchaikovsky piece celebrating military history: *The Slavic March*.⁷

But one day Psalm 98 is going to beat that record. Because this song is *meant* to be sung by a planetary orchestra. "Let the *whole earth*" sing and shout and play and make melody.

⁶ 1 John 4:8

⁷ <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/largest-orchestra>

Like most churches, we make it a habit to sing praise to God at our services. God loves to hear His children sing. It pleases God when we worship Him. But our singing can also remind us of what is still to come. Derek Kidner writes, “*The [songs] we sing now are a rehearsal and God’s presence among His worshippers is a prelude to His appearing to the world.*”⁸

It’s fun to think about how many people are worshiping God today. You know, if you go around the globe, with all the time zones, it will be 10am 38 times today. Meaning that for all the Sunday morning churches, the praise will keep flowing again and again 38 times as the world turns.

But of course, praise doesn’t only happen Sunday mornings. There is, undoubtedly, an unbroken stream of worship to our God moment by moment around the globe. Each gathering a piece of God’s orchestra. And we get to joyfully recount the goodness and grace of God as we lift His name high song by song, week by week *in* His presence. God *inhabits* the praises of His people.⁹

Psalm 98:7-9a - ⁷ Let the sea and all that fills it, the world and those who live in it, resound. ⁸ Let the rivers clap their hands; let the mountains shout together for joy ⁹ before the LORD,

One day, creation itself will join in the song. *Today*, creation *groans*, waiting to be set free from the ruin and decay of sin.¹⁰ But redemption is coming. A *Kingdom* is coming. The *Lord* is coming to solve every problem. To bring total restoration to every place and all who have joined His family.

There have been times in human history when a conquering commander will wage what is called “Total war.” That the invaders would destroy *everything* as they went. The Mongols utilized total war. They would divert rivers, destroy property, decimate whole populations. Not too many songs today celebrating that empire. I haven’t heard a Mongol hymn recently.

When Christ returns, He *will* conquer His enemies, and those who reject Him *will* be destroyed. But remember He is a *Deliverer*. And the final result is total *worship*. Psalm 98 shows every person, every fish, every animal, the water itself, and all the rocks resounding in *joyful* praise to God.

Resounding refers to the rumble of thunder.¹¹ We rarely get to hear *real* thunder in our area. A few months ago we had that one day with real thunder. Of course, thunder comes after lightning. In Matthew 24, Jesus says that His return will be like lightning flashing from east to west. And after He returns comes the thunder of praise from all creation. The whole world *reverberating* His glory.¹²

Reverb is a specific effect in sound. It’s not just an echo. It’s when a sound fills a space and reflects off the surfaces of that space, creating a *persistence* of sound. And so the original is not simply *copied*, but it *continues*.

⁸ Derek Kidner *Psalms 73-150*

⁹ Psalm 22:3

¹⁰ Romans 8:21-22

¹¹ *Theological Wordbook Of The Old Testament*

¹² Frank Gaebelein, et. al. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 5: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*

We did a lot of singing in 2025. Hopefully in 2026 we'll get to do even more. Not just going through the motions and zoning out, but that our hearts would *reverberate* with praise. That the joyful truth of God's work would fill our hearts and reflect off of us. A *persisting* testimony of how wonderful God is. That the joy of His presence and accomplishment would resound from us.

Psalm 98:9b-d - for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world righteously and the peoples fairly.

When I hear the word "judge," I generally have a sort of anxious dread. I doubt any of us want to be brought before a judge tomorrow morning. But remember: God is a Judge Who freely *offers* us His righteousness. He says, "I'll trade *your* iniquity for *My* righteousness." And His "fairness" is to forgive us, remember our guilt no more, and share all He has with us. In fact, the word used for "fairly" there was a term comparable to one used in Mesopotamia for when someone was released from their debts.¹³

Jesus Christ is coming to do *that* for those who put their trust in Him. He's coming to bring restoration and victory and *joy* to this world. That's the message of Psalm 98. Which is why it was a perfect text for Isaac Watts to use when writing *Joy To The World*.¹⁴

The Lord is good. He is always good. And His goodness is always active. His strong arm of love and grace was working in 2025 and it will be in 2026. And our Deliverer is coming back one day and then all the earth will join the song of celebration to the forever King.

No matter what happens in 2026, *this* verse should be our perspective. But the New Testament gives us an interesting plot twist: We Christians can actually *hasten* His return.¹⁵ We can orient our lives in such a way that the good work of God can spread and accelerate. Until one day God's righteousness and fairness will cover the whole earth. And our praise won't be a prelude, it will be the performance creation has anticipated for thousands of years.

In 2025, God has been active and faithful. We want to take time to celebrate that and thank Him for it. In 2026, we not only get to *prepare* ourselves for what He wants to do, we get to *participate* in what He *is* doing. His hand is *still* moving. He is still accomplishing wonderful things. He wants to make a melody with *your* life if you'll believe Him, walk by faith, and take your place in His orchestra.

¹³ Victor Matthews, Mark Chavalas, and John Walton. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*

¹⁴ Daniel Estes *Psalm 73-150*

¹⁵ 2 Peter 3:12