

1. As I started going through the psalms in this lesson, what hit me was an overwhelming sense of appreciation for God. Not just that He has saved us, but just how wonderful the big picture is of what God has done, is doing and will do for all of humanity and especially for those who trust in Him. So no matter your mood at this moment, I invite you to come appreciate God with me.
 - a) That leads me to my lesson title. It is that single word, "appreciate".
 - b) OK John, why should I tell God how much I appreciate Him? If God is perfect, why does He need to hear it? It is not for His sake, but for ours. Experiencing the joy of God begins with spending time being grateful for what He has done for us in our lives.
 - c) It would be helpful here to give my paraphrase of John MacArthur's salvation definition:
 - i) Salvation is what we did receive when we first acknowledged Jesus as our savior.
 - ii) Salvation is what we continually receive as we grow in our trust of Jesus.
 - iii) Salvation is what we will receive when we get to enter heaven and be with God.
 - d) I stated that definition because we grow in our relationship with God is by spending time appreciating all He has done, is doing and will do in our lives. Let me give examples:
 - i) We can think of the beautiful things God has made.
 - ii) We can think about the positive things that have happened in our life.
 - iii) We can appreciate the salvation we have in past present and future aspects.
 - iv) We can think about the fact that God created us with the purpose of living for Him and being with Him forever. I am convinced the greatest purpose for living is all about making a difference for Him with our lives.
 - v) My point here is that there is a lot we can choose from to appreciate about God.
2. This leads me to the psalms of this lesson. The first one deals with the problem of a lack of trust in God's ability to work in our lives. The remaining psalms focus on the joy we can and will have when God literally rules over this world one day.
 - a) This lesson and the next lesson both spend time focusing on the fact that life as we know it now, does not go on forever. Part of being a Christian is to believe Jesus will literally return one day and He will rule over this world. There are lots of bible references to that literal event. A good reference to read about that event is Revelation Chapter 20
 - i) The point for the moment is God wants us to appreciate all He is doing in our lives now and in the future when He comes back to "right the wrongs" of this world.
 - b) Learning to appreciate God is more than just getting us in a good mood about the great things God has done in our lives and in our world. It is about having confidence that the bad aspects of this world will not go on forever. The bible teaches that there is coming a day when Jesus will literally return to rule over our world. We can have confidence that God will judge all the "bad stuff" His way on His timing. In this lesson I will discuss why that is a good thing and why we should look forward to that day.
3. To explain appreciation for God another way, let me share one of my biblical expressions": Just because someone invites us over to their house, does not give us permission to rearrange the furniture. (Chuck Missler.). What that means is just because we are saved, does not mean we automatically get to share in all the blessings He desires for us in this life and the life to come.
 - a) I am convinced a reason Paul worked so hard for Jesus, is that Paul believed his eternal destiny depended upon working hard to make a difference for Him. That is what God calls all of us to do: Draw on His power to make a difference in this world. Learning to appreciate God, as this lesson will show, helps us to draw on His power to make that difference in our world around us.
 - b) With that positive introduction completed, let us spend some time together appreciating all that God is doing in our lives through the psalms in this lesson.

4. Psalm 95, title: None
 - a) None of the psalms in this lesson have a title. Given that fact, I won't discuss any lack of titles any more in this lesson.
 - b) Commentators believe that Psalms 93 through 100 are all a single series about giving praise to God for various reasons. Each of these psalms give various reasons to praise God well, mainly just for the fact that He is our God. I was considering covering all of these psalms in one lesson, but after working through them, it wasn't meant to be.
 - c) OK, time to break down and actually start Psalm 95.
5. Verse 1: Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
 - a) Verse 1 is describing an effort being made by the psalmist to sing out loud to God.
 - i) No, this is not a request to sing at the top of our lungs. It is a request to get together with other believers to share our appreciation of God.
 - ii) Yes it is about making an effort in church to appreciate God and all He has done for our lives. I believe it is also about getting together for example, with those in our own household to praise what God has, is doing, and will do for us.
 - b) I would like you to notice the different names (that is titles) given for God in this verse.
 - i) The word LORD in all capitals represents the name "Jehovah". That word literally means, "I am what I am". What is behind that title is about learning to appreciate God for who He is, who He was and who He always will be.
 - ii) The title "Rock of our salvation" is about appreciating our salvation. That title for God also comes back to my threefold aspect of salvation as defined by John MacArthur and I stated on the previous page of this lesson. Again, it is about appreciating all three "time aspects" of our salvation.
 - iii) The title for God translated as "rock", is designed to express steadiness. Think of a giant unmovable huge rock. Think of the Rock of Gibraltar as an example. The point is we can appreciate how God is always there and always unchangeable.
6. Verse 2: Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.
 - a) In Verse 2, we have the "what" and "how" questions posed and answered:
 - i) The "what" is about telling God how we are grateful for what He has, is and will do in our lives. I am convinced that in order to be joyful in life, one has to be thankful for what we have. That is why it is necessary to express thanks to God.
 - a) My point is simply that God wants us to take the time to show our gratitude for what He has done for us. We should do this to get us to appreciate Him more, and that should make us more joyful in our lives.
 - ii) The "how" is with music and song. I am convinced this method is not the only way to show our appreciation to God. A logical assumption is that someone with musical talent wrote this psalm. The idea for us is to use whatever talent we have to show our appreciation to God.
 - a) Even if we are not musicians or great singers, the point is God wants us to use whatever ability we do have to praise Him. For our own benefit and the benefit of others around us, we should individually and collectively express our gratitude to Him.
 - b) This verse is not just saying how grateful we are for our salvation. That would only take a few seconds. Appreciation of God is about spending the time to think about all the good things He has done both in our own lives and the lives of others.
 - i) My point is once we start to think about all the good things God has done for us as individuals and as believers, it can be overwhelming to contemplate.
 - ii) A reason for all of this appreciation is that it gets us to trust Him when things are not going well. It is a way to realize that God is always ("big always") there for us.
 - iii) Learning to appreciate God helps us to cope with anything we are dealing with at the present moment in our lives.

7. Verse 3: For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods.
- a) Let's start this verse by remembering that there are lots of deities worshipped as god. For those who think that worshipping any god is the same as worshipping "the" God, let me use the study of Islam as an example to counter that concept:
 - i) Islam teaches that the Jewish and Christian God is not the same as the God of Islam. Those words of denial are literally printed in large letters on the Muslim temple that currently stands where the Jewish Temple once stood in Jerusalem.
 - ii) Other religions do teach how to be a good person or live a happy life. While those are good things, they miss the key issue of how a perfect God can perfectly forgive our sins. God Himself believes that we deserve punishment for our disobedience. At the same time God Himself paid the price for our sins. That is how the bible teaches about God having perfect justice and perfect forgiveness at the same time.
 - b) This does lead me back to Verse 3. The point here is not about the existence of false gods. The point is that the God of the bible will rule over and eventually bring an end to other "so called" gods that are worshipped in this world.
 - i) One thing I will emphasize in this lesson and in the next lesson is the concept that God gets involved in the lives of believers now. There is coming a future day where God will bring an end to life as we know it. In that day, other gods and the people who worship them will be judged. In summary, when Jesus returns to rule over the world, it brings an end to any other form of worship.
 - a) In that sense, the God we worship is king over any and all other gods.
 - c) OK John, how do we know Christianity is right and other views are wrong?
 - i) Other religions do teach how to live a good life. Christianity is far more than that. It is the only religion that emphasizes not only how to have forgiveness of sins but also, everlasting life. No other religion teaches how God Himself was raised from the dead for our sakes. The New Testament goes through painstaking detail to describe the reality of Jesus rising from the dead. No other religion dares to even suggest that God could be dead or even rise from the dead. I admit that concept is strange. How can a "Perfect God" be dead and rise from the dead?
 - a) The answer is that God had to become a man in order to prove to us that we can live forever. No other religion teaches us and shows by example how we can have eternal life and eternal forgiveness at the same time.
 - d) OK, enough about how our God rules over other "gods" of this world. Time for verse 4.
8. Verse 4: In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. ⁵ The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.
- a) One way we can appreciate God is to consider this world that He has made. If you think about it, there is not a lot of bible text on the subject of the "creation". There are a few chapters in Genesis, a few in Job and a few references like this one here in the psalms.
 - b) OK John, it is time for one of your "why bother telling me this" statements: ☺
 - i) I believe the bible mentions this world as a creation to deny the false concept that this world created itself or that it always existed. As noted apologist Greg Koukl likes to say, "If you believe in the big bang, then there has to be a "Big Banger". That simply means there has to be an entity that set our universe into existence.
 - ii) I also believe verses like these are here so that we can appreciate this world. We can stare at mountain peaks or consider the great depths of oceans and appreciate the fact that God has made all of this. God made great views for us to look at.
 - iii) My point here is that God does not want us to sit around and be miserable all day. If we can't think of other things to be grateful for in our personal lives, at the least we can appreciate the beauty of nature all around us and take the moment to enjoy it. To steal a bad movie line, "If you don't take the time every now and then to appreciate life, it will pass right past you".

9. Verse 6: Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; ⁷ for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.
 - a) The "appreciation of God" lesson continues here in Verses 6 and 7. In context, these verses are saying if we appreciate the beauty of this world, let us thank God for this world.
 - b) The verses are then saying in effect that if God is in charge of this world, that also means that He is in charge of our lives. In effect, "We are His".
 - c) OK John, let's say we are all devout Christians reading this. We already believe in God and already believe we are under His care. Tell me, how is this relevant to my life again?
 - i) It is to remind us when life gets us down, or when we get so busy or bogged down on some particular project that God is still there, He is still in charge, He still created this world and He still wants to be in charge of our lives.
10. Verse 7 (cont.): Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, ⁹ where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did.
 - a) I found it interesting that there is a "period" in the middle of Verse 7. To me, that last part of Verse 7 appears to go better with Verse 8. Even if one does read all of Verse 7 as one thought, then the point is simply that if one believes God is calling us to get close to Him, we should take the time to worship Him and appreciate all He has done for us.
 - b) With that said, I do see this last part of Verse 7 tying better with Verses 8-9. To explain why, first I need to explain what is Meribah and Massah.
 - i) Both words refer to a story in Exodus Chapter 17. The word Meribah means to "quarrel" as in the fact the Israelites quarreled with God. The word Massah meaning, "testing" as this was a place where God tested the Israelites.
 - c) OK John, as you like to say, so what? Just so you know, I spent some time this week pondering why the Israelites didn't trust God at that moment in time.
 - i) This was the generation that saw all of the plagues on Egypt and the Red Sea part.
 - ii) My question is, if this group saw God work in such a mighty way, why did they still rebel against Him? They didn't doubt God's existence. They just didn't want to be led by Him. They didn't want to follow the way He wanted to lead them. That's a great summary of how most nonbelievers view God.
 - iii) The related lesson for us is about trusting God when our future is unknown. It is about trusting that God will lead us when we don't know what is "next".
 - d) All of this is relevant to this psalm and to our lives. Part of appreciating God about realizing that He knows what is next for our lives and He has great things for us.
 - i) A friend recently described to me how God sees our life like a "planned out race course" in that He knows the entire path of our lives. While we are not privileged to know what is next, God does. He wants us not only to trust Him with whatever is next, but to appreciate that His plans for our lives is what is best for our lives.
11. Verse 10: For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways." ¹¹ So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest."
 - a) Meanwhile the psalmist ends this psalm by describing how angry God was at those who turned from Him back at this incident called both Meribah and Massah.
 - b) OK why was God so angry at this bunch and what I can learn from this story?
 - i) Think of the bible verse: "To whom much is given, much is required". (See Luke 12:48.) The group of Israelites who saw all of those miracles coming out of Egypt was held to a high standard because they got to see God do a lot of great things.
 - ii) If we realize that God has saved us, then we should trust in Him to guide our lives. The point is that believing in God's existence and actually trusting in Him to guide us are two different concepts.

12. Psalm 96, Verse 1: Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.
 - a) We now continue our "appreciate God praise fest" with Psalm 96.
 - b) This psalm lists a bunch of reasons why we should be grateful for God's existence and why we should praise Him. The focus of this psalm appears to be greater than just the Nation of Israel. This verse says in effect that the whole earth should praise Him.
 - c) Ok John, the whole world is not Christian. How or why or when should this happen?
 - i) Many scholars believe this psalm is "millennial". That word millennial simply refers to a future time when Jesus will literally return to rule over the world.
 - ii) As I said in the introduction, Revelation Chapter 20 discusses the literalness of this event. It is a 1,000-year period where Jesus reigns from and over the earth.
 - iii) After Jesus died, He stated He would return again one day. (See John 21:23 and Acts 1:10.) That second coming is about Jesus ruling over our world one day.
 - d) Psalm 96 mentions a "new song". Some say that new song is the words to Psalm 96. Others argue it is a future song when all of this happens. The point is the event of the return of Jesus should cause people now and in the future to sing out to God
 - e) OK John, suppose you are right that this psalm is future or "millennial" as you call it.
 - i) Why should I sing this now or think about it now? Another good question. Remember that our lesson theme is about appreciation. Part of that appreciation is to appreciate what God will do in our lives and will do for this world. That concept about appreciating what God will do is the focus of this psalm.
 - ii) OK time to stop saying "appreciate" and move on to Verse 2. ☺
13. Verse 2: Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.
 - a) Remember that God wants us to praise Him, and share with those around us how grateful we are for His salvation. That concept alone should make us more joyful people.
 - b) Let me discuss God's name for a moment. Most of us just use the word "God" to describe Him, or if we want to get fancier, we might say "LORD" or maybe use the word "Jehovah".
 - i) In the original Hebrew language, there are lots of names for God. Many of those names have the Hebrew word "Adani" or "El" as part of a title for God.
 - ii) My point is not about learning Hebrew. The point is in order to appreciate all of the good things God has done for our lives, we think upon His name and maybe even think of ways to describe God for our gratitude for what He has done for us.
 - a) If we say we are grateful for God doing some particular thing He has done for us, we are proclaiming His name at that moment in time.
 - c) Let me come back to the "salvation process". As I stated in the introduction, salvation is more than the first moment we got saved and more than the moment we enter heaven.
 - i) It is also about how God is working on our lives daily to draw us closer to Him. That concept of "daily salvation" should cause us to praise Him regularly.
 - ii) Think of it this way: Have you matured more as a believer now, then say a year ago? If that is true, God has drawn you or me closer to Him and we should be grateful for that privilege. If we have not grown then we should ask, "Has God moved or have we moved" and what does He want me to do to grow now?
14. Verse 3: Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.
 - a) Verse 3 is not saying we all have to go on say, television or post on the internet our love for God among many nations. The point is simply that we should not be afraid to share our love for God with other people all around us.
 - b) Verse 3 is like the "great commission", where Jesus told all of us to go out into the world and make disciples of all nations. (See Matthew 28:19.) What if we say we are too shy to do that? Welcome to the club. ☺ I am not saying we have to be evangelizing for Jesus every moment. I am saying it should be part of our nature as believers to want to share our love for God with others around us. Believe it or not, the more time we spend praising God, the easier it becomes to want to share that love with others around us.

15. Verse 4: For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. ⁵ For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.
- a) I already spent some time in this lesson discussing the existence of other gods. (See my commentary on Verse 3 of the previous psalm), so I won't repeat that here.
 - b) This psalm is much more blunt about the fact that other "so called" gods are just idols and Verse 5 makes that point very clearly.
 - c) Remember that these psalms are about learning to appreciate God for all that He does for our lives. Part of that appreciation is that He has rescued us from serving other gods.
 - i) It may help to remember here that "other gods" is greater in concept than just the other major religions. As I like to say, if you find out how a person spends their spare time and spare income you will usually find their god(s).
 - ii) I'm not saying that we can't have hobbies or interests, but I am saying that God wants to be a part of all that we enjoy doing. For example, if we are going shopping or even going to a sporting event, "take God with us" to that event.
 - d) Gee John, what does all of that have to do with these two verses? Glad you asked. One point is we should appreciate how God has called us to Him and appreciate (there's that word again) all that He has done for our lives and our world around us
 - i) Another point is that we should appreciate how God wants to be part of every aspect of our lives and appreciate the joy as we make God a part of those things.
 - e) Notice the end of Verse 5 where it says, the LORD made the heavens. Why is that there?
 - i) It is not referring to God's throne, but the day sky and the night sky. The point is many people worship what they see in the sky, be it the stars or the sun. Many people reject the true God in order to worship what He has created. The danger of that type of false worship was condemned by God way back in Deuteronomy 4:19.
 - ii) Also remember that much of the ancient world around Israel believed in a whole series of created gods. Therefore, the psalmist is warning of being like the "world" around the Israelites. If one believes in multiple gods, then the question must be asked, "Well, who created them?" Eventually one has to logically lead to a single God that created everything, and that is what we worship.
 - iii) The great mistake made by other nations is that they saw all of the horrors of this world and figured that "if there is a single God, He obviously doesn't care". That is a lie of the devil. The truth is not only that God cares, but also that He wants to get involved when we are willing to call upon Him for our lives.
16. Verse 6: Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.
- a) OK now the psalmist asks us to appreciate God's "splendor, majesty, strength and glory".
 - i) Ok, what does that mean? I believe the idea here is not to look for synonyms of these words so we can make a list of words to describe God. The idea again, is for us to appreciate God for He is, what He has done and will He will do for our lives.
 - b) I don't visualize God as "an old man sitting on a throne chair making demands on us". God as an entity that desires we have an intimate relationship with Him. Remember that if God is a "God of Love", then He desires something to love, and He chooses us for that purpose of a two way love with relationship with Him.
 - i) One way to get close to God is simply to praise Him for the great things He has done for our lives. Realizing God's power is one reason to sing this verse.
 - c) When the text says for example, "splendor and majesty" are before Him, it is describing attributes of God. To use adjectives to describe God is a way for us to get our focus upon Him and realize all of the good things God has done for our lives.
 - i) God does not want us to sit around and feel sorry for ourselves. He wants us to appreciate life in terms of what He has done, is doing and will do for our lives. That is how we appreciate God and to beat that point home that is what this verse and this psalm wants us to focus upon.

17. Verse 7: Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
⁸Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.
- a) It is time to remember again that this psalm is "millennial". I say that because Verse 7 is asking the "family of nations" (i.e., non-Jewish) nations to honor God.
 - i) OK John, how does that affect me, and my life today? Yes it is describing a future day when all will honor Him as God. The point is to remember that this future day of God ruling will come one day and we should keep that thought in mind.
 - b) People have been waiting 2,000 years for Jesus' return. How can you say it will happen? Think of it this way: How short is our life span? The next thing we know after we die is we will be in heaven. After that, we will be in God's "outside of time" world. The next thing we know is we will experience God literally ruling over the earth.
 - i) OK John, what about the 2,000 years from the perspective of time? The answer is that God wants as many people as possible to be saved. Therefore, He waits for a very long time for as many as possible to be saved. Still, there has to come a day when God says in effect, "that's it and closes the door" to this present time era.
 - c) OK, I've wandered away from the verse with that little speech. The main point is that we should appreciate that God will rule over the world one day and praise Him for that.
 - d) And now, a few words about Verse 8. I believe these two verses go together in that God is calling worshippers to draw close to Him and "bring an offering".
 - i) OK time for a quick lecture on Christians on offerings. First, this does not mean Christians need to bring a sacrificial animal to church. It does mean we show our appreciation for what God has done for us by being "givers". If we do trust in God's salvation, then we "put our money where our mouth is", and prove our love for Him by making a difference for Him in the world around us.
18. Verse 9: Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.
- a) What I am about to say sounds strange to the new believer, but part of worshiping God includes the concept of fearing Him. That is why the text says, "tremble before Him".
 - i) Yes the text is describing the "millennial era" where God is ruling and to deny His rule will require a very harsh penalty. ☺
 - ii) With that said, why should we "tremble before Him?" Just as we can count on God blessing us when we are obedient, so He can and would punish us believers when we are not doing His will. If we do belong to God, He will allow us to go through situations to keep us close to Him. To fear God, means to fear His punishment for disobedience.
 - b) With that scary concept stated, let me talk about the first part of this verse.
 - i) It mentions God's "holiness". That "fancy church word" simply means that we believe God is perfect and what He says for us in His word is true.
 - ii) The point is we should be grateful that God is perfect and worship Him as such.
19. Verse 10: Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.
- a) When the psalm says, "say among the nations", that is another call for us Christians to be willing to publicly take a stand for Jesus.
 - i) Let me put this a different way: Not all of us are called to be in the professional ministry. However, that does not mean we should be scared of saying how much we trust in Jesus when the opportunity presents itself. The point is if we believe in Jesus, we should not be afraid to admit that fact to others.
 - b) Now lets look at what we should specifically say to the nations (i.e., non believers): God does reign and He will judge all of our lives. Most people do believe that God exists. What they need to know is trusting Him is not about the great lie that "our good deeds outweighing our bad deeds". The truth is that God wants to be in total control of how we live our lives. It is about learning to "let go and trust God" with every aspect of our lives.

20. Verse 11: Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it;
¹²let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy;
¹³they will sing before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth.
- a) The best way to explain these verses is to again go to a "millennial" point of view.
 - i) Let me explain. These verses describe such non-human concepts as the earth (land) itself, the seas (oceans), the fields (think farms) and trees being happy when God comes to reign over this world.
 - b) OK John, you have to admit that concept is strange. How can such things be glad when God reigns on earth? Do they start singing with voices when it happens?
 - i) No, the idea is that those things are cursed by sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, they did a lot more damage than they realized. When they choose to sin, they said in effect, "We want to do things our way and not God's way". God let Adam and Eve and all people live with that choice.
 - ii) Sin is more than something we do wrong. It is literally like a disease that is spread over the earth. The idea is that we as people (all people) choose at times to rebel against God. He gives us that freedom to do so.
 - a) We live in a world where sin exists and we have to accept the fact that this world is cursed by sin no matter how good or bad we act as individuals.
 - iii) This surprisingly, leads me back to discussing non-human objects like land, seas and even trees. The point is such objects feel (for the lack of a better term) the affects of the sins of mankind. The good news is that God promises one day the influence of sin is coming to an end. There will come a day when God literally will rule over this world again, and that is what the "millennium" is all about.
 - a) Therefore, even such objects as the land on earth, the sea and even trees look forward to a day when the earth will once again be under the control of God the Father and not be under the control of people.
 - c) OK John, you have to admit all of this theological stuff is really weird. If the influence of sin is so bad, why doesn't God just end our ability to sin here and now?
 - i) A big part of the answer is for us as people to see how bad sin really is, and how much we need God to rule over every (big "every") aspect of our lives.
 - ii) If that is true, why can't life as we know it go on forever with people from every generation realizing how much they need God in their lives? The answer to that question leads me back to the sea, land, trees, etc. It is not fair to those things that life, as we know it goes on forever. One reason God promises that a millennium will exist one day is so His creation (our world) is no longer cursed by sin.
 - d) It has now been roughly three thousand years since this psalm was written and about 2,000 years since Jesus died and rose again. How do we know for sure this "millennial age" will come one day? Yes I understand that the bible says so and we can trust the bible, but it is such a long time period. Why is God waiting so long to fix this world?
 - i) The short answer is that God wants as many people as possible to get it before He has to well, "get on with the show" and bring this world, as we know it to an end.
 - ii) Just because God is very patient, does not mean it will go on forever the way it is.
 - e) OK John, let's say you are wrong here and we just live our lives and then face God's judgment based on how we have made a difference for Him in our lives? What would happen if this world just "went on forever" as it was?
 - i) For starters, this world would never be "fair". It would always be stuck with the curse of sin. Just as I believe God will make things "fair" in heaven by judging people based on how we live, so He will make this world "fair" one day in terms of how the curse of sin has influenced this world.
 - ii) As I like to say, would you rather live life believing God will right the wrongs of the world one day, or just live assuming life just goes on forever as it currently is?

21. Verse 13 (cont.): He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.
 - a) The psalm ends with the reminder that God will judge the world and those who are living whenever this great event happens. Then the world will live under that truth of His rule.
 - i) The reason we pray a psalm like this is to remind ourselves that "life as we know it will not go on forever the way it is". God's judgment is coming for all of us. That judgment should be a motivational factor in effect to keep us on our toes.
 - ii) The point of this whole psalm is not just that the "millennium" will happen. The main point is that God exists, He will "right all of the wrongs" of the world on His timing and we should look forward to the day of His ruling over this world.
22. Psalm 97, Verse 1: The LORD reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice.
 - a) This psalm also focuses on the specific day Jesus comes to reign over the earth. Tell me again, why should I focus on that issue and appreciate it as your lesson title suggests?
 - i) The answer is in effect, the problems of this world will always be there until God comes back to "right the wrongs" of this world. By thinking about the concept of God literally ruling over the earth one day, it gives us a reassurance that people won't always have to deal with the problems of this world, as we know them.
 - b) OK, John once again, how do I know you are right? The Jews have been waiting for the Messiah for many millenniums and Christians have been waiting for Jesus return for about 2,000 years. How do I know this will happen? Yes I know the bible says so, but why should I trust in something that hasn't occurred for millenniums? The answer again is in effect to ask ourselves, would we rather live expecting nothing to ever change about this world, or live with the idea that God rules over this world?
 - c) Meanwhile, we are still on Verse 1. Notice the word "reigns". That word simply means that God is in charge of this world. It always was true it is true and always will be true.
 - i) However, with that fact stated, let's look at the rest of the verse. It says, "Let the earth be glad". The idea is about a joyful life trusting that in some unknown, future date, this world will be better when Jesus literally rules over this world.
 - ii) I don't think the rest of this verse is referring to people having joy as much as it is referring to the physical earth appreciating this event. As I have explained earlier in this lesson, the physical earth itself will be happy when the curse of sin will no longer have its affect over the earth.
23. Verse 2: Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. ³ Fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side.
 - a) To explain this verse, I need you to recall that whenever God the Father spoke to Moses, it was always in a cloud. Even when God the Father appeared to Jesus and three disciples at the time when Jesus was "transfigured", the text mentioned clouds. (See Mark 9:7).
 - i) OK John, so what is the deal with "clouds and thick darkness"? Think of being in a thick fog. One cannot see clearly. The idea is that we cannot fully understand God even when He is speaking to us. Even when we read of what God says to us in His word, it is accepting the concept that we as people cannot fully comprehend Him and that is why God uses the word picture of clouds with His appearances.
 - b) The next phrase says, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne".
 - i) One has to remember that when Jesus comes to literally rule over this world, a lot of people won't want that to happen. Over and above the idea that many people won't accept a Jewish Messiah ruling the world, is also the idea that many, if not most people simply don't want God literally ruling over their lives.
 - ii) The point is even though people won't like God ruling, He will rule one day. That leads me back to the words "righteousness and justice". God will somehow order everything to be right in terms of not allowing bad things to continue in this world. How will that literally happen? I don't know. I suspect that will be the role of angels or even us believers to enforce His justice.

- c) This leads me to Verse 3: This verse says that fire will consume God's foes.
 - i) That is another reminder that a judgment day is coming for all people. God will judge those who don't want Him to rule over their lives.
 - a) If Jesus will literally rule over the earth and "right the wrongs" of this world, then that includes beginning the judgment process on earth for those who refuse to accept Jesus as king of this world.
 - b) In short, I wouldn't want to be in their shoes when that day comes.
 - d) OK John, so the wicked will die one day when Jesus returns. Why should I focus on that?
 - i) Let me explain it this way: I believed Paul lived his Christian life with the idea that Jesus would return at any moment. We Christians should live our lives with that possibility as well. That is a motivational tool not only to keep us focused on God, but to realize that the world as we know it will not go on forever as it is.
 - ii) Let's say you or I are working at a job. We know that at any moment, our boss can walk in and look over our shoulders. That should be a motivation to keep us focused on our job. The same principal applies to our Christian lives. We need to live with the possibility that God can return to judge what we do at anytime.
24. Verse 4: His lightning lights up the world; the earth sees and trembles.
- a) Think of Verse 4 as a contrast to Verse 2. Back in Verse 2, it mentions that when God (Jesus) returns, it will be in "thick clouds". Here in Verse 4, the text says, "His lightning lights up the world". I suspect that means the whole world will somehow see that event and the psalmist was doing his best to express that concept in his own language.
 - b) Notice in the second half of this verse, that people are not excited (to put it mildly) about God returning. They see it and tremble as Verse 4 states. OK John, what gives here?
 - i) Think of it as all of the people who don't believe in God, all of a sudden seeing Him and thinking, "OK, I bet on the wrong horse and I'm in big trouble". ☹
 - ii) I have to admit that if I saw God "face to face" right now, it would scare me. Even knowing that I am forgiven of my sins, given the fact that I am in the presence of a perfect God would make me tremble just as this verse is describing. That reminds me that He is always watching my life and in effect I am in His presence.
25. Verse 5: The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth.
- a) If I take this verse literally, it would be describing the mountains of this world, going "flat" when God returns. While that may improve the view of God returning for people "sitting in the back row", I don't believe that is what this verse is describing.
 - b) More likely, this verse is describing the leaders of this world. In the bible, "mountain" is a figure of speech for human leaders. Just as mountains stand out over the "flat world" from our perspective, so our leaders are held up higher than the rest of society. I believe this verse is simply describing the leaders of this world realizing that the true leader is now on the scene and again, many will say, "Oh boy, I bet on the wrong horse". ☹
 - i) OK John, how does this affect you or me? It is another reminder that God is in control and He will one day rule over this world, and that includes the leaders of this world who refuse to acknowledge God as their leader.
26. Verse 6: The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory.
- a) OK, how do the heavens proclaim God's righteousness? Yes it could be describing the evidence in the sky that God created the world, but I think this verse is bigger in scope.
 - i) I believe this verse is describing the literal day of Jesus' return and the fact that it will be visible for the whole world to see.
 - ii) OK, John how will that be possible? How can the whole world see that event? Well for starters, we live in a world of satellite broadcasting, so while that event was not physically possible until recent times, now it is "no big deal".
 - iii) I have also learned with God to not worry about the "how". If "God is God" as I like to say, then it somehow it will be arranged.

27. Verse 7: All who worship images are put to shame, those who boast in idols-- worship him, all you gods!
- a) Speaking of worrying about world reaction when God returns, the psalmist in effect contemplates that question here in Verse 7. The point here is that all people who worship false gods are put to shame at this future point in world history.
 - b) OK, by now we get the idea that nonbelievers will be judged. What about us Christians? The question for all of us (myself included) is what "idols" do we deal with? Do we live to make a difference in order to impress others or do we focus our lives on pleasing God by ministering to other people? Changing from bad actions is all about confessing what we do wrong at times.
 - i) I am saying that it is a healthy thing for all of us to examine our lives at times and contemplate what is not pleasing to God. If for no other reason, we should do this because the possibility always exists that Jesus could return one day.
28. Verse 8: Zion hears and rejoices and the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments, O LORD.
- a) Meanwhile the religious Jews would be very happy when their Messiah comes if for no other reason, then they in Israel no longer have to fight all of their neighbors.
 - b) Will Jewish people be saved when Jesus returns? No. Salvation is still about accepting Jesus' payment for our sins. However, I hold the view that God still has salvation plans for the nation of Israel. I expect there will be many Jewish conversions to Christianity prior to the time of Jesus Second Coming based on what Romans 11:25 teaches.
 - i) Let me explain further: God made unconditional promises to the Nation of Israel that the land of Israel belongs to them. Again, Romans Chapter 11 teaches of a future day where Jesus will rule the world from Jerusalem. When that unknown day comes, all of Israel will be saved. That is why I believe that there will be lot of conversion of Jews to Christianity in some future, unknown day.
 - c) OK why would the nation of Israel be happy about the Messiah's (Jesus) return if they are not Christians? Wouldn't they be disappointed if Jesus showed up?
 - i) Yes it will be painful for them to contemplate their mistake, but a point of Romans 11 is that God will forgive Israel out of His unchanging love for them.
 - ii) By the way, I am giving this "God is not done with Israel" speech here because that is the underlying point of this verse. That all of Israel will be happy in that day when Jesus returns to rule over this world.
29. Verse 9: For you, O LORD, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods.
- a) As we approach the end of this psalm, we are getting the reminder that God is to be exalted above anything and everything else that is worshipped as god.
 - i) OK John, and I should focus on that fact because? The answer is to contemplate our own lives every now and then and think about are there any aspects of our lives in which He is not worshipped as God.
 - b) It is time for another of my classical Christian expressions: "God does not want to be #1 on a list of say, ten things. God wants to be #1 on a list of 1". That does not mean we can't do other things in life. It means that God wants to be part of every aspect of our lives.
 - i) This leads me back to my lesson theme of appreciation. In order to appreciate God as well, "God", we need Him to be in charge of every aspect of our lives.
 - c) OK John, does that mean I have to think about God all the time? No, it just means we do have to regularly consider if there are areas of our lives that we haven't given to Him.
 - i) If for example, there is an area of our life we struggle with, it is a matter of saying, "I can't win in this area, God, You are now in charge of it. You (God) lead me on Your timing to deal with this specific issue in my life."

30. Verse 10: Let those who love the LORD hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.
- a) Speaking of God ruling over every aspect of our lives, consider the topic of "hating evil".
 - i) Yes God wants us to love all people, but He also wants us at the same time to hate all evil deeds. To love God is to love what He loves and hates what He hates.
 - ii) To use another classical Christian expression: How much do you love God? Well, then how much do you hate evil? If you can't grasp the concept of what is evil, then substitute the word "sin": How much do we hate the concept of sin?
 - iii) Does that mean we should be roaming the streets looking to stamp out evil deeds? I don't think we have to travel that far. ☺ It starts with examining our lives on occasions and seeing what is sinful in our own lives.
 - iv) As to sinful deeds that are not our own, that too, is what prayer is for.
 - b) Meanwhile back at Verse 10, the point is God wants us to live a life of not only being faithful to Him, but also turning from what is evil (again think sinful) in this world. That is the convicting idea that I am trying to get across to all of us in this verse.
31. Verse 11: Light is shed upon the righteous and joy on the upright in heart. ¹² Rejoice in the LORD, you who are righteous, and praise his holy name.
- a) OK what does "light" refer to as stated in this verse? Consider that Jesus said in effect that being born again as like the "light for God" inside of us. (See Matthew 5:14.) If you read these two verses with God's light inside of us, it fits well in context of those verses.
 - b) But John, I thought this psalm was about the Second Coming. It is. The point is when God returns, that should bring joy to our hearts and make that "light shine" that is located within us. To put it another way, it will be a joyful day in the hearts of us believers when Jesus does return to rule over this world. Considering the fact that Jesus will return one day is something we should consider every now and then and yes appreciate that idea.
 - c) This leads us to verse 12. The final point here is that those of us who do trust in God should praise His name. Let me end this lesson by giving some examples of how we should appreciate the fact that God will return to the world one day.
 - i) We should appreciate God for the fact He will return to rule this world one day.
 - ii) We should praise Him because we do want Him to be in charge of our lives.
 - iii) We should praise Him because He does do good things for us.
 - iv) We should praise Him because He is ruling in our lives now and one day He will rule over this world once again.
 - v) If all of that doesn't get us to appreciate Him, I don't know what will. On that happy note, it's time to end this lesson in prayer.
32. Father, help us to learn to appreciate all that You have done, are doing and will do in our lives. Help us to see areas of our lives that You still need to rule over. Help us to appreciate the fact that You will literally rule over this world one day. Help us to be grateful for all the good we have in this life. Finally help us to live to make a difference for You in this world. We ask this in Jesus' name Amen