

Sermon | Psalm 114

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[0 : 01] Last week, we began a six-week series on Psalms 113 to 118, and we talked about how these six psalms can be considered as one song, and they have been considered as one song, and it was sung during various feasts in Jesus' day, including the Passover.

The song is called the Hallel. The word Hallel is the Hebrew word for praise. This song is also called the Egyptian Hallel because of the psalm that we're looking at tonight.

Psalm 114 rehearses God's redemption of Israel from Egypt. Like we said last week, these psalms would have been the last songs that Jesus sang with his disciples together before his trial and his death.

Let's orient ourselves into that moment when they would have been singing the Egyptian Hallel by looking at what the author and theologian N.T. Wright says.

He points out that Jesus had sung these psalms all of his life, and he knew them by heart, as well as disciples. And he says, what Jesus believed and understood about his own identity and vocation, he believed and understood within a psalm-shaped world.

[1 : 23] I love that. Within a psalm-shaped world. Let's use this psalm to look at this chapter of Israel's story, the Exodus, and see how it's also Jesus' story.

We're going to see it's our story as well. It's the story of Jesus, and it's our story as well. Let's pray. Father, we ask that you would illumine our hearts and our minds.

We can't understand this without your help. May the words of my mouth and meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. I'm until a couple years ago, whenever somebody asked me the question, what do you do?

I always enjoyed saying, I'm a musician. Because I thought they would think, oh, maybe he's the cool kind of musician. Unless they plumbed just a little deep, and then they realized, not quite.

[2 : 35] I was the front man of an Irish folk band in rural Florida. And we had some fun songs.

One of my favorite ones was a poem by Robert Burns called Scots Wahey, or Scots Who Have. And the lyrics go like this.

Scots who have with Wallace bled. Scots whom Bruce has often led. Welcome to your gory bed, or to victory. Lay the proud usurpers low.

Tyrants fall in every foe. Liberties in every blow. Let us do or die. The poem is written about the Battle of Bannockburn.

It was a decisive battle in Scotland's first war of independence. Robert Burns imagined it being spoken by Robert the Bruce as he leads his soldiers into battle.

[3 : 37] Robert the Bruce led the Scottish forces against a much larger English army and secured victory. Not only did the victory lead, eventually, to Scottish independence, but one could say that that victory, that battle, defined the Scots as a people.

An event defined the Scots as a people. Another song that I know, because I'm a band geek and some other band geeks might know, the song Chester, written by William Billings.

It goes like this. Let tyrants shake their iron rod, and slavery clank for galling chains. We fear them not. We trust in God. No England's God forever reigns.

Very similar to Robert Burns' poem. This song was about the American War of Independence. And one could argue that the American War of Independence defined the Americans as a people.

Our psalm today, Psalm 114, is a song that also celebrates a great deed. For 400 years, the nation of Israel had lived in Egypt.

[4 : 46] And while in Egypt, they had become enslaved and were treated brutally. But God led his people out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, dwelt with Israel in the wilderness, led her again through the Jordan River and into the Promised Land.

And this song celebrates this victory, and it defines Israel as a people. The Exodus defines or defined the nation of Israel as a people.

What about the New Testament people of God? What about the church? What about us? What defines us as a people? I'll answer that question a little later, but let's look first at what the psalm says about the Exodus.

And in particular, what it says about Israel's deliverer. We're going to look at God's presence, God's power, and his care. We're going to see God's presence, his power, and his care.

Let's look first at his presence. Verses 1 and 2 says, The Exodus event represents one chapter in a much larger story about God's presence.

[6 : 13] In the very first chapters of the Bible, we read of God creating the heavens and the earth. Those people who understand the world of the ancient Near East and its literature, they read this description of the creation of the earth.

These people tell us that this is communicating that God was creating a temple. God was creating a temple when he created the earth.

And in this temple, as one would expect, God sets up an image of himself. And this image is human beings. Human beings would reflect his image, bring to bear his creativity in the world, and to reflect back his praises.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had an intimate fellowship with God. They enjoyed his presence. But when they rebelled, that fellowship was severed.

Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden, and God's project was spoiled. But God would resurrect his project. He chose Abraham and made a covenant with him and his descendants to be a blessing to all the families of the earth.

[7 : 29] And though the plan would seem to derail while Israel was in slavery, Abraham's descendants, God raises up a leader, Moses, and brings him out of Egypt.

God himself accompanies them on this journey, first as a cloud by day and as a pillar of fire by night. And after he leads them through the Red Sea, Israel creates a tabernacle.

A tabernacle is an intricately constructed tent or complex tents. And it functioned as a portable temple.

God's glory, we read, rests on the tabernacle. And God is present among his people. He's close to his people.

He's there. He's near. This act of condescension is an act of grace. With God's presence comes safety and protection. It's a place where his glory is revealed and his judgments unveiled with power.

[8 : 38] That power goes with God's people as they cross the River Jordan into the land they've been promised to inherit. They had crossed through the Red Sea into the wilderness, and from the wilderness, 40 years later, they pass into the Promised Land.

It's the second thing we're going to see in this psalm. God's power. It's so poetically described, isn't it? What ails you, O sea, that you flee?

O Jordan, that you turn back? O mountains, that you skip like rams? O hills like lambs? It would be easy to reduce this to trash-talking nature.

But something bigger is at play here, which we need to keep in mind. Fast forward from the Exodus to Jesus' day, the moment that the disciples and the rest of the nation of Israel are praying these psalms during the Passover meal.

We find the people of Israel under Roman rule in a huge empire surrounded by different worldviews. Now, one of these worldviews would be called Epicureanism, which basically says that if there is a God or if there are gods, then they're a long way off, and they don't interfere with us in the material world.

[9 : 59] And that should sound familiar because that worldview is still around to this day, and it's very prevalent. But the Jews of Jesus' day held a different view, that creation is permeable.

And that sphere of God and the sphere of man, they mutually overlap by design. And because of the permeability, God can act and work in and through created things.

We share this worldview too, and that's why we pray, right? As Jews would enact the story of their redemption from Egypt in celebrating the Passover meal and in singing psalms like this one, they wouldn't just be celebrating a past event which displayed God's power, but they would be declaring trust in God to act again in power, to show that power again, to bring his presence back to Jerusalem.

God uses his power not just to defeat his enemies, but to care for his people. We've looked at God's presence, his power, and now his care. Last week we talked about God stooping, caring for the poor and for the barren woman.

Here, in verses 7 and 8, the psalm relays an event from the Exodus where God stooped to care for his people who were thirsty and desperate.

[11 : 24] He turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water. I mentioned last week how my family went on a hike about a month ago in New Hampshire, three and a half miles up, three and a half miles down, and my oldest three kids nailed it.

My youngest did not. He went up great, but he was too tired to go down. He kept falling. So I had to carry him a lot of the way down, which was really kind of tiring work.

He's a big four-year-old. But I loved it. I wouldn't have traded it for anything. Just to carry his tired body, his head slumped forward, onto my shoulder, my cheek resting against his as we trudge down the mountain.

It felt intimate. I felt a connection with my son. And I thought, this is probably the closest I'll ever come to experiencing the intimacy that a mother probably shares with her child as she nurses him.

I won't experience that myself, but this is the kind of intimacy a mother has with her child.

[12 : 45] I can only imagine the intimacy that occurs between them. The mother fully present to her baby, giving the baby what he needs to survive.

And this is how I read verses 7 and 8. God, he's fully and intimately present, using his power to feed and sustain his people.

See, in this psalm, God is powerful and glorious, and he also stoops, and he draws near, and he cares for the weak. So if this psalm celebrates the event that defined the Old Testament people of God, then what defines the New Testament people of God?

This is the question I posed earlier. What defines the church? Well, I would say it's the same thing. It's the exodus. It might be a surprise to some of you. You might be thinking, we're Christians.

Wouldn't the thing that defines us be the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ? And I would say, yes, you and I, we're both right.

[13 : 49] We're talking about the same thing. I say it because for over a thousand years, every year, God's people have been celebrating the Passover meal, reenacting God's mighty act of deliverance.

All four Gospels make very clear that Jesus chose the Passover celebration as the moment of his decisive action. The Passover celebration is Jesus' own grid for interpreting his actions and the events that would follow.

He is the fulfillment of the exodus. Jesus is the fulfillment of the exodus. Through Jesus' own death, human beings are rescued from the bondage of sin and death.

And through his resurrection, they are brought into eternal life. So let's look at the three things we discussed. Presence, power, and care. God's presence did return as his people had hoped.

John tells us this. The Gospel of John. It says that, Do you want to know God?

[15 : 01] Look on Jesus. God, the creator of the world, who made his presence known as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, became man.

And there are four eyewitness accounts of the things he did. We don't have to wonder about who God is. We can just look at Jesus. And he came with power.

Jesus came with power. The exodus is the sign of what God's power can do, and it's also a pledge that it will happen again when his people need it.

Do you wish to end poverty in this world? God, in his power, is determined to deal with it.

Do you cry out over injustice? God and his power in Jesus Christ will one day set all things to right.

[16 : 02] Do you grieve over sickness and the death that surrounds you? God and his power in Jesus Christ will one day make all things new. Do you find yourself powerless against a besetting sin, addiction, an unforgiving spirit, self-loathing?

God and his power, through Jesus Christ, who began a good work in you, will be faithful to complete that. But God doesn't do it from afar.

He does it from a place of intimacy and care. After Jesus ascended to heaven, he sent his Holy Spirit, and so now God's presence is manifested in us.

We, the church, are his temple and are empowered to fulfill the work God originally gave humanity, to reflect his image, to bring to bear in this world God's creativity and now his restorative activity, and to reflect back his praise.

And more intimately, each of us as individuals are indwelt with his spirit. His spirit sustains us, supports us, comforts us, tells that we are God's children.

[17 : 16] He prays for us. You cannot pray without God himself praying with you, so who will refuse you if the one who grants is the same as the one who asks? God's children. God's children.

God's children. God's children. God's children. God's children. God's children. God's children. I'd like to draw your attention quickly to two implications of God being present in us and understanding this in the context of the Exodus.

The first is, if you are in Christ, if you have been baptized in him and believe in him as the one who rescues you, then the God who created the universe dwells in you. God is in you.

Therefore, whoever you encounter at work tomorrow is encountering God in you. And so that is the most important meeting they will have all day.

It is an interaction that can save them, can heal them, can encourage them. It's an implication of what it means to bear God's image.

[18 : 26] The second implication is this. We talked last week about the dark night of the soul, how to understand that when we go through a dark night. We talked about how we can understand the dark night of the soul better if we understand our story as it unites to the story of Christ.

Even further, with this psalm, we see that we can understand the dark night of our soul as it unites to the life of Christ in the context of the Exodus, God's great work of leading his people out of the wilderness.

I'm going to quote a counselor and professor of counseling. His name is Chuck DeGroote. He writes this.

In the gospel, and this is what we've been talking about, the gospel, we participate in Christ's life, that we're transformed in and through the indwelling of our suffering God.

Dark nights aren't optional. They aren't a punishment for sin. No, the dark night is the pathway, that wilderness way for those who long to enjoy union with Christ.

[19 : 41] Our experience of emptiness, incredible though it may sound, indicates the powerful work of God hidden deep within us. Our despair testifies to hope, and our dying prepares us for spiritual growth.

The dark night forms us in ways that set us free to love boldly and compassionately. On the night that Jesus' friend betrayed him, he took bread, blessed it, broke it, and then gave it.

And in the same way, Jesus takes us, blesses us, breaks us, and gives us to a hurting world to be God's very presence. The dark night is a key part of God's missional purpose in the world.

God redeems our broken stories, weaving new and better ones, which paint pictures of redemption and flourishing in our broken world.

Our honest lives become the great signposts in a broken world. Redemption is here. Gabriel Del Grande is an Italian filmmaker, and of course I'm not pronouncing that right.

[20 : 56] He found himself with four activists in the city of Aleppo, Syria. In September of 2013, during some serious fighting, a gunman took aim at each of them every time they looked out the windows.

And then it got worse. The front line of the battle merged with where they were. They found themselves on the front line, and then a young boy comes to their door.

The young boy is holding a butcher's knife and a wedding dress. The boy cuts the dress into strips, urges them to tie a strip tightly around their heads, and then to follow him.

And they didn't know why, but they had no other choice. So they mustered up the courage and followed this boy through a battlefield. Bullets whizzing and whirring over their heads.

And finally, they made it to safety. They realized later that white was the signal of the Free Syrian Army's snipers. It was a wedding dress that protected them, that covered them.

[22 : 02] A wedding dress saved their lives. A month after his return to Milan, he and some close friends met a Syrian refugee trying to make his way to Sweden.

Met them in a train station. Asked Gabriel and his friends, do you know when the next train to Sweden leaves? They said, well, there is no train that goes to Sweden from Italy. But he knew a couple other Syrian and Palestinian refugees trying to make their way to Sweden.

In Sweden, they had family and friends and connections. They saw safety there. So, Gabriel had an idea.

He said to his friends, you know who the border guards would never stop? A wedding party. The police would never check a bride's documents. So they bought some nice clothes.

They did all the arrangements. They did a lot of planning logistics. They bought a wedding dress. And the refugees and those helping them all dressed up as bride and groom and as the wedding party.

[23 : 06] And they filmed their journey. It's a documentary you can watch. I don't know how, but it's out there. It's called On the Bride's Side. They filmed their journey as they made their exodus through Europe.

A wedding dress had saved Gabriel's life. And now it would be a wedding dress that would save these refugees in their exodus from Italy through Europe.

Now the Bible speaks about his union with his people, about God coming to his people as a wedding. We are the bride of Christ.

And he gives us covering which saves us. And that covering, we experience forgiveness of sins. And he leads us, his bride, from bondage into freedom.

And every week, here, at this table, we have a feast looking forward to a great wedding supper that we will share in his kingdom.

[24 : 18] And in this meal, this bread, and this wine, spheres of heaven and earth overlap. and he feeds our souls through the bread and the wine and transforms us more and more into the image of his son.

An image we reflect to a world that he is making new once again. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let's pray. God, thank you for saving us, for redeeming us, for rescuing us, for you saw us and you pitied us and you lifted us out of bondage and sin and brought us into your kingdom, into freedom, into a life of joy with you as our king.

you weren't content merely to do that, Lord, and so you gave us your Holy Spirit that we could know you intimately.

So God, as we make our way down the aisle to take the bread and the wine, would you communicate to us your grace? Tell us we are your children.

[25 : 46] Tell us our sins are forgiven. Tell us it's not anything that we have done that has gained us this favor, but it's what your Son has done.

thank you for rescuing us. And now, transform us. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.