

Confidence

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[0 : 00] So the reading today is from Psalm 76 on page 584. In Judah God is known, his name is great in Israel.

His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion. There he broke the flashing arrows, the shield, the sword, and the weapons of war. Glorious are you, more majestic than the mountains of prey.

The stout-hearted were stripped of their spoil, they sank into sleep. All the men of war were unable to use their hands. At your rebuke, O God of Jacob, both rider and horse lay stunned.

But you, you are to be feared. Who can stand before you when once your anger is roused? From the heavens you uttered judgment. The earth feared and was still.

When God arose to establish judgment to save all the humble of the earth. Surely the wrath of man shall praise you. The remnant of wrath you will put on like a belt. Make your vows to the Lord your God and perform them.

[1 : 02] Let all around him bring gifts to him who is to be feared. Who cuts off the spirit of princes. Who is to be feared by the kings of the earth. Hannah, thank you very much for reading.

Let me just pray for us as we start. Father, thank you for your word. Pray that you would help us to listen, to understand, and to act on your word.

In Jesus' name, amen. Well, for any of you who are visiting, I'm John Rhys. I'm one of the congregation here. And through the summer, we have a number of people leading, preaching on your word.

And I'm doing that today. And I'm continuing our series looking at Psalms. And we're going to look at Psalm 76, which Hannah's just read for us.

One of the things that struck me in the excellent summer focus series that we've been having on Tuesdays, on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, is the way the sovereignty of God is shown in history.

[2 : 14] Even though there was terrible suffering at the time for people, progress continued and God's word progressed towards the Bible that we read today.

And it should give us confidence in the certainty of God's purpose. If we rely on confidence in our own ability, we will always be disappointed.

There's a story of a confident young office employee working late at the office out to impress. And the chief executive wandered in and looked at the various office machines around, wandered over and stood in front of the shredder waving a piece of paper and said, my secretary's left and I have this very sensitive, important document.

Can anybody make this machine work? Well, certainly said the confident young worker leaping up, turned on the shredder, took the document, pressed the start button, paper disappeared forever.

Excellent, said the chief executive. I just need the one copy. Well, today's psalm is a psalm to be copied, not shredded.

[3 : 26] It's a psalm to give us confidence in God's purpose, to understand what a majestic God we serve by saying what God has done, what God is doing and what God will do in the future.

And sometimes as Christians, we do need to have our confidence boosted, don't we? When the pressures of the world are wearing you down, when you've been working hard all day on a Tuesday and you wonder if you have the energy to go out to growth group, what motivates you?

What keeps you going? What gives you confidence that it's all worth it? Well, I've been really encouraged over the last few weeks by looking at Psalm 76, and I hope that you will be too.

So the psalm is thought to be set as Jerusalem is being besieged by an overwhelming force. The people are desperate. They're wondering what could possibly save them.

And God intervenes. God is in control. And looking back 2,700 years, it's got a great message for us today, as it did then.

[4 : 39] Now, on the back of your sheet, there are four headings and a few references. We'll work through the headings. God has acted. God is acting.

God will act. And how should we react? But since we're in the psalms, it would be a shame to forget that these are songs, they're poems.

And to get the full meaning, it's helpful to look at the poetry too, at the structure and the language of what we're looking at. I hope you're enjoying the language of the psalms in this series, as well as their great messages.

The psalmist here in Psalm 76 uses repeated ideas to emphasize and expand the points he's making, that he wants us to take away.

So I thought we might just look at the form of the first few verses to see that. At this time, the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel are separate.

[5 : 39] But the terms Judah and Israel are used for the kingdom of, are used interchangeably in verse 1.

They're used for the southern kingdom, including Jerusalem. And similarly, in verse 2, Salem and Zion are both names for Jerusalem. And the alternative words are used as part of the phrases in the poetry that echo and elaborate the author's meaning.

So in verse 1, we read, In Judah, God is known. His name is great in Israel. So phrase 1, In Judah, God is known.

The people know God. And then this repetition, expanding the idea in the second phrase, His name is great in Israel. So not only is he known, but his name is great among his people.

And then look at verse 2. His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion. God has a place where he can live in Jerusalem, or Salem, in the temple.

[6 : 43] And phrase 2, He doesn't just have a house there. Jerusalem, Zion is where he's to be found. God is with his people. And so in verse 3, you've got the idea by now, there he broke the flashing arrows, the shield, the sword, the weapons of war.

So the first phrase, God overcomes the bows and arrows of his opponents. And then the amplification in the second phrase, not just arrows, but every sort of weapon they may bring against him.

Shields, swords, machines to attack the city walls, any weapon you can think of. So the repetition here is part of the poetry, part of the way the writer amplifies his message.

So I think while we're in the Psalms, it's important that we don't miss the beauty of the language as we look for the meaning. So let's begin to look at what the Psalm is about.

And we're in the first heading, God has acted in history. It sounds as if this is a description of a specific event, the work of God in overcoming his enemies at one particular time.

[7 : 54] There's nothing definite in the Psalm that identifies the specific event for certain. In verse 5, they were stripped of their spoil.

All the men of war were unable to use their hands. And it seems most likely this is describing the defeat of Sennacherib, who was the king of Assyria, and who besieged Jerusalem around 701 BC.

I put a reference there to Isaiah chapter 36, verses 33 to 36. I'm afraid that's actually a misprint. It's chapter 37. Apologies. And it's the same text as 2 Kings 19.

But let me read that to you and listen there for the common links as I read that, the links to those verses we've just looked at in the Psalm. So Isaiah chapter 37, verse 33.

Therefore, thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, he shall not come into this city, or shoot an arrow there, or come before it with a shield, or cast up a siege mound against it.

[9 : 08] By the way that he came, by the same he shall return. And he shall not come into this city, declares the Lord. For I will defend this city to save it for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.

And the angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. So that sounds very like verses 3 to 6 of the Psalm, doesn't it?

The arrows, the shields, the siege weapons, the soldiers incapacitated. But the Psalm is written so that it could be used for other victories too, other times when God intervenes in history.

And what it shows is that God is able to intervene. God will take control of history. This God, whose name is great, who dwells with his people, has intervened in history to rescue his people from the attack by overwhelming forces.

All seemed hopeless. They could do nothing to save themselves except to pray, as Hezekiah had done, to throw themselves on God's mercy and he saves them.

[10 : 19] just as He rescued His people from the Egyptian Empire through the Exodus. So the Psalmist is showing us God's great power.

Jerusalem, besieged by the mighty Assyrian Empire, survives because God controls the battle. He decides the winner. God saves people who cannot save themselves.

So then verse 7 is not surprising. Who can stand before you? A hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians were unable to stand before God.

So the Psalm celebrates an amazing victory. And let me ask, how big is your concept of God? Sometimes we tend to domesticate God and we bring Him down to human level.

But the Psalmist shows us a different God, a God who is glorious. Verse 4 says, more majestic, more majestic than the most impressive mountains you can imagine.

[11 : 27] You know the experience, perhaps when you climb a mountain and see the world spread out underneath you. Or perhaps for the less active, you take the lift up to the top of the shard or you see those views of earth from space.

Well the Psalmist is saying, that's nothing. You're just seeing a fraction of God's creation. This great, majestic God. And when God speaks from the heavens, the whole earth stops and listens.

Verse 8. No earthly leader compares, he tells us in verse 12. And you see the way the Psalm moves from a God known in Judah in verse 1 to a God known by all the kings of the earth throughout the whole earth in verse 12.

Here's a description of a God so unbelievably majestic and glorious that we should be in awe. And yet this is the same God who cares enough about his people to intervene in history and save them from danger and death.

So God has acted in history numerous times. And let's move to our second heading. God is acting now. Because the great news is that this isn't, of course, the only time that God intervenes in history.

[12 : 47] He did it repeatedly for his Old Testament people of Israel. And crucially, 700 years later, he intervened again when he sent his son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins.

And that's the source of our confidence. Verse 9 tells us about judgment. And we'll come on to look at that and God's further action.

But look at the rest of verse 9 with me. There's also salvation from judgment. God arose to establish judgment to save all the humble of the earth.

Just as the judgment on the Assyrians saves God's people in Jerusalem, so God's people are saved from his judgment by the cross. When Jesus overcomes sin, death, and the devil forever.

All of us have sinned, as verse 7 tells us. None of us can stand in the face of God's judgment. None of us can be righteous by our own efforts. But Jesus stands for us and takes our sin on himself.

[14 : 01] And who is saved from God's judgment? In verse 9, it's the humble. He saves all the humble of the earth through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Those who humbly come to him, those who acknowledge that they cannot save themselves, that their salvation can only come through turning to Jesus. And if you want to hear more about what it means to live humble lives, I recommend listening to Mark Oden's talk from last week on the Grace Church website, where he tells us more about living in humility.

And going on through the psalm, let's look at verse 10. I think what looks like a confusing verse. Surely the wrath of man shall praise you, the remnant of wrath you shall put on like a belt.

We have to remember again the poetic form of the psalm. God used the anger, the wrath, or the opposition of man for his glory.

Whatever atrocity man can do, God can use for his purpose. The war waged by Sennacherib and the Assyrians in the siege of Jerusalem leads to this example of God's power in rescuing his people.

[15 : 20] Giving his people confidence to praise him in this psalm. It's used for God's glory. The anger of Pharaoh against Moses and the Israelites leads to the rescue of God's people from Egypt and their journey to the promised land.

And in the same way, the anger of the chief priests, the rage of the crowds calling for the death of Jesus' son, were turned into the path to glory.

I put a reference to Luke 23 on the sheet to look up later. The hatred is turned into praise for his son in the ultimate rescue of his people.

Jesus rescues, not this time from an enemy with arrows and weapons of war, but an enemy familiar to all of us. He rescues us from sin and the devil who has weapons of his own to slay God's people.

And he's still acting in history in this way. He continues to provide this rescue to anyone who turns to him. And he's given us his Holy Spirit to continue to work in our lives, to give us confidence.

[16 : 32] Just as in verse 2, God was dwelling with his people in Jerusalem, in his physical temple, God is now with his people in his church. Jesus' dwelling place is in our hearts if we are in Christ.

So God is acting. And God will act. Verses 8 and 9 tell us more about God's judgment. judgment here on the Assyrian army.

But there will be a further judgment when Jesus returns. So turn with me to Revelation chapter 6 where this language from the psalm is picked up again.

That's on page 1, 2, 3, 9. 1, 2, 3, 9. So that's Revelation chapter 6.

And let me read from verse 15. Jesus the Lamb opens the sixth seal. And then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful and everyone slave and free hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains calling to the mountains and rocks fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.

[18 : 05] For the great day of their wrath has come and who can stand? Who can stand? No one can stand.

Not the kings of the earth in verse 15 of Revelation 6 echoing verse 12 of our psalm. The whole earth feared and was still. Just as we can have confidence that God is in control so we can be confident that he will bring judgment.

But we can also be confident in the offer of salvation through Jesus' death and resurrection if we turn to him in humility and then we will all be able to dwell in God's presence forever.

So God has acted he's still acting now and he will act in judgment. So let's look at our fourth heading how should we react?

And this short psalm has something to say about that too to guide our response to this amazing rescue to this God who can intervene who can control history. Four times the psalmist tells us that this is a God to be feared.

[19 : 20] Well how does that fit with confidence in God? Fear of earthly things can often stop us acting can't it? We can be paralyzed with fear. When my wife Helen sees a mouse in our house which happens now and again her reaction is to jump on a chair and scream.

Now that's not what fear of God looks like. Psalms and Proverbs tell us that fear of God brings wisdom leads to life. faced by a God of such power and majesty it's right for us to respond with proper reverence and awe.

It's when we diminish God when we bring him down to our size that we can lose that appropriate response. So if we have the right concept of God we should respond with awe. A desire to please him and a proper fear of his judgment.

And verse 11 tells us more about our response. Not paralyzed by fear but acting in wisdom make your vows to the Lord your God and perform them.

Making our actions follow our words. To make our vows to God means committing ourselves to him. Now many of us here today will have done that when we became Christians but each day we can recommit those vows to him and act on them.

[20 : 52] Then verse 11 says let all around bring him gifts. What gifts can we possibly bring to a God such as this?

The people of Judah brought sacrifices as penance for their sin allowing them to approach God but Jesus has made the ultimate sacrifice by giving his life for our sin.

He's opened the way to God so we don't need to bring God dead animals. What gifts could we possibly bring? Well what he wants is that his people come to him to give themselves to him for his glory.

So the only gifts we have to bring are ourselves to give over our lives to him to give him praise through our words our vows through our actions our gifts how we spend our time how we spend our money what is in our thoughts we can bring him those gifts of ourselves.

So this psalm should give us great confidence confidence that God intervenes in history to rescue us to make us acceptable to this glorious God despite our sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

[22 : 06] So when we're feeling worn down when doubt creeps in when the Christian life seems hard here's a great psalm to read to see how amazing God is what he does for his people.

He did it then to save his people in Jerusalem from the Assyrians he does it through Jesus to save from judgment those who humbly turn to him now.

So if you're in need of motivation to follow through what we've been singing in our hymns what we say in our prayers to give God the gift of our lives and our time don't shred Psalm 76 copy it in your hearts read it again over this coming week and reflect on this awesome majesty and glory of our wonderful God.

Thank you.