

He Rides the Wings of the Wind

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[0 : 0 0] Friends, please take a seat, and as you're doing that, if you can keep your Bibles open to Psalm 104, that'd be great if you can follow along. Now, it really is just an awe-inspiring psalm, isn't it?

I mean, when I first read it, I could almost imagine the psalmist, you know, maybe doing his quiet time, sitting on the side of a hill, just looking out over creation, and praising God as he looks out.

He's seeing the cattle and the conies and the mountains, workers in the field. And he just really paints a beautiful picture. And it's beautiful poetry as well. Our author was probably reading Genesis, as you've probably noticed from the way that he closely follows the order of creation.

And it's not only that, there's just great wordplay and balancing in there as well. I mean, for instance, if you count the number of times that the earth or that Yahweh is used, it's actually seven times, it's heavenly.

All the research I was doing, it almost makes me want to learn Hebrew. Which, when Andrew's your vicar, it's a very dangerous thing.

[1 : 0 5] Now, here's something I realized, though, just yesterday. And, well, I'll start by telling a story. I was, when I was 11 years old, our family had a chance to go to Europe. And I think the highlight for me for that trip was in Rome and going to the Sistine Chapel.

Now, some of you may have been there, but as I was walking through the Sistine Chapel, the ceilings are about 20 meters high. So if you imagine a building twice the size of this one with every inch of it, every inch of the roof covered with just beautiful artwork.

Now, it's arguably Michelangelo's greatest artwork. And even at the age of 11, I was just standing there and looking in awe at it. It was a masterpiece.

And what I realized was that, in a literary sense, this psalm is a masterpiece as well. It's just as grand. And the psalmist gives us, you guessed it, seven.

Seven pictures. Seven scenes to envision. To marvel at. Now, it would be great if we could just sit back and say what a beautiful psalm it is. Maybe play lots of beautiful pictures on the overheads.

[2 : 1 2] And just say, you know, we just need to stop and smell the roses every now and then. But in remembering that this psalm is like the prayer book for the Jewish faith. And through all the further readings and research, that really wouldn't do it any justice.

Because, see, this is actually the psalm that is read on one of the most important days of the Jewish calendar. It's Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement. So, that's the day where God's people are absolved of their sins.

That's also where the Lamb is sacrificed. And it's the day that points us towards Jesus and his death on the cross. Now, this is the psalm that's read on that very day.

And so, like the liturgy that we've come to know and love and that we're comforted by, obviously, there's a lot of deeper meanings to it as well. So, let's pray as we explore that.

Dear Lord, I thank you for your word. I thank you for your spirit for us to be able to discern your words and these psalms in particular. Lord, please open our minds.

[3 : 17] Please open our eyes to see your glory. I put these things in your hands. Amen. Now, the first picture that you'll see is the very first one.

And, obviously, you can imagine it's going to be God. Now, there is one thing, though, that I'd like you to be able to take away from this morning. One thing that should go past morning tea.

And that's this message. That God is awesome. Now, Matt Sheffer and I have had this conversation. And Matt's on a mission to redeem the word awesome.

Awesome. And I'd like to join him. See, I do believe that awesome is one of those words that we use just a little bit too often. Maybe if it's, you know, I got an awesome deal on a car or just got a great and awesome new house or TV system, whatever it is.

Those things are good. Don't get me wrong. But is it awesome? Now, that word should be reserved for when something really is that far beyond anything else that we can think of.

[4 : 18] And you do get a sense the psalmist is looking for that kind of a word here. If you look at that first line, his opening line, bless the Lord, O my soul. And the next line, he says, my God, you are very great.

Not just great, but very great. And in the following words, he tells us exactly what he means by great. So if you can picture it with me, if you can picture the heavens there, they are his tent.

He's above the waters. He doesn't need a flying fox. He has those clouds, those chariots. The winds are his messengers. The fire itself is waiting at his beck and call.

See, unlike the gods of the other nations, the God of the Israelites, Yahweh, our God, he isn't controlled or he doesn't just control one of those elements.

He controls all of them. The fire, the wind, the earth, the water. All of them are under his command. And he isn't just over them either. He's actually right in there amongst them.

[5 : 21] As it says there, the very light that shines through the world, that is his clothing. That light is what God is wearing. I mean, if you want an example of power dressing, you can't top a guy that's clothed in honor and majesty.

Compared to that, anything I'm wearing, be it my best suit or a pair of jeans, it just doesn't even come into the same league. So right from the start, we have a great sense of awe, of the magnitude of God's greatness.

Now, hold that image for the moment. And if you can, look at that next picture in verses 5 to 9. It takes to the first day of creation. Now, this one is an easy one to picture.

All you have to think of is water and you've got it. Now, two things to note, though, from verse 9. Because there are only two times in history that the waters ever covered the mountains.

So the first is that of creation in Genesis. So you remember the first day, the waters are there and light comes forth. And we've covered that before. But the waters covered everything at first.

[6 : 24] And it's only on the second day that God puts a boundary between those two, between the sky and the waters underneath. Now, on top of that, of course, is the second time.

And that's the time of Noah, when the waters rose up above the mountains again. Now, it's a little bit anachronistic, but he brings those two times together. Now, what it does is it demonstrates God's power, his absolute power.

And not only that, it demonstrates how deeply God is involved in his creation. And we get that same sense of interaction in the following verses as well, in the tenses that he uses. So if you look at verse 7, it's not that the waters fled at his rebuke, but they flee at his rebuke.

He continues, verse 10, you make the springs gush forth, not made. You water the habitation. You cause the grass to grow. And it continues on, of course, but I think you get the point.

It's not in the past. It's all happening. Now. And it's all God. Now, from verse 10 onwards, the psalmist doesn't quite follow creation as closely, but that's not really his point here.

[7 : 30] He's just told us that the earth and the sea have been separated. Now, he'll come back to the sea in just a moment, in verse 24 onwards. But in the bits in between, he's talking about earth, the animals and the trees that are on the earth.

So look at verses 10 to 13. And it's just an idyllic scene, isn't it? It's beautiful. Springs gushing forth. Life giving water, sustaining deer.

The birds singing amongst the branches. It's the most natural and down-to-earth scene that anyone could come up with, even Hollywood. I mean, I can almost just picture Bambi sitting there.

It's beautiful. Now, anyway, verses 16 to 18. We can see that each animal has its place. So birds are in their nests. Storks in the fir trees. Conies in the rocks.

It's a great detail there. By the way, the cone is a rabbit, just in case those don't know some of that old language. A.K.A. Thumper, in this case. If you don't get that, that's a Disney reference.

[8 : 33] But anyway, of course, you've got that. And then you've got the grandeur of the cedars of God, the cedars of Lebanon. And those two things are contrasted. But here we do see, again, just how much God is continually working, continually interacting, and shaping the ebbs, the flows of life.

So we've got these two stunning illustrations. Verse 10 to 13, springs in the deers. And verses 16 to 18, cedars, conies, mountains. Now, when you've got these two images that are so alike, and you've got a passage in the middle, you know that that passage in the middle is something quite important.

But it's not necessarily what you might expect. See, what we have there in the image from verses 14 to 15 is an image of mankind. It's an image of culture. So there are cattle, domestic livestock, and the wine, the oil, and the bread.

Now, the wine's there to make the heart glad. There's your biblical principle for having one glass of bread a day. There's also oil there to make the face glow. And bread, processed grain.

That's the backbone of civilization. Now, each item is the result of a progressive society. And they're all coming from God. So we have creatures there.

[9 : 53] We have culture. Two seemingly opposites, opposing forces. Now, he brings them together, though, in verse 19 to 23. And this passage, this bit's all about balance and symmetry.

So you've got the moon, and you've got the sun. You've got creatures, and you've got culture. So you've got the lion who roars in the night. It's the pinnacle of creation. Lying down at sunrise and giving way to people.

It's the pinnacle of culture. Laboring and doing all those things at sunrise, but going down at nightfall. So these opposites, you can see they're perfectly balanced.

They're in harmony with one another. And again, once you see this circle of life, that's another Disney reference, we come to our final picture.

Back over the waters. So that's verses 25 to 26. For the seas are in perfect harmony as well. You can see they're great and wide as they are. You have the Leviathan right next to men in ships.

[10 : 54] They're side by side. Now, there it is. You've got seven pictures, seven images to wander at. Now, there is one thing, though. These pictures aren't just haphazardly arranged.

Just in case we miss the point throughout the whole psalm, he tells us again from verses 27 to 30. So everything, all of those pictures, they all look to him.

All of creation, the land, the creatures, culture, lion and men, the sea, the Leviathan. Everything looks to that first picture.

Everything's looking to God. It's all just a reflection of his light, his glory and his majesty. For apart from God, there is no breath or life or food or water.

Apart from God, there is no wisdom or creativity. There's no order or boundaries. Now, apart from God, there is nothing.

[11 : 57] Everything that is reflects God. For verse 28, when God gives them their sustenance, he opens his hand and good things come.

They're filled with not just any spirit, but his spirit. And from his spirit, they're created. And when he hides his face, when he takes his breath away, they return to the dust and they renew the ground.

So our psalmist doesn't just look at the good things, life. He also takes death as well. Both of them are at God's hand. Now, there's several ways that the psalm can renew our minds.

I'd like to point out three in particular. Now, the first one, of course, it's right in front of us. It's the very first line of the psalm. It's the very last line of the psalm. You can see it there.

Bless the Lord. Bless the Lord, oh my soul. Praise God. I mean, let's open our eyes to everything that we see.

[13 : 00] Everything, our work, our homes, our loved ones, the very paper that we hold, or songs and games, ideas, philosophies, theologies, every single thing that is good on this earth, it cries out, God is awesome.

And if we can just catch that, just a glimpse of it, just for a moment, we can see it's that same picture from Revelations, all of creation. Everything, angels, creatures, us.

If we can see everything, and not just a reflection of God's glory, but beholding His glory in all of its fullness, that's what awesome is.

And if we can see it just for a moment, that's our first application. And if we can see that, we can't help but be drawn into singing His praises. So, see God in everything, and praise Him for it.

So, friends, if there is anyone among us who doesn't know Jesus, who doesn't know God in all His glory, we have but to look around you. His reflection is in everything.

[14 : 14] Just open your mind and believe. Now, if you're anything like me, though, and sometimes, let's face it, most of the time, I forget that all of this, all of this around us, is reflecting God's glory.

Now, there's just so many things happening in the world. Sometimes it does feel like the waters are rising up over our heads. So, if you can, just, though, take one thing, just for one minute, each day, and see God's reflection in that.

See His Spirit that He's breathed into it. And remember that it's from Him, and thank Him for it. And if we can do that, just one day at a time, maybe we will get there.

Now, there's also one line that kind of sticks out from this psalm. You probably have noticed it as well, but it's in verse 35. So, I'll read it for you there. Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and the wicked be no more.

Now, it's very short, and it kind of seems out of place here, doesn't it? I mean, after all the praises and all of the beautiful pictures we have, we've just got this one line. But it's a very important line, because it gives us a clue.

[15 : 35] It tells us what the one thing is that might get in the way of us seeing God's glory. Now, that's sin. Now, sin, again, I'm sure most of you know by now, is any and all things that are in disobedience to God.

So, His sovereignty. There's things that praise God, and there's things that don't praise God. Now, in a more specific way, a sinful mind believes the things around them were created for them, for their benefit, not God's.

So, for ourselves as taxpayers, as workers, as consumers, you know, any other way that we invest our time, our money, our resources, you know, who isn't upset when these things don't meet our expectations?

Who doesn't believe that their world should work a certain way? And who wouldn't expect results when they put their time and their effort and money in?

Now, the irony, of course, is that we believe that it's our time, and our money, and our resources to begin with. Now, we know we live in a sinful world if we forget just how much everything, and I mean everything, things like advertising, media, technology, even governing bodies, election campaigns solely designed to please the masses.

[16 : 56] Everything we come across is targeted at us, to please us, to make us more comfortable, or to make our lives better. John puts it this way in his Gospel.

Chapter 5. How can you believe when you give glory to one another and do not seek the glory that comes from God alone? Now, don't get me wrong.

I'm not saying that media technology in itself, even politicians, are evil. What I'm saying is this. We are raised in a society that helps us to think that we are the center of our own world.

And that's the exact opposite of this psalm. It's the opposite of revelations. It's the opposite of reality. And it's only in our sin that we would ever think to question God's wisdom and goodness, or that we believe we have a right to be angry at God, or worse yet, that we could ignore Him.

Now, it's only in sin that we could ever believe that any sin committed against us, or indeed even our own sins, could ever outweigh the glory that is God's alone, or that any sin would be too great to be forgiven.

[18 : 14] Now, it's only in our sin that we would stop being in awe of an awesome God. Maybe that's why this psalm is read out on the morning of the Day of Atonement, before all those sacrifices, and the blood, and the gore, and the death.

We need to catch a glimpse of the world without sin, and corruption, and self-centeredness. Because it's only once we have this perfect picture of God and His works that we can see how disgusting a hardened heart is, and how horrific disobedience to God is.

Now, if we think that any mission that we're on is the most important thing in the world, or whether we think we should know how others should think or act, or whether we think we've earned the right to put our needs first, sin.

Now, but when we look back at all these things through the cross, everything between Genesis and Revelations, this is why sin needs to be dealt with.

All of the suffering and the pain, but compared to God's glory, it's as simple as one line. Sin must be consumed.

[19 : 38] Sinners must be consumed. So, if there are any attitudes in light of the picture of God's glory that we've just looked at, any sins that don't fit into those pictures, repent it, repent of it, cut it off, and just throw it out.

They have no place in God's kingdom. Now, last of all, and perhaps most importantly, in praising God, be encouraged.

this is a picture of hope. It's a picture that we can see. I mean, right now, we can only see in part. It's only a reflection of who God is.

But we can see it. It's there. And for all the suffering and the pain and things that we go through every day, I mean, we just listen to Psalms of Lament.

It's okay to cry out to God. But no matter how big any of those problems are, even to the point of death, because of Jesus' sacrifice, atoning sacrifice on the cross, because of the gift of His Holy Spirit, we know that God is so much bigger than all these things.

[20 : 53] We know that anything that does not give Him glory will be no more. And we know that everything that is on this earth will be for His glory.

And we live in that hope that God is glorified. Let's pray. Lord, You are just unimaginably worthy of our praise, Lord.

Your glory is uncontainable. And sometimes in our sin, we do forget Your picture and Your plan, Your purpose. Lord, help us to remember what Your glory is.

Help us to look past these dark times. Help us to see Your glory, even if it's just a glimpse. And help us to praise You, Lord, in all that we see, all that we do, all that we touch, all that we taste.

And Lord, let us see that and know that it is You and Your Spirit and it is for Your glory. So, Lord, we put ourselves in Your hands. Amen. Amen.