

OUR GOD AND GUIDE FOREVER!

Psalm 48: 1-14 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

She was just an Egyptian handmaid, but you have to feel deeply for her pain as she was cast out of her home where she and her teenage son were living. This was Hagar's second time to have to leave her home where she had born a child so Sarah could say that God had fulfilled His promise of a son to Sarai and Abram by doing so through her, their Egyptian handmaid. This handmaid named Hagar had been asked to go along with a plan by her mistress Sarai and her master Abram, for Sarai to give Hagar to Abram as a second wife. Can't we all mess up God's plans by believing His plans are not ours to follow strictly, as His plans seem impossible or His plans are simply unacceptable to us? We all can be caught in coming up with or going along with ill-advised plans to help God out. Sarai and Abram are not two rank sinners without scruples. No, these two beloved saints, a married couple of many years, became a father and mother in the Hall of Faith, Hebrews 11. Yet, they failed the Lord temporarily and played Holy Spirit, when they thought God's plan seemed impossible to them, and was therefore, was impossible. On the first exodus from the house of Abram and Sarai, in Genesis 16, Hagar was fleeing her harsh mistress because she was pregnant, and Sarai was angry with Abram and Hagar because a child was on the way, and it was not her own. Thus Hagar fled into the wilderness and found a spring, a fountain, a well there, where Hagar could sustain herself. Remember God met Hagar there at the wilderness well, and this was the very first time God showed Himself to anyone in the scriptures, He showed Himself to, of all people, an Egyptian handmaid. Hagar told the Lord, "You are the God who sees me, for she said, "Truly here I have seen Him who looks after me." And God told Hagar to go back home and bear the son she was carrying by Abram, and to name him Ishmael.

That was way back when Sarai was 76 and Abram was 86, but the years had passed, and God, who cannot lie, fulfilled the 25 year long promise He made to Abram when Abram was 75. After the birth of the child of promise, Isaac, was born and Sarah was renamed by God, the time of weaning Isaac came—perhaps at age 3 or 5, but it came as Genesis 21 explains that Ishmael, now about 17-19 years old was laughing and mocking Sarah and little Isaac. So Sarah told Abraham, God's new name for Abram—she told her husband to cast out the slave woman with her son, for he could not be heir with her son, Isaac. Although Abraham was displeased beyond words, God told Abraham to listen to his wife so for a second time, Hagar left the home of her master and mistress. All Hagar took was a skin of water and some bread. This time Hagar came to no well and soon, she saw her son

was dying. Hagar sat down a ways from Ishmael and said, “Let me not look on the death of the child.” Every child of ours in some ways is our baby, our child, even when they are grown. Again God saw and heard the voice of this teenage boy crying and dying. He asked Hagar what was troubling her and told her to lift up the limp rag doll boy of hers who was without strength, to bring him to his feet and hold him fast with her hand. God told Hagar he would make of Ishmael a great nation. Then God opened Hagar’s eyes and she saw another well, a well of God’s grace, a well of water. Then Hagar filled the skin with water, Ishmael didn’t die, and he grew up to take a wife from Egypt from which came a nation.

Why do I tell you this story as we begin this Psalm 48, a Psalm of the sons of Korah? I wanted to start with this story to help us all identify with the God these sons of Korah are singing about, with the words, “Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of His holiness.” I want us to know this God is not just the God of the sons of Korah and the sons of Israel, the pride of Jacob, Psalm 47: 4, but He is the God of everyone who trusts Him, who repents and believes in His Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. No wilderness is too remote for God to show up in—no arid land like these arid high desert plains is too impenetrable for God to see us, to speak to us, and to show us the wells of His grace. No place where there is the largest body of shifting sand in North America is too arid, too dry, too ugly with its Boar’s Tusk and greasewood and sagebrush for God to come down and give us a song to sing about. No place called the “Armpit of America” is too remote for us to come to the discovery of Isaiah in Isaiah 12: 3, 4, as he rejoiced saying, “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say, “Give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name, make known His deeds among the peoples, proclaim that His name is exalted.”

Psalm 48 is a duet with Psalm 46, but it has a theme of its own which is the greatness of the Lord we praise. Today, I ask you to follow with me, perhaps in your own wilderness and desert as Hagar, or in your own wilderness as the sons of Korah whose father—their own heritage had been swallowed alive in the wilderness because he had questioned Moses’ authority and God’s choice of Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. Why weren’t these sons of Korah bitter? Why were they singing praise to the greatness of the Lord? I find three major reasons for their praise in verses 1-14. First, they came to know the Lord as their God, v. 1-2, secondly, they came to know the Lord as their fortress in Mount Zion, the city of the great King, v. 3-8, and thirdly, they came to know the Lord as their God and Guide forever, v. 9-14. Follow with me as I attempt to extract the honey from this bee-hive of praise, as I attempt with you to draw water from this well of

salvation. Why were the sons of Korah singing? Three reasons: Why must we sing about God's greatness? Let me show you a deep well of grace.

WE MUST SING AFTER COMING TO KNOW THE LORD AS OUR GOD.

(I.) Notice verses 1-2. "Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King." There is a setting for this psalm and it is clear that something miraculous has happened that God has done for Jerusalem, and for which He is worthy of praise. Initially, this city of God, the city of the great King, Mount Zion, is the famous old citadel, the city of Jerusalem. Most historians and commentators believe this occasion for joy is a victory of God in Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah, spoken about in II Kings 19: 20-21, 31-36. At the time, the city of God was surrounded by 185,000 Assyrians and their king, Sennacherib, one of the greatest warrior kings of all time. Soon the assault would occur with arrows, shields, siege mounds, and Assyrian warfare. I read, "Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: your prayer to Me about Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard. This is the word that the LORD has spoken concerning him: For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and out of Mount Zion, a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD will do this. "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. 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 that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at Nineveh. And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him down with the sword and escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place."

After such a victory, these worshipping sons of Korah were on their feet, on their knees, bowing, singing, clapping, shouting, and praising the greatness of the Lord. The Lord wiped out their enemy overnight. Why shouldn't they praise the Lord? Why shouldn't we all be saying—"Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised."? There's an old song I believe we ought to sing more. "After all He's done for me, after all He's done for me, How can I do less, than give Him my best, and live for Him completely, after all He's done for me." Yet, this song was not just sung by the sons of Korah. I see the sons of Korah writing this psalm for their nation. And

it was as if all Israel was singing, “After all He’s done for us, protecting Jerusalem, how can we do less than give Him our best and live for Him completely after all He’s done for us.” Beloved, as I see our nation becoming a nation that is forgetting God this week, I tremble as I reflect on Psalm 9: 17, “The wicked shall return to hell, all the nations that forget God.” Beloved, how God Almighty has blessed America. And yet, you know the news. America no longer seems to want God to be our God. At a political convention in 2012, I listened to a crowd of thousands scream that they wanted no mention of God or Jerusalem in their platform. It made me shudder as three times they screamed—“No God! No God! No God!” Then this week, on Wednesday, June 26, 2013 the United States Supreme Court of America ruled that married same sex couples are entitled to federal benefits and cleared the way for same sex marriage in California ignoring the ban of Proposition 8. In so doing, by saying the Defense of Marriage Act is unconstitutional, the Court struck down a 1996 Act of Congress, and disregarded hundreds of years of history of our civilization, refuting our history, our law, our Bible, our faith, and our God. The Supreme Court is not the highest law in the land, beloved. Our great God is our great king. When a law of the land defies our God, we must stand with Peter and the apostles in Acts 5: 29, “We must obey God, rather than man. God defines the union of one man and one woman as marriage in Genesis 2: 24, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Today, we must stand in our crumbling nation like Joshua of old in Joshua 24: 15, saying, “And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Beloved, the next ten years in our great nation will prove more and more for each of us where our allegiance lies, to our God or to man, to our God or to political correctness, to our God or to our fear of man. Proverbs 29: 25 is clear—“The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.” God keep us singing—“Great is the Lord!” We must sing, and continue to sing after coming to know the Lord as our God. Secondly,

WE MUST SING AFTER COMING TO KNOW THE LORD AS OUR FORTRESS IN MOUNT ZION, THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. (II.)

Notice v. 3-8. “Within her citadels, God has made himself known as a fortress.” For behold, the kings assembled; they came on together. As soon as they saw it, they were astounded; they were in panic; they took to flight. Trembling took hold of them there, anguish as of a woman in labor. By the east wind you shattered the ships of Tarshish. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God, which God will establish forever. Selah” Who do we

trust these days? The sons of Korah found their God to be their fortress. The Hebrew word for fortress here is the same word as in Psalm 46:7, 11. This Hebrew word **misgawb** means an inaccessible, safe, strong, high and lofty, too strong to be conquered fortress. It means a high tower or fort or cliff refuge or defense position whose altitude is above the enemy's ability to attack or penetrate. How did king Sennacherib view Jerusalem when he first saw the city? The kings of the nations all begin by assuming that Jerusalem is nothing; a puff, mere froth, entirely dismissable—a city to be had easily. Once the nations have meddled with Jerusalem, however, they flee in panic. It's not just Sennacherib—do you remember the '67 War? Yet, when nations learn who is fighting for Jerusalem, that God is their fortress, that there is the truth of God there, the word of God, and the peace—the shalom of God there—all of a sudden, kings of the nations have fled from Jerusalem in panic as Sennacherib did after losing 185,000 troops overnight.

Beloved, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the author of Hebrews 12: 22, writes, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.” How do the nations' rulers react to God's people, His bride, His church? The church appears to be a pushover. Yet when the rulers of the nations begin to push, they find it unyielding. More than unyielding, they find it a threat to them. When Hitler came to power there were 18,000 Protestant pastors in Germany. The call was sounded to form the Confessing Church. The Confessing Church insisted that Hitler was not to be heard or heeded. It declared, "Jesus Christ is the one word of God that we must obey in life and in death. We deny that the church can have a fuehrer apart from Jesus Christ...". But the pastors succumbed to Hitler one by one until the 18,000 became 2,000 and then the group got smaller and smaller. Why was Hitler unrelenting in his persecution of so small a number? Because Hitler knew that the testimony of Jesus Christ is like yeast. It appears as nothing, insignificant, and yet it spreads everywhere and affects everything, leaving nothing untouched. The influence of yeast is pervasive, uncontrollable and undeniable. Notice verse 8, and the testimony of God's people, As we have heard, so we have seen in the city...which God establishes for ever." "As we have heard, so we have seen"; it's the language of testimony! Testimony is like yeast: uncontrollable and undeniable. Hitler knew this much. The testimony of God's people when God is our fortress is distressing to the enemy. What is that testimony? Look with me at verse 8. “As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God, which God will establish forever. Selah” Do we have this confidence in God's promise-

keeping faithfulness or is it becoming diminished? What He has promised He will do. He promises us He is our fortress in Matthew 16: 18. He promises to build His church on His people's public testimony and acknowledgement of Him as Messiah of Israel, Son of God, and Savior of the redeemed. He promises that the gates of hell will not prevail against Him or us. No powers of death or hell, no attacks from satan and the underworld will topple the true church of God. If we like the sons of Korah, will testify of Him, and His Gospel, we will overcome. Beloved, I call us as a local church to stand fast, for v. 3 tells us, within our citadels God has made Himself known as a fortress. Imagine the enemy trembling because of our faith and our courage and being in anguish as a woman in labor-v. 6 May God help us not back down now just because we sense Mt. Zion is surrounded and our country is forgetting God. Let's not bury our heads in the sand or hide ourselves inside our fortresses as a chambered nautilus. God help us to stand tall for God, not obnoxiously, or angrily, but joyfully, with love and with song testifying to our trust in the Lord as our God and our fortress. Thirdly, and lastly,

WE MUST SING AFTER COMING TO KNOW THE LORD AS OUR GOD AND GUIDE FOREVER. (III.)

Notice verses 9-14. "We have thought on your steadfast love, O God, in the midst of your temple. As your name, O God, so your praise reaches to the ends of the earth. Your right hand is filled with righteousness. Let Mount Zion be glad! Let the daughters of Judah rejoice because of your judgments! Walk about Zion, go around her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels, that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever." There is no better guide. He created all things? Is He not the God who directs and governs all events? He is the God who plans our lives in their minutest detail? He is the One who has chosen His people and we are His people, He chose us from before the foundation of the world? He has promised that all things work together for good to those that love God, who are the called according to His purpose? He has testified in His Word that our light affliction which is but for a moment is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory? There is no accident, no chance happening that can befall us in our pilgrimage on earth. All things that take place are under His ultimate sovereignty. That was seen at Calvary. Wicked hands took our Lord Jesus Christ and crucified Him according to His determined counsel and foreknowledge. What a Guide to have. He knows the dangers. He has even determined the purpose of these dangers in our way. He knows the difficulty of the path. And He has provided everything we need to fight the battle of faith, until the battle is done and the victory is won. He has given us His Word on it. His Word is part of our armor of God. He directs us by His Spirit, through His Word, so that we

are never alone. He is our God even unto death, through death and for all eternity, forever. Our last enemy, death is the enemy that frightens us most of all because we have never gone through that yet. But to have a Guide even unto death, through death and over death is to have guidance forever. The wicked fear death and some curse God as death approaches. Man uses all of modern science and medicine to avoid death, but it still comes. The child of God rests even in death in the arms of our guide who carries us across the swelling tide of death. Whatever befalls us, in trying circumstances, troubles, persecution, and in death, He is our Guide to take us by the hand, to direct us over, under, around and through until we are Home, and no one can snatch us from His hand. We must trust our great God, our God, our fortress and our guide. He is God over all. Amen.