

Psalm 114:1-8 Thine Own Dear Presence Falls Ch. AM 7/23/2023

When we studied the previous 3 Psalms, we studied the phrase “Praise the LORD” or Hallelujah. Some say that the Hallelujah at the end of Psalm 113, probably belongs at the start of Psalm 114. But the absence of the Hallelujah is as intentional and beautiful as it is conspicuous! In fact, the whole point of the whole Psalm is not the absence of the LORD, but the presence of the LORD inviting our excited praise! Much like Jesus said on Palm Sunday – if people will not praise me, the rocks will cry out.

The theme of the Psalm is God is present or near, and not far away. God is available. God is attentive and aware. God observes and discerns our situation.

For the title of this sermon on this, I borrowed a phrase from another hymn – Great Is Thy Faithfulness, and it comes from stanza 4, “Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide; Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside.”

Luther and the Reformers emphasized that God is a very present help. Each year at Christmastime, we emphasize Immanuel, which is another Hebrew word that you know, and it means God with us. But this truth is older than Christmas!

Adam and Eve enjoyed the presence of God in the Garden, without sin! What happened? Genesis 3:6, of the forbidden fruit, she ate, and he ate. Then just two verses later, it stands out what God told us about what happened next. Genesis 3:8, “...*they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife HID THEMSELVES from the presence of The LORD God among the trees of the garden.*” Verse 23, “...*the LORD God sent him out from the Garden of Eden...*”

What we lost in the very first sin of our very first human leader, was our access to the presence of the LORD God!

The classic Old Testament action of God to redeem was the Great Exodus; what was so encouraging about it was the very presence of The LORD.

1. God redeems and then lives among His people! (v.1-2)

As Psalm 114 opens, God’s people have been 400 years in slavery. So, in verse 1, God swoops into Egypt and blesses His people with His presence. Not that God will stay with them in slavery, but rather that God had arrived in order to bring His people out of slavery in Egypt. Further, in verse 1, we are also told that God’s people had long been isolated suffering by listening to people speak with a foreign language, unknown to them.

Verse 2 uses the word sanctuary and the word dominion to describe the result of God’s presence. Wherever God shows up is both a sanctuary, and a place where God is king in charge. To say that Judah became God’s sanctuary was the same as to say that Israel was His dominion.

The classic OT redemptive action of God points ahead to the classic NT redemptive action of God. Similar to God's rescue of people in Egypt, at Christmas, Christ drew near to a people enslaved in sin. God's new classic action of redemption was when Jesus came near and took on a human body. We even call him Immanuel. In Matthew 1:23, we get an OT quote and its direct fulfillment in Jesus, from Isaiah 7:14, "*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which means God with us.*" Then, Jesus took us out of slavery to sin by nailing our sins to the cross. After He died for our sins and rose again, we became people under His dominion, with Him as our king. On the Day of Pentecost, when Christ made His presence known through His Holy Spirit, it was in a gathering of people from various countries speaking various languages, who each heard the Word of God in his own language! Why? Because Christ was drawing even closer, now even taking up residence within His people! God was reversing our slavery to sin, reversing our isolation, and reversing our sense of being dominated and subjugated. What reverses all that? God's presence by Christ's Spirit! At Pentecost, the people themselves became the place where God's presence was known! What God said to Joshua, God also says to us who are living in the New Testament age and are filled with His Spirit, "*Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.*"

2. Even God's creation joins us in response to His actions and His presence. (v.3-6)

When we get to verse 3, we find a new take on familiar OT stories of God's actions and God's presence. While the stories over in the Book of Exodus and in the Book of Joshua tell about God's presence with His people, this Psalm 114 comes at the same story from a completely different angle. Here in our incredible Psalm, we get the viewpoint of what was poetically happening at that very same time in the elements of the creation, as if the parts of creation were turned into people who speak and move like people, or at least like animals. When God the Creator showed up in Egypt to redeem, what was the reaction of the sea or when God showed up to give His people victory in conquering the new land, what was the reaction of the Jordan River? That is our topic starting here in verse 3.

The answer is that the sea and the River fall all over themselves to make way for the Mighty Creator, who is now present. Make way for the Creator! What does the Creator ask of the Sea, when He is taking action to redeem His people? Exodus 14:21, "*Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.*" What should the waters of the sea do in response to the Creator God showing up? The waters should do what they are told to do – to stand up straight on the left and the right, making a hallway between the two walls of water

and a dry land for a floor! Make way! Make a pathway for God's people to be rescued! The Creator is here, they seem to be saying! Similarly, what did the Creator ask of the Jordan River, God took another action to redeem His people. You can read it in Joshua 3:14-17, that when the priests carrying the ark of the covenant stepped into the water of the river, it stopped flowing and became dry ground for them to safely cross over.

The point in our Psalm is that the parts of creation, such as the Red Sea and the Jordan River, are given a role similar to persons, so that they can express how excited they are to enjoy God's presence, and how respectfully and immediately they obey God by taking part in His redeeming of His people!

In verse 4, we are being asked to remember whether the mountains in the background of any photos we have ever seen were photo-bombing? Were the mountains up to any antics in the background? No. The mountains are always aloof and stable, never moving, rather just majestically looking down at all of us. That is what verse 4 is asking us to remember about mountains. All the more our surprise to find what the mountains began to do when God showed up! The majestic, static mountains have become as animated as a child at recess on the school playground. The mountains will start skipping around like a group of wild rams! The ever dignified, regal and stately mountains have become as highly excited as a giddy child, who cannot sit still, cannot stand still, but constantly skips around!

And the mountains are not the only ones... the hills skip like lambs!

In verse 5, we hear the narrator asking for an explanation from these geographic monstrosities, but it is really just a playful question. It is like Elijah taunting the prophets of Baal, "maybe your false god is deep in thought or in the bathroom or he is on a journey or asleep and you need to awaken him?" Elijah was asking the prophets of Baal, what is the matter? SI – it is like a family at Christmastime all in snowsuits in the backyard, and a grandparent shows up in the front of the house. The young grandchildren run circles around the house on the snowy lawn, and so parent says to the child – what is so exciting that has running in circles around the house and jumping up and down like a crazy person? The children don't answer but keep right on running and running in circles around the house with grandparent in front, and parents in back of the house, round and round. When they pass by again and again, the parent asks, "What is the matter?" Everyone knows full well that nothing is the matter. Quite the opposite. Daddy is home. Mommy is home. Brother and sister are home. Grandparents are here. If the grandkids won't celebrate, the mountains might start skipping about. It is not about the salvation that God brought, but rather about getting to be with the LORD God.

This is how we read verses 5 and 6 - What ails you, O sea, that you flee?
[what is the matter with you] O Jordan [River] that you turn back [your waters]?

Verse 6 – [And what is your problem], O mountains, that you skip like rams? And what got into you, or hills, that you jump around like a lamb who cannot stand still on a normal day?

The narrator is playing dumb. The narrator knows good and well what is the matter is nothing. What is the problem is nothing. This is one of the best days they have ever known, because God Himself is here. God is here. God is here!

When God Almighty comes walking in, that event is the most encouraging hope-giving thing that could ever happen! We are cheered up and propelled forward by God's own presence with us. This is what we seek. That is what we long awaited. The more discouraging the deepening and spreading sinfulness of the days and times in which we are living, the more encouraging is our anticipation of God's arrival one fine day, and His spiritual presence with us already! Don't you think the mountains, the sea, the hills all long for their Creator to fix the problems? Paul tells us that they do in Romans 8:19-22, "*...the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*"

The most significant thing that has happened today is that Jesus has not yet returned in person to end the reign of sin, to make everything right, to end our sorrows, and to take us home. If we sing a sad dirge, the creation joins us in singing. And when Christ does come, the creation joins us in singing and skipping for joy. The joy comes in the presence of Christ the Risen LORD.

3. This God provides for our needs as His people on our journey. (v.7-8)

As we continue on our journey through this declining and sin-damaged world, this same God provides for our needs consistently. What do we need? We need to be told how to respond to the presence of God!

Verse 7, "*Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob...*"

The apostle John gives us more when we read His writings in Revelation 20:11, "*...then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. From His presence, earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.*"

Where is the sky supposed to go to flee, away from God?

Where is the earth supposed to turn to hide from God's presence?

But the parts of creation need not fear, and we people need not fear, because this mighty God is described in our Psalm in verse 7, as *the God of Jacob*, meaning that God has the intention of saving us.

Verse 8 tells us what God has plans to do – this is the God who turns the *rock into a pool of water*. And to repeat it another way is to emphasize it – this is the God who turns the *flint into a spring of water*.

This action of God are a reference to God caring for His people in the desert, recorded in the Book of Numbers, chapter 20. God had brought the people safely through a lot of dangers. Here, the problem was lack of water! The people grumbled and asked why did we come up out of Egypt, only to die here in this evil place! Without water, we cannot grow grain, figs, vines, or pomegranates, and we cannot even drink water! Moses went to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and what happened? The glory of the LORD appeared to him! God told Moses to take the staff and tell the rock to provide water! This is a story to show God's power and also God's compassion. Even for a grumbling people, God provided water!

So, in verse 8 of our Psalm, the author ends with reference to this story in order to ask us to look at how this God cares for us! Look how this God uses His power and His creativity to provide for us whenever we did not think there was a way through this problem, a way out of this mess! Whenever we are dangerously lacking basic necessities, such as water, and all we have is a rock, then God will show up in person, and take His power and apply it to our point of need, and that rock will become for us a pool of water! The least promising scene, when God shows up, is suddenly transformed into a place of plenty and a source of joy.

The gospel is that God draws close to us again. The gospel is that God promised that Christ would crush Satan, and give us access again to God and to the tree of life, and to the presence of God once more.

That came at a cost. The cost was Jesus taking our sin upon Himself, and experiencing the absence of God the Father! Jesus needed to die and rise again for us to re-gain access into the presence of God.

Conclusion:

1. Be encouraged about where we are going. Our God has us viewing ourselves as journeying through this world into our eternal home. Be encouraged by that. We are citizens of heaven. Philippians 3:20 That makes us visitors here, on a redemptive journey going home. Hebrews 11:13-14, our forefathers in the faith, *“...not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.”* Be encouraged that this place is not our home, but we are just temporary visitors. Be encouraged to seek our homeland. Be encouraged that we are moving along in our journey. We are not at the same place we were yesterday, last week, and last year. We are moving forward. We are closer to home. Be encouraged.

2. Be encouraged that God's Spirit is present with us now to cheer us, to guide us all the way home.

We the church are the sanctuary of God. How is that? The Spirit of God dwells within every heart and life of every Christian, and so much more in our collective gatherings in worship! 1 Peter 2:9, "...*you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*" We are the sanctuary of God, where God dwells by His Spirit. We are also the dominion of God, the place where God rules over us as our King in His Kingdom and as Head Shepherd in His Church, the fold of God.

Just as the people of God in the desert, after they were called out of Egypt, was a time of God providing wonderfully for them, so also we the people of God, traveling through the desert of this world, after we were called out of slavery to sin by the cross and resurrection of Christ, enjoy a time of God providing wonderfully for us. The best thing that God provides is His own dear presence by His Spirit, to cheer us and to guide us all the way home. God did not give us His Son, only to have us crumble and die part-way through our journey to heaven. Romans 8:32, "*He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?*"

If the New Testament has an equivalent to Psalm 114, it is what I'll end this sermon by reading - Romans 8:35-39, "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."* 37 *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

Let us pray.