

To the choirmaster: according to Do Not Destroy. A Psalm of Asaph. A Song.

Psalms 57, 58, 59 and 75 all share this same preface:

“according to Do Not Destroy,”

This probably says something about the tune.

Unfortunately, we do not know the tune –

but the tune appears to have been selected to connect these Psalms
with a particular theme –

and that theme refers back to Deuteronomy 9:26-29.

In Deuteronomy 9, Moses is reflecting on the sin of the golden calf,
and he reminds Israel of how he had prayed,

“O Lord GOD, **do not destroy** your people and your heritage,

whom you have redeemed through your greatness,

whom you have brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Do not regard the stubbornness of this people, or their wickedness or their sin,

lest the land from which you brought us say,

‘Because the LORD was not able to bring them

into the land that he promised them,

and because he hated them,

he has brought them out to put them to death in the wilderness.’

For they are your people and your heritage,

whom you brought out by your great power and by your outstretched arm.”

And this theme of God’s wondrous deeds is very much where Psalm 75 begins in verse 1:

1. The Nearness of God’s Name (v1)

75:1 We give thanks to you, O God;

we give thanks, for your name is near.

We recount your wondrous deeds.

Why do you give thanks to God?

The Psalmist gives two reasons:

1) because your name is near

2) because of your wondrous deeds

In the Hebrew it is “they recount your wondrous deeds” –

which fits well with the recitation of the works of God in the following verses.

The only problem is who is the “they”?

For this reason, most translations render this “we recount” –

although that solution doesn’t quite fit with the first person singular in v2.

The same idea of “they recount your deeds”

occurs in Psalm 44:1 (our fathers have told us of your deeds)
and Psalm 78:3 (“our fathers have told us”).

This word is frequently used throughout the Psalms to speak of how God’s mighty deeds
are passed on from one to another.

There is one “they” that is present in the text of verse 1.

We give thanks to you, O God (the you there is singular)

We give thanks, for your name is near (the “your” is also singular)

But God, who dwells above the highest heaven,
and his name (which dwells in the temple)
together testify and recount his wondrous deeds.

I’ll admit that it would be a little odd for God and his name to be called “they” –
but if the “they” is original, that might be the best explanation.

Whatever the case is with respect to the “they,” (or “we”)
we should see that for the Psalmist, we give thanks to God
because his name is near.
God has made his name to dwell with his people.

The theme of the nearness of God –
that God draws near to his people –
is a prominent theme throughout the scriptures.
God is sovereign over all the earth –
but he is also near to his people,
and he has demonstrated this because *his name* dwells in the temple.

The nearness of God’s name is especially shown forth for us.
We have been baptized in the *name* of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
That singular name of God has been placed upon us.
And because God’s name has been placed upon us,
we now give thanks for his wondrous deeds.

Verses 2-8 then explore God’s wondrous deeds in four themes:

The earth’s pillars (v2-3),
the wicked’s horns (v4-5), which leads to,
God’s execution of judgment in lifting up and bringing down (v6-7),
and the cup of foaming wine (v8),

all of which are oriented around our eschatological hope,
namely, that God will judge rightly in the end –
and this righteous judgment will be for our good.

So let's work through these central four themes.

2. The Earth's Pillars: How Do You Know that God Will Judge Justly? (v2-3)

2 *"At the set time that I appoint
I will judge with equity.*

Here is the promise of God's eschatological judgment.
Some would say that the Psalmist is talking about a particular judgment in history.
And certainly that may be included.
After all, God often brings judgment upon nations and peoples.
Every nation deserves judgment!
And at the set time – at God's appointed time –
God will judge with equity – he will judge justly.

But how do you know?
How do you know that God will judge justly?

We've already seen from Psalm 73 that in the middle of history
we often do *not* see justice!
And from Psalm 74 we know that God's people can feel forgotten!

How do we know that God will do right?

3 *When the earth totters, and all its inhabitants,
it is I who keep steady its pillars. Selah*

When the earth wavers – when everything (and everyone) seems unsettled –
God maintains the pillars of the earth.

You need to see the picture here:
the ancients had a three-storey view of the universe,
expressed simply as "the heavens above, the earth beneath,
and the waters under the earth."
As reflected in the language of the "raqia" (or firmament) in Genesis 1,
they viewed the visible heavens (that blue dome above us)
as a solid barrier that held back the "waters above."

The "pillars of the earth" are the supports that hold up the raqia – the firmament.
Job 9:6 speaks of the pillars of the earth,
but Job 26:11 speaks also of the "pillars of heaven,"
in a way that makes clear that these are the same pillars.

Psalm 150 speaks of this when it says,
“praise the LORD in his sanctuary, praise him in his mighty firmament.”
In other words, God has spread out the heavens like a tent (like a tabernacle),
and he has established all the earth under heaven as a sanctuary –
a place where he might dwell with his people.

But because of sin, all the earth under heaven has come under judgment.
And so a new creation was needed.

And so therefore the temple was given as a picture of the new creation.

And the temple/tabernacle also has pillars.

Both in Leviticus and Kings there is lots of “pillar” language –
as also in the new temple of Ezekiel 40-42.

The pillars of the temple remind us of the pillars of the earth.

You may have noticed that in the description of the pillars of the temple,
it is not obvious what they are supporting.

There is a reason for that.

They are pictures of the pillars of the earth (or the pillars of the heavens),
and so they are supporting the heavens!

If you are not sure about this association of the pillars,
then I would point you to one more pillar:
the pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness.

Why is it called a “pillar”?

Because the pillar of cloud and fire connects earth and heaven.

The presence of God – the Holy Spirit –
comes to dwell with his people.

In the pillar of fire God came near to us.

So when Psalm 75 speaks of the pillars of the earth tottering and swaying,
it is speaking of the potential disintegration of the very fabric of the created order.
But God says that *he* is the one who holds the universe together.
“I keep steady its pillars.”

The God who orders and directs all things –
the one who holds together the physical universe –
he is the one who will judge with equity.

From Psalm 73 we have learned that the wicked may triumph for a season.

From Psalm 74 we have learned that we don’t know how long this will be.

But here in Psalm 75 we are told that at the set time – at God’s appointed time –
he will judge with equity.

And for this reason, God speaks to the proud:

3. The Wicked's Horns: The Danger of Pride (v4-5)

*4 I say to the boastful, 'Do not boast,'
and to the wicked, 'Do not lift up your horn;
5 do not lift up your horn on high,
or speak with haughty neck.'"*

This is the second theme dealing with God's wondrous deeds:
because if God is going to judge justly –
then we should expect to see that God gives a warning.

And here in verses 4-5, that is what he does.
God does not simply blind-side the wicked.
He warns them.
He warns all men through conscience –
he warns all men through his common wrath –
through disasters and difficulties –
he warns them that judgment is coming.
He says to them "do not boast."
He says to them "do not lift up your horn."

As Tate (256) notes,
"The horn is a symbol of strength (Job 16:15; 1 Sam. 2:1),
power (1 Sam 2:10; Lam 2:17),
dignity and glory (Pss 89:18, 25; 92:10; 132:17).
In Pss. 132:17 and Dan 7:7, 8:24, horns represent kings.
Yahweh lifts the horn of the Davidic king (Ps 89:18, 25),
of the faithful worshiper (Ps 92:11)
and of (or on behalf of his people – Ps 148:15) –
exalting one's own horn is synonymous with haughtiness and arrogance."

Pride is dangerous.
And yet pride is so easy!
I don't claim to be a great musician or poet,
so you can question anything in the psalter work that I've done,
and I'll thank you for it!
But if you question my competence as a historian,
I get a bit more prickly.

But God warns the boastful: 'Do not boast.'
In my case, the God who ordains and governs history
laughs at my pretensions at competence!
In Asaph's days it was the wicked who boasted of their rule.

Foolish men!
God himself keeps steady the pillars of the earth
when the earth and its inhabitants are tottering!
And you think that you are something important?!

Rather, as Jeremiah 9:24 says,
“let him who boasts, boast in this: that he knows *me*, that I am the LORD”

As one commentator says,
“Those who exalt themselves instead of trusting in him
are denying the fundamental nature of reality:
Yahweh is in charge, and judgment will come.” Tate (259)

And this is the point in verses 6-7

4. The Source of Lifting Up: Where Is Your Hope? (v6-7)

*6 For not from the east or from the west
and not from the wilderness comes lifting up,
7 but it is God who executes judgment,
putting down one and lifting up another.*

As we've seen from Ezekiel, Israel's tendency was to look east or west –
east to Babylon or Assyria,
and west to Egypt –
depending on who was the biggest threat!

Ahaz had looked east to Assyria to fend off Damascus and Samaria.
Even the godly Hezekiah tended to trust the Babylonians against the Assyrians.
And many had looked west to Egypt to deliver them from the kingdoms of the east.

But it is not from the east or the west that lifting up comes –
nor even from the wilderness!

Now, this word “wilderness” is used more than 250 times in the OT.
It is a very common word – just remember the “wilderness” wanderings.

Geographically, the “wilderness” is generally to the south –
whether the wilderness of the Negev,
or further south toward Arabia and Sinai.

In the days of Moses God delivered Israel in the wilderness.
And the prophets had spoken of deliverance coming from the wilderness –

just think of Isaiah 40:3,
“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

It would be easy to think that salvation comes from the wilderness!

But no,
my help does not come from east or west, nor even from the wilderness;
my help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.
“It is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another.”

Coming into the sanctuary and beholding the glory of the LORD
should remind you that our help comes from above!

To whom do you look?
Where is your hope?
To whom do you turn when you are downcast?
Do you think of your husband (your wife) as your savior?

Perhaps the best way of asking this, is
what do you think would make life better?

I realized this week that some people actually look to their pastor.
They think of their pastor as their savior,
and if only he would do X,
then all would be well.

I see how this happens.
Paul says, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ.”
Hopefully your pastor is imitating Christ,
and so I can see how someone can get confused.
But it is a lethal confusion.

Your love, your hope, your trust
is to be centered on God alone.
If your heart is centered on anyone or anything else,
then it is a disordered love.

God may use your disordered, misguided love for others,
indeed, he may even use that to show you
that the object of your misguided love is utterly inadequate,
so that you might transfer your love to the only one who is worthy!

This is why we sang the Song of Hannah earlier.
Listen to the Song of Hannah in light of Psalm 75:

*My heart exults in the Lord; my horn is exalted in the Lord.
My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation.*

Then Hannah turns to the proud – the boastful:

*There is none holy like the Lord; there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God.
Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth;
for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.
The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength.
Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.
The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn.
The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up.*

Note the language of bringing low and lifting up:

*The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts.
He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap
to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor.
For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world.*

This is actually a totally different, unrelated word for pillar
(more closely related to the idea of “foundations” than “pillars”),
but again you see similar connections between God’s rule over creation
and his judgment over the earth in bringing low and lifting up.

*He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness,
for not by might shall a man prevail.
The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces;
against them he will thunder in heaven.
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king
and exalt the horn of his anointed.*

Hannah’s song deals with precisely the same themes as Psalm 75 –
and points us more specifically to the great Singer of Psalm 75,
our Lord Jesus Christ, the anointed King.

So our third theme in seeing God’s wondrous deeds
is that God is the one who puts down and lifts up.
God humbles the proud – but exalts the humble.

And he has demonstrated that in Jesus –
as Jesus humbled himself,
as Jesus passed through humiliation and suffering to exaltation and glory.

And we see this even more clearly in our final theme:

5. The LORD's Cup: The Wine of Judgment (v8)

*8 For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup
with foaming wine, well mixed,
and he pours out from it,
and all the wicked of the earth
shall drain it down to the dregs.*

We are so used to thinking of the cup of the Lord as the cup of blessing,
that perhaps we forget how it became the cup of blessing!

The cup of the Lord is regularly used as a picture of God's judgments on the nations.
(Jer. 25:15-17, 28f.; 49:12f.; 51:7. Also in Ps. 60:3, it is a symbol of judgment.)
This cup is the cup of wrath – the cup of judgment.

Perhaps that helps make sense of what Jesus meant when he prayed:
"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." (Matthew 26:39)

Jesus understood very well that he was coming to partake of the cup of God's wrath.
Psalm 75:8 said that the wicked would drain the cup of wrath down to the dregs.
And Jesus understood what this meant:
"My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." (Mt 26:42)

And with that understanding, he said to his disciples:
"shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (John 18:11)

And so our Lord Jesus Christ drank the cup of God's wrath down to the dregs.
And at the Lord's Table, we partake of that cup.
The cup of blessing that we bless, is the cup of judgment!

Why do I say that?
Because Paul says that to drink of this cup without discerning the body and blood of Christ
is to eat and drink judgment on himself. (1 Cor 11:29)

The cup of blessing and the cup of judgment are not two different cups.
There is one cup.

And because Christ has drunk that cup,
therefore when we drink of that cup in him,
we drink it as the cup of blessing.

But if you drink the cup of the Lord apart from faith in Christ,
then you will drink only the judgment.

Another way of saying it is that *everyone* receives judgment at the Lord's Table:
either the judgment of vindication for those who are in Christ,
or the judgment of condemnation for those who are not.

And this is why we sing of our eschatological hope at the end of Psalm 75

6. The Eschatological Hope (v9-10)

9 But I will declare it forever;

I will sing praises to the God of Jacob.

*10 All the horns of the wicked I will cut off,
but the horns of the righteous shall be lifted up.*

I will declare it forever.

Because Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father,
you have confidence that God will do what he has promised.
And you may declare forever that he will make things right.
He will cut off the horns of the wicked.
He will lift up the horns of the righteous.

You see, for the Psalmist this was a future hope.
Asaph's "forever" was mostly future.
But in Jesus Christ, Psalm 75 has come true.

Jesus, as the singer of Psalm 75, has drunk the cup of God's wrath.

He has also been exalted to the right hand of God.

Therefore, when *we* sing Psalm 75,

we see that our eschatological hope has already happened.

The final judgment has already happened – to Jesus.

Because he has taken God's final judgment,
because he has drained the cup of God's wrath to the dregs,
therefore by virtue of our union with Christ,
we have already passed through the final judgment as well.

By faith.

But not yet by sight.

In him, God's righteous judgment has been satisfied.

And because Jesus has taken our judgment in the middle of history,
therefore we need not fear the verdict at the end of history,
because the verdict at the end of history has already been announced in Christ.