

Psalm 108

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[0 : 00] Good evening and welcome to St Silas on YouTube. My name is James and I'm on the staff team here at St Silas. And I'll be giving us a bit of a steer through our passage this evening.

And if you've joined us for the very first time, a very big warm welcome to you. And over the summer evenings at St Silas, we've started on a little series in the Psalms.

But before we start, let me pray to God and ask him for his help as we look at this great psalm, Psalm 108, this evening. So dear Father, please help us to listen now. Please help us to hear your word.

Please help us to draw strength from the truth of the gospel as we go out this week. In Jesus' name, Amen.

And the psalms were songs that were sung by God's people at important times in their history. And very often they express what we feel as Christians in poetic language.

[1 : 05] Psalms are Jesus' songs. And when we sing these, we sing these with Jesus. And so this evening we'll be looking at a beautiful psalm, Psalm 108.

And as we start, I want to teach you a battle song. And we see that in our passage in verse 10. Who will bring me to the fortified city? And then again in verse 13. With God we shall gain the victory.

And a battle song might be an unfamiliar term for us today in 21st century Glasgow. And I grew up in South Africa.

And the school that I grew up had three school songs. And one of their school songs was a Zulu battle song. A Zulu chant that the warriors would sing when they'd go to war.

[2 : 04] So it went, I'm a Zulu, I'm a Zulu. Yeti, yeti, boni na, yeti, yeti, se koni na, isi pao, isi kulu. And it's very rousing, isn't it?

You can imagine a thousand schoolians singing this song arm in arm, intimidating the opposition schools when they came to play them any kind of sport.

And the Christian life can feel sometimes like a bit of a battle. So lots of my friends that I chat to about Christianity, they might initially be quite positive about church and about Christianity.

They might think that they like the atmosphere of church. They like the chat. They like the values that church and Christianity is about.

They like the art and the history of Christianity. But when I speak to my friends about the Lord Jesus as a personal Savior and a personal Lord who asks them to give up their independence and follow Him, I find that the drawbridge is pulled up and they retreat into their heart.

[3 : 23] And their heart becomes a bit of a fortress that says, off limits, don't come any nearer. And then in 2 Corinthians 10, Paul the Apostle speaks of the human heart as a stronghold.

And we see lots of strongholds around us in the world today. So if I go to work and I mention that I am a Christian, very often I'm treated with an attitude of pity or maybe suspicion, even that I believe something that is harmful.

Or our friends, when they find out that we're Christian, their language might change and they might draw back from us slightly. We might not be included in as much as we were.

And then when I look at my own heart and I see what my own heart is truly like, I find strongholds of evil in there too, areas of my life where I have not bowed the knee to the Lord Jesus.

And I say off limits. And so the cause of Christ seems doomed, surrounded by fortresses and strongholds that I cannot conquer, that we can't break into.

[4 : 46] Now obviously, working for a church and being a Christian minister, this isn't something that I really believe. Otherwise I wouldn't be here this evening.

And so I want to teach you a war song from Psalm 108 that will hopefully be quite encouraging. And Psalm 108 is a psalm of David, but it's really two older psalms of David that have been put together. And they have been compiled by an unknown compiler at the end of Israel's history, long after King David. And so the psalmist has looked at a historical event that has happened in David's life.

And he has applied that event to what is happening in his life as still being relevant. And it is still relevant for God's people today in every age.

And I think the psalm, it breaks up into three sections that teaches us about the victory of God. And I think the first thing that we learn about the victory of God comes in verses 1 to 4, and that that victory, it flows from God's love.

[6 : 06] The victory of God that flows from God's love. So in verses 1 to 3, we have a response. And then in verse 4, we have a reason for that response.

And so it starts off very upbeat, doesn't it? David says that he wants to sing to God. And then in verse 4, we get this reason why he wants to sing.

And that is because God's love is so great. And notice in verse 1, David's heart is resolute. He says it is steadfast.

Nothing is going to change him. Notice also that it's all-encompassing. He sings with all his heart and soul, with all my soul. It's a love that's going to shape his destiny.

Well, growing up, when I was out with my mates, and it was a really memorable moment, something to be celebrated, something big like a wedding or a matriculation or a graduation or someone's important birthday, there's always one place where it ended up, and that was on the beach with a big log fire, watching the sun rise over the Indian Ocean.

[7 : 23] And we were waking up at the dawn, as it were. We were toasting it in. And that's what we read about in verse 2. Awake, carp and liar.

I will awaken the door. And so it's a love, God's love, that is to be celebrated. And then in verse 3, David sings that he is going to praise God among all the nations.

I will praise you, Lord, among the nations. I'll sing of you among the peoples. Everywhere on earth, everyone should know about this great love that God has for us.

And the reason that David sings is because of the Lord's love. Verse 4. For great is your love, higher than the heavens.

Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. And it's a love that fills creation. It's a love that's at the heart of creation.

[8 : 30] And so the greatest truth in the universe is the covenant love that God has for all who trust and believe in him.

And so in lockdown, one of the things that I've finally gotten around to doing is listening to Sun Tzu's The Art of War. And it is a surprisingly good listen.

Do give it a listen, even if the subject doesn't really interest you at all. And one of his principles that he teaches is that if you really want to get your troops motivated to fight, then you need to take the option of withdrawal off the table.

You need your troops to see that if they lose this battle, they lose everything. And David sings here because he has found something that eclipses all other ambitions that he may have had in life.

The love of the Lord. Because your love is better than life. I will praise you. David sings in another song.

[9 : 38] And as we'll see, David is facing an impossible challenge. He's facing the strongholds of evil. As Jesus had faced some impossible challenges in his life, he had faced the strongholds of evil.

And the thing that was to motivate him, that was going to give him confidence that the battle is not in vain, was his sure and certain knowledge of God's love for all who trust in him.

Well, the second thing that we learn in this song, look at verses 5 to 9 here, is that the victory of God rests on the promises of God.

So in verse 5, David prays that the God will do all that he has promised and intended to do, that he'll fill the whole world with his glory.

And so if God's love is at the heart of creation, the purpose of creation or the mission of God in the world is to fill the world with his glory.

[10 : 44] In accordance with that mission, David prays that God would save those who love him, who trust him. And in response to this prayer that David does, says God speaks in verse 7.

And to speak is rarely to make a promise. It's to speak truthfully. I hope that we do always speak truthfully. And in verse 7 to 9, we're going to have to do a bit of Bible work.

And I want us to notice four things about God's promises here. And the first thing is to notice that God is going to win a holy war.

So at the start of verse 7, we read, God has spoken from his sanctuary. And a sanctuary is the place where God was said to have dwelt.

It's the place that was free from sin, that was free from uncleanness, that was absolutely holy. It was filled with God's godness.

[11 : 47] And that's where God is speaking from. That's where he's acting from. And so today we might think bad things when we say holy war. But here it means that God's victory in this holy war is going to be a victory of good over evil, of the love of God over bad.

The second thing that we notice here is that God promises that all the promised land is his in verses 7 and 8 there.

And so the land that we're talking about here is the land that was promised to King David's ancestors, Abraham and Jacob in Genesis. And the places that are mentioned in verse 7 and 8 there are really places that cover the length and the breadth of the promised land.

So we read there Shechem, and Shechem's right in the center of the promised land. And that's in the west. And then we read Succoth, and that's in the east of the promised land.

And those are the places that the patriarch Jacob went to, David's great ancestor in Genesis 33, that we looked at last term in the evenings at St Silas.

[13 : 04] And David mentions them here, these place names, as a way of saying one part represents the whole. So it's similar to the way that we might talk of the length and breadth of Scotland.

We might say from Lerwick to Gretna Green. Hopefully you know where those are. Maybe you don't. But it might be another way when we talk of Scotland politically.

And we might say Holyrood. And we really mean the whole of Scotland simply by mentioning one place. And so what God is saying here is that all of the land, the length and the breadth of it, is his. And he is free to give it to whoever he wants. So when David originally composed the psalm, all the land was God's people's land.

But when the psalm 108 was compiled later, none of the land was God's land, was the people's land. God had chosen to give it to someone else.

[14 : 08] But the next thing that we notice here is that God is going to rule the land by his king in David's line. So towards the end of verse 8, we read Judah is my scepter.

And the scepter is really that thing the queen or the king holds that represents their power and authority. And Judah was the place where King David came from originally.

And where God had promised the patriarch Jacob that God's king forever would come from, from that tribe. And then the final thing that we notice here in verse 9 is that God is going to defeat all evil powers.

So Moab is my wash basin. On Edom I toss my sandal. Over Philistia I shout in triumph. And these are Edom, Moab, and Philistia.

They're the three ancient enemies of God's people. And so Moab was situated right down in the south by the Dead Sea.

[15 : 26] And there we have that wash basin image. And then the Edomites, they were in the east, in the hill country. And then the Philistines, they're in the west. They were the traditional enemies that Samson fought.

And it's not that every Moabite or every Edomite or every Philistine was God's enemy, would be triumphed over God's enemy. At least one Moabite loved the Lord.

We remember Ruth, hopefully. and she joined God's people although she was a Moabite. But all God's enemies, all those who oppose God, all evil powers, they will be defeated.

And listening to all of us, the obvious question for us is what are we meant to do with this as Christians today?

And the answer is that we need to do with this what the New Testament does with this. And that is, we need to read these as a type or a shadow or a pattern that points to a bigger and greater reality.

[16 : 42] And so in Romans 4.13 Paul writes that God promised Abraham not simply a patch of land in the Middle East but that God promised Abraham that his descendants, his king forever

would rule the whole world.

They would govern and rule all created order. And so what we read here is a shadow of a greater reality. And so what God is saying in this psalm, in Psalm 108, is that God promises that he will wage a holy war and that all of it will be his and that he'll rule it through his ruler from Judah and every evil power will be defeated.

And so the promises that by the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus, the Savior and Lord, that ultimately you and I, as we tell our friends about Jesus, as we speak to them, we are waging a holy war.

And by the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus, all evil powers are going to be defeated. And ultimately, through this proclamation, resurrection, the whole world will be filled with God's glory and will come under that one ruler, Jesus.

And I know that when we go out in the week, it doesn't always feel like that when I try and mention to my friends about Jesus and I shuffle my toes a bit and I don't know whether they will believe or trust.

[18 : 22] It seems quite pathetic but this is something that God has promised. This is what God is doing in the world.

And so, the victory of God is a victory that flows from his love. It's a victory that rests on his promises and then finally we see that the victory of God that comes through God's power in verses 10 to 13.

And in verse 10 we discover the immediate crisis that has led David to sing this song. And David is asking where he says who will bring me into that fortified city?

And it's not a sat-nav question. David's not asking how do I get to Glasgow Green from the West End? But he's asking who will bring me into that city as a conqueror who's finally conquered that stronghold.

And what city is he talking about? Well, who will lead me into Edom, the city of Edom. And so, the psalm is written as a battleground in the midst of a military challenge from Edom.

[19 : 41] And the Edomites, they hated God's people. Israel. And I wonder if you've ever read Psalm 137. We often sing it at Christmas, Boney M, we know that song by the rivers of Babylon.

When Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians, and in that psalm, we read how the Edomites, they cheered as the Babylonians were sweeping through Israel.

Yeah, get them. And the Edomites, they lived in the hill country to the east of the Jordan. And some of those places where they lived were these impregnable mountain rock fortresses.

And so, thinking back to KwaZulu Natal, where I grew up, the Zulus conquered everything. They were a tremendous fighting force. They inflicted the greatest defeat on the British Empire by a native people that they'd ever suffered at Isidlwana.

But there was one enemy that the Zulus never conquered. And that was the Basutu people who lived in the mountain kingdom of Lesutu.

[20 : 56] And they never conquered them because there was only a single trap into their kingdom that they could get into. And so, one of the mountain fortresses that the Edomites had was Selah, their capital.

And that's a city that's on the site of the modern day city of Petra. And you might have seen those pictures of Petra, where you wander down the track and it's taken from between the two cliffs and you just see the city emerging as you come out through this track.

And it's a tiny track, just wide enough for one chariot that enters this mountain stronghold. Very easy to defend, incredibly difficult to attack and conquer.

And so, David asked the question, how will he conquer this fortress, this Edomite city? And the answer comes in verse 11.

And we don't know what had happened in David's life at that time to make him feel so abandoned by God, but he cries out to God because he knows that only with God's help can that city be conquered, that fortress be conquered.

[22 : 20] And he knows that this conquest will be in spite of himself rather than because of anything he does. And he knows that ultimately God saves ungodly, undeserving people out of his great love for them, for those who trust in him.

And this particular incident in David's history is appropriated by God's people later and it becomes a picture of every fortified city of evil and wickedness, of hostility to the people of God.

And what David sings is that one day with God's help, God's king will conquer and that conquest reaches its ultimate fulfillment at the cross.

And that at the cross of Jesus, every evil power, every fortress, every stronghold is defeated. And it might not feel like that sometimes.

We're still engaged in some skirmishes, mopping up cooperation. That on the cross, God's king forever will be announced in the Lord Jesus.

[23 : 37] And that on the cross, we see the full and final triumph of good over evil, of God's love over bad.

And that on the cross, God, Jesus declares God's glory and wins a people for himself who will rule over creation, every bit of it, forever and ever.

And see, this is how Paul, the apostle Paul, writes about this victory, this victory of God in Colossians 2, as we read how Jesus died for our sins in our place to bring us to God and in doing so conquers every evil power.

So Colossians 2, pick you up in verse 13. And Jesus forgave us all our sins. And having cancelled the charge of legal indebtedness which stood against us and condemned us, he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them by triumphing over them on the cross. So let's pray as we close.

[24 : 52] Father, we thank you for the cross of Christ. We thank you that in many times we feel helpless and hopeless against the fortresses around us.

We come to you and we plead, won't you help us, won't you save us, won't you work through us for your praise and glory as we seek to proclaim the victory of God, the victory of the Lord Jesus, in all that we do, speak and say, every day, in Jesus' name, Amen.