

The Revered Judge

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we are here, not on our own merit, but only because of your mercy, we can stand before you.

So we pray, Lord, that as we turn to Psalm 76, we pray that you will speak to us, teach us about how you want us to live, remind us of your gospel.

Of your grace. So that we might live with the holy fear and love for you. And we pray that that truth, Lord, would stir us into prayer.

And as we pray, Lord, we pray that your holy spirit would lead us, meet with us in a powerful way. Lord, because we know, Lord, you want us to pray.

You answer prayer. Amen. Amen. That's why we're here to seek you, Lord, to acknowledge our dependence on you. So please guide us. Help us.

[1 : 12] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Psalm 76. The title of the psalm says, To the choir master with stringed instruments, a psalm of Asaph.

A psalm. I'll just read it out loud, 12 verses. And we'll go from there. In Judah, God is known.

His name is great in Israel. His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion. There he broke the flashing arrows, the shield, the sword, and the weapons of war.

Selah. Glorious are you, more majestic than the mountains, full of prey. The stout-hearted were stripped of their spoil. They sank into sleep.

All the men of war were unable to use their hands. At your rebuke, O God of Jacob, both rider and horse lay stunned. But you, you are to be feared.

[2 : 08] Who can stand before you when once your anger is roused? From the heavens you utter judgment, the earth feared and was still. When God arose to establish judgment, to save all the humble of the earth.

Selah. Surely the wrath of man shall praise you. The remnant of wrath you will put on like a belt. Make your vows to the Lord your God and perform them. Let all around him bring gifts to him who is to be feared, who cuts off the spirit of princes, who is to be feared by the kings of the earth.

Imagine a boy in grade school who dreads going to school because of a bully that relentlessly goads him every single day and he just wishes, would just let up for one day or he dreams of, daydreams of moving away from school, moving to another school so that he can be finally relieved of that.

Or imagine like a small, you know, in battle nation, maybe in the Middle East where there's a lot of war and just surrounded by more powerful nations and they have no choice. Their nation becomes a battleground and their families are torn apart and they just wish for it to finally let up.

There's longing for peace, for ceasefire in their country. And whether we're aware of it or not, that's the state that every Christian is in, right?

[3 : 37] Because that's the plight that faces the church even if we are unaware of it. Because Jesus said to his disciples in John 15, 18 to 20, If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, a servant is not greater than his master.

If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. So we're surrounded by spiritual enemies on every side, right? And the world, the flesh and the devil are conspiring together each day to bring down the people of God and they will not let up on their assault.

So this is daily our experience. And if we don't feel this battle for our souls daily, if we don't feel this fight for holiness, and if we are not experiencing spiritual warfare in the world, then that's probably a sign that we are more of this world than we ought to be.

That the world is not opposing us because we belong to the world. But if we are pursuing God's priorities and purposes, we always face opposition. And that's really what this psalm is speaking to.

[4 : 48] It teaches us that we should fear the awesome God who judges the world and establishes peace. That's really the main point. We should fear the awesome God who judges the world and establishes peace.

And this psalm is unique because it uses interesting titles for God. So the translation kind of misses it. But in verses 1 to 3, God is called the renowned one.

In verses 4 to 9, he's called the majestic one, the resplendent one, the shining one. And in verses 10 to 12, he's called the revered one. So that's really the outline I'll follow. So the renowned one, the resplendent one, the revered one.

And first, it speaks of God as the renowned one in verse 1. It says, In Judah, God is known. His name is great in Israel. That phrase, God is known, is literally, God is the known one in Judah.

He is a known one. In other words, God is the famous one, renowned one. Though other nations might not acknowledge him, God is known among his people in Judah.

[5 : 48] His name is great in Israel. His reputation precedes him. That's what the psalmist is trying to tell them. And verse 2 continues that thought, His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion.

The place that God, this God calls home, is among Israel, his people. Salem is an old name for Jerusalem. Salem means peace. Zion is a mountain and a stronghold in Jerusalem.

And it often is used to stand for the entire city itself. So Zion is just all referring to the same thing. Judah, Israel, Salem, Zion. And so there's a great sense of good, healthy pride here in God.

Saying that this is who our God is. And there's a lot of, it's a declaration of faith. And it's not unlike what Joshua says, right at the end of Joshua, when the Israelites are, you know, talking about, should we keep going this path?

Should we follow God? And Joshua says, choose this day, chapter 24, verse 15, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your father served in the region beyond the river, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.

[6 : 59] But ask for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord. And that's essentially what the psalmist is declaring here in these two verses. Your nations of the earth worship other gods and refuse to acknowledge our God.

But the God we worship is the true God. And though his name might not be on your lips, his name and praise are on our lips. He's saying, his name is great in Israel.

In Judah, God is known. And he is the renowned one. So there's that kind of declaration. And that's the attitude that we should have also, of course, as believers, right? Because even though Christianity is increasingly unpopular, right?

In our country, and especially this part of the country, and our God is frequently vilified, and his name is often taken in vain, but we shouldn't be cowered into embarrassment.

Rather, we should declare proudly in our church, in my home, God is known. And God is great. And his name is great in our gathering. And his home is with us.

[7 : 59] He dwells in our midst. And that's what Psalm is declaring here. And in verse two, tells us a little bit more about our God, than the translation lets on. So let me explain. The word abode, in verse two, is a word that literally means thicket.

It's a metaphorical word that depicts a lion emerging from the thicket, like to devour his prey. And that's why that same word is used in Jeremiah 4, verse seven, 25, 38, Psalm 10, nine, Amos three, four, and song of songs to refer to a lion's den or a lair.

It's the same word. It refers to a lion's lair. And similarly, the word dwelling place, in verse two, refers to a lion's den in Nahum chapter two, verse 12.

We're in Psalm 76. And so, and then if you look at Job 38, 39, 40, it uses those, both of those words that are translated in verse two as abode and dwelling place.

And, and it's, it's translated this way, Job 38, 39, 40. Can you hunt the prey for the lion or satisfy the appetite of the young lions when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in their thicket?

[9 : 17] Those are the two words that are translated here as abode and dwelling place. So, so the Psalmist is intentionally using a poetic imagery of a lion to describe God, that God's dwelling place is a den that he comes, emerges from a thicket.

And so he is here being described as the lion of Judah, right? That's prophesied in Genesis 49, nine. He is a lion who emerges majestically from his den. And that's the place where he makes his dwelling.

And then that place where he makes his dwellings with his people. And here's why that lion imagery is significant. Cause it says in verse three, there he broke the flashing arrows, the shield, the sword, and the weapons of war.

Selah. So the mighty lion of Judah breaks all the weapons of war. And notice it doesn't specify verse three, whose weapons are in view here, right?

It doesn't say that God destroys his enemies and they break their weapons. It says that he breaks the weapons of war in general, right? And combine that with the fact that he is described as dwelling in Salem, which means peace.

[10 : 20] I think this is a, this, this language is pointed to the fact that God is not that, not that God is merely victorious in battle, but that God puts an end to war period.

He brings ultimate permanent peace by reigning over all things. And it's the similar idea found in Psalm 46, nine, where it says he makes war cease to the end of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear. He burns the chariots with fire. So the idea that's here is not merely that God's victorious in warfare, but that God is abolishing war once and for all.

And that, and that's a common theme in the prophets as well. So that's the first point that God is the renowned one. And then starting in verse four, the Psalmist shifts to using the second person and addresses God directly.

Uh, and he gives God the title of the resplendent one, or literally the shining one. That's the literal meaning of the phrase glorious. Are you? He's the shining one.

[11 : 16] Uh, and, uh, he's, he says he is more majestic than the mountains full of prey. That's kind of a, shows the distance of the time, right? And then we, it's an image that doesn't really make sense to us, right?

Because, um, it's, we don't have mountains full of prey, but, uh, this is an expression that the people in the, ancient world in this part of the world used to describe something glorious and majestic.

It's kind of in a similar way that we would describe maybe, uh, you know, metropolis, you know, a skyline of, of, of a city, a cityscape or something like that, right? That's glorious, right?

So for these people, uh, looking at a mountain, let's say full of a herd of, uh, mountain goats or, or a herd of mountain gazelles or, or a flock of mountain goats, that's the, that was glorious.

I mean, imagine these, all these animals covering the face of the mountain. I mean, it looks majestic, right? And he's saying that that majestic sight, God is more glorious than that. He's more majestic than that.

[12 : 14] And then in verses five to, uh, six tells us that this shining God, resplendent God puts an end to war once and for all. The stout hearted were stripped of their spoil. They sank into sleep.

All the men of war were unable to use their hands. At your rebuke, Oh God of Jacob, both rider and horse lay stunned. the stout word hearted, stout hearted warriors, the men of war were likewise defeated.

Um, the phrase sank into sleep is likely a euphemism for death. Uh, so at the mere rebuke of God, he doesn't even raise his hand. He simply rebukes them. All the enemies are, are laid to rest.

They're stunned. They're defeated. Uh, and when God rises to render his judgment, none can protest or clamor or so, but in fear and trembling, they have to receive God's judgment.

That's what verses seven to nine is talking about. It says, but you, you are to be feared who can stand before you. When once your anger is roused from the heavens, you utter judgment. The earth feared and was still when God arose to establish judgment, to save all the humble of the earth.

[13 : 18] Selah. Right? So when heaven speaks, earth must listen, be silent. When God renders judgment from heaven, earth must stand still in fear. And so God judged the whole earth and saves all the humble of the earth.

And because God is an awesome God who judges the world and establishes peace for his people, the psalmist tells us that we should fear him. Right? Verses 10 to 12 transitions to the appropriate response of man, how we should respond to God, who establishes peace for his people and judges the wicked of the world.

It says in verse 10, surely the wrath of man shall praise you. The ramson of wrath you will put on like a belt. It's confusing initially, but what he means is, even the wrath of man that, that, that rails against God, that wrath of man will succumb to the renowned and resplendent one and will eventually praise him.

And like a, you know, champion boxer who puts on the title belt around, around his waist after his victory, God will wear the remnant of wrath as a belt, like a trophy. Those who will defeat him.

And, and then therefore the psalmist exhorts everyone, verses 11 to 12, make your vows to the Lord, your God and perform them. Let all around him bring gifts to him who is to be feared, who cuts off the spirit of princes, who is to be feared by the kings of the earth.

[14 : 39] So twice in these last two verses, God is described as one who is to be feared. Right? And that literally means the feared one. God is the feared one.

And the word fear is a key word that's repeated four times in the psalm. And it's always referring to the fear of God. And, and the word fear in Hebrew can refer to, uh, terror, right?

Being terrified of something, uh, so that you should flee, but also refers to a reverence, um, right? That governs the actions of God's people and inspires their worship.

So that's why in Exodus 22, 20, when God appears to his people on Mount Sinai, Moses tells them, uh, do not fear, uh, because God has come to test you so that the fear of God may be with you to keep you from sinning.

So there are two words for that are you, that will fear. It's the same Hebrew word that's translated as fear in both cases. But in the first case, when he said, do not fear, it refers to a fear, a terror of God.

[15 : 35] He's saying, telling God's people don't fear him in that way. But then he tells them, he came to you to test you so that the fear of God may be with you to keep you from sinning. So that second instance, the same word, but fear in that context means a reverence that keeps you from sinning.

That keeps people from sinning. It means to walk before the face of God and to recognize his presence. And we are all called to live that way. Even the princes and kings of the earth, he says, I have to fear God here.

But do we live with this kind of fear of God, with the reverence of God? Do we conduct ourselves with holy fear? And do we live with an awareness that an awesome, awe-inspiring God is indwelling us, that he's walking with us?

And if we did, how would this affect what we say and what we do? And in the New Testament, of course, this revered one is ultimately revealed to us in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Because the problem with this psalm is that it says, in Judah God is known, his name is great in Israel, but this isn't true if you look at the history of Israel.

[16 : 39] It's true in some points of their history. And it was what they hoped for, what they should have done, but they failed to worship God. And they went after the idols of other nations.

And so they were not the humble of the earth, in verse 9, that God saved. So they were instead part of the world that would incur God's judgment. And so then, if that's us and that's our faith, then how can we place our hope and trust in this God?

And that dilemma, that question is answered when Jesus Christ comes. And he is, of course, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David who is conquered.

Revelation 5.5 describes him that way, right? And that's the, it's a fulfillment of all the metaphorical uses of the lion to describe God in the prophetic books, in the Psalms, and ultimately the fulfillment of the prophecy in Genesis that describes that the Messiah will be a lion from the tribe of Judah.

And Jesus came and he conquered, like the God who is described here in Psalm 76. He is the God who is described here. And how did God, how did God conquer?

[17 : 50] How did Christ, the lion of Judah, conquer? And in that same passage, a couple verses later in Revelation 5.6, in one verse later, the lion of Judah that conquered, when John turns to look at this lion of Judah, instead of seeing a lion that conquered, he sees, he says, a lamb standing as though it had been slain.

And so there's intentional paradox there, right? That he is the lion of Judah who is conquered, but the way he conquered is by being slain as the lamb of God. And by dying on the cross for our sins, he conquered sin and death.

And because he did that for us, now this hope that is expressed here is ours, right? Because he has saved us, because those who humble ourselves, humble themselves and repent of their sins and acknowledge their need for Christ, are saved by God.

And so now this hope that's expressed in this psalm becomes ours. And that means, of course, then ultimately, when we are embattled, right? When we are tempted, when we face trials and suffering, and when men of war assail us at every side, are the enemies of the sold world, flesh and the devil seek to make us sink into the mire, we can hope in God and know that God will come, the renowned one of Israel, the resplendent one, the revered one will come and establish his peace and give us ultimate peace and rest that only God can give.

So with that hope, let's see.