

Introduction

Before the news of the corona virus began to hit the airwaves back at the beginning of this year, who could have imagined that 2020 would have been perhaps the most disturbing year since WWII? Layer upon layer of unprecedented circumstances have accumulated upon us. Temptations to fear and anxiety abound. I made a list of the layers. Covid. Lockdowns. Prohibitions. Mandates. Protests. Looting. Burning. Sporting events without fans. Skyrocketing crime. Division among Christians. Empty shelves at stores. Significant suspicion of fraud in the national election. The deterioration of regard for religious freedom. Much of the country buying into the idea that if you do not belong to a designated minority group, you are an oppressor and need to be overthrown. Then there is all the normal regular stuff that we all have to deal with.

I am not listing these items to increase your anxiety and fear. Rather, I just want to acknowledge that a storm is gathering. And I want, this morning, to direct us to genuine hope and confidence in the midst of it all. Hope is not based upon the absence of trouble. Trouble is a fact of life in this world. Hope admits that there is trouble but trusts God in the midst of it all. So an accurate grasp of God is what we need. Over the next two weeks we are going to study two psalms both of which direct us to our great God.

[Read Text and Pray]

This psalm calls the earth to tremble at the presence of God in his saving and supplying work. God is demonstrating his majestic and glorious presence as he deals with his people. All the earth should respond with awe and wonder. And if that is the response that all the earth should have, then God's people should be profoundly impacted as well. The main idea of the text is that God is present with his people. God, whose glory calls the earth to tremble, is present with his people. And his glorious presence manifests in several ways.

I. The Presence of the Lord with His People.

This psalm takes us back to the exodus, to the time "When Israel went out of Egypt." The house of Jacob had gone down to live in Egypt because of a severe famine. Over the years, however, the Egyptian rulers turned these outsiders into a house of slaves to build up Pharaoh's empire. Heavy demands and great afflictions were placed on them. For the Israelites, Egypt was a people of strange language. Obviously, they spoke a different tongue than the house of Jacob. But the point is that Egypt was not home for Israel's descendants. It was a land of idolatry. The Egyptians would not speak of God as Israel could. The people languished and cried out to God in their distress. Their plea for rescue from slavery came up to God. The Lord God heard their cry and bore in mind the covenant he had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He drew near to his people and made his presence known among them. The psalmist draws attention to three aspects of God's presence with his people.

A. He delivered them. Pharaoh was a mighty monarch and Egypt was a mighty people, but the God of Jacob brought them down. And he brought his people out. Israel came out of Egypt because God brought them out. After nine plagues which failed to convince Pharaoh's hard heart, there came the tenth. The Israelites sacrificed their Passover lambs and applied the blood to the doorposts of their dwellings. That night the Lord slew the firstborn in every Egyptian household in Egypt. The

Israelites were spared because of the blood of the lamb. And Pharaoh set the house of Jacob free. God raised up Pharaoh and hardened his heart in order to demonstrate his power so that his name could be proclaimed in all the earth.

Especially in times when the world is raging, it is good to look back on God's deliverance of Israel. It reminds God's people of his mighty acts to deliver us. We live among a people of strange language. Their speech reflects blindness and hostility to God. Our Egypt is our sin, and our Pharaoh is Satan. We languish under the oppression of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Our sins cry out for our blood. Our Passover lamb is Jesus Christ. His blood was shed, and when judgment falls the Lord will pass over those who by faith paint Christ's blood over the doorpost of their heart. They are delivered. It is a mighty and magnificent work of God. God spared not his own Son for us who believe. It is a great and marvelous deliverance which demonstrates his presence with us. The Lord spoke by the prophet Isaiah, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which means, GOD WITH US.

Our sin has separated us from the Lord. He is holy, holy, holy. But the Bible tells us if we draw near to God, he will draw near to us. If you have not already, your greatest need today is to draw near to God by turning away from sin and trusting in Jesus Christ, God's great and mighty deliverer.

B. Not only did the Lord come down to deliver the people, he also came down to make them his sanctuary. "When Israel went out from Egypt, ... Judah became his sanctuary." They were set apart unto God to be his holy place. He dwelt among them. He was there with them, and they are set apart as precious to him. The people were his tabernacle, and his holiness and majesty and power were displayed where they went because he was with them. The Lord said as much through Isaiah. In chapter 43, we read,

Thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Fear not for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be WITH YOU; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the holy One of Israel, your Savior. ... Fear not for I am WITH YOU. (Isaiah 43:1-5a)

As we turn to the New Testament, we are told that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, made up of the people who believe in the Lord Jesus, is his sanctuary. Paul writes the Corinthians, "For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people." With his dwelling in our midst, we have access to him and fellowship with him. The Lord God is no less present with his church and his churches than he was with the Israelites when he brought them out from Egypt! He will never leave us or forsake us.

C. And there is a third aspect of the presence of the Lord with his people here in Psalm 114—dominion. The people were his sanctuary and his dominion. That is to say his special realm of rule. God rules the world, the universe, everything. But he is the king of his people in a peculiar way. They embrace his kingship and he gives them his good commands, and they should rejoice in those good commands. They should exclaim with Psalm 119: "Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong but walk in his ways!" (1-3) When the Lord's people obey him, he keeps them close (Leviticus 26:11-12). They show themselves to be gladly under his reign and in his kingdom.

In the same way, when the Lord is honored and worshiped and loved in his church. He makes himself known. His word is loved and obeyed. They embrace his will and seek to be holy as he is holy. Jesus declared, "If you love me, you will keep commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be WITH YOU forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, . . . he dwells WITH YOU and will be IN YOU.

The Lord is with his people as their deliverer. They are his sanctuary and his kingdom.

II. The Presence of the Lord in the Midst of Nature.

A. The psalmist turns his attention from the people themselves to depict how nature responds to the presence of the Lord with his people. As the Lord brings his people out of Egypt and is present with them, nature responds to his majesty. It is a response not to the people but to God and yet when nature responds to God's presence, his people are blessed. The sea flees. The Jordan river turns back. The mountains and the hills skip. They tremble before the holy manifestation of God's presence. And the rock turns into a pool and a flowing stream of water. Each of these elements of nature behaves in an unnatural way in the presence of the Lord.

B. It is as though nature is afflicted by the presence of the Lord as he comes with his people. The psalmist asks, "What ails you, O sea, O river, O mountains?" What ails you? What's wrong with you? What is tormenting you? It is the presence of God. God in his saving and sanctifying and sovereign work brings trepidation to bear upon nature. The sea opens up. It would never open up for Pharaoh or the Egyptians. The river flows backwards precisely when the ark is brought into its midst. The mountains quake. The unshakable hills and mountains shudder at God's presence at Sinai. The rock gives forth water. It is because their sovereign, their creator, by his very holiness wills it so. His will is their command. He rules nature and nature complies completely.

The natural world puts to shame the creatures God made in his image, now blinded by sin. The sea, the river, the hills and mountains, and even rocks all respond with fear and trembling to their creator and his majesty. Meanwhile, human beings, the very ones made in God's image, endowed with the ability to see and perceive and think, are oblivious. Jesus Christ, the God who spoke them into being has come nearby being made flesh. He has come nearer than at the Red Sea, Sinai, or the Jordan, yet the world is not turned back from its sin. It is not turned back from its idolatry.

C. For those with eyes to see, the closer the Lord comes the lower we bow ourselves in reverence. The better you know God the deeper you bow before him, the greater you tremble in his presence, and the more you stand in awe of his saving work. The better people know their God, the stronger they stand, and the more amazed they are that he would condescend to rescue and to fellowship with them.

D. The psalmist calls upon the earth to tremble. It is a present tense summons. He has been looking back to see how God made his presence known in the past. The present summons asserts that the Lord is still present with his people. He is still present and at work and so nature should continue to tremble. It is worth noting that the when Jesus died on the cross and when he rose from the dead, the earth did tremble. Matthew writes, "And Jesus cried out with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and rocks were split" (Matthew 27:50-51). He then tells us that "after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great EARTHQUAKE, for an angel of the Lord descended from

heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. . . . He said, "He is not here, for he has risen."

The presence of the Lord at work for his glory and the good of his people in the midst of nature calls the earth to tremble. We too should tremble before him. If you do not tremble before the Lord, you do not know him well. You need to seek him. You need to pursue him. You need to determine to grasp that he has not stopped working but is continuing to do great and wonderful things in preserving and keeping his people to the end. Right now in the waning days of 2020; right here in southeastern Wisconsin in Grace Community Church; God is present and is at work. Do not miss it.

III. The Provision of the Lord by His Presence

Before we conclude this morning, I want you to see one more aspect of the mighty works of God in nature. Each one of nature's awe-filled responses to the presence of God also makes a provision for the people he delivered.

A. The sea that fled is the Red Sea that opened up to let the children of Israel crossover. This work saved God's people from Pharaoh. When it closed back, it decimated Pharaoh's army, and Israel was free to go forth.

B. The Jordan river turned back when Israel made its entrance into the promised land. The Lord reminded the people that he who had set them free from Egypt was still at work, still with them. He was bringing them into their inheritance.

C. The mountains that skipped refers to the way the mountains and hills shook like a spooked flock of sheep at Sinai when the Lord came to the mountain in fire and smoke and gave his law. His word is a great treasure and provision for them.

D. Finally, we come to the water flowing out of the rock. Twice during its wilderness wanderings God quenched the thirst of Israel with water from a rock. The psalmist says God turned the rock into a pool of water and a spring of water. A pool signifies abundance. A spring signifies a continual supply. The psalmist depicts the way God meets the needs of his people. He is with them. He blesses them. He sustains them fully and continually.

God's deliverance of the house of Jacob from the yoke of enslavement is a striking type of the Christian's deliverance from the burden of our sin. He brings us out from sin's tyranny through Christ's blood and delivers us from the threat of the devil.

The turning back of the Jordan river points us to the provision of God at the death of the believer. At our conversion we receive the promise of a great inheritance. The Lord has given us an inheritance and has guaranteed that we will enter into it. At our death, he will keep his promise and bring us home.

Meanwhile, the shuddering of the mountains declares to us we have God's gifts of his word and his Spirit to lead and guide us. If we keep in step with the Spirit who has written God's law into our hearts.

And we drink daily from the supply of life that flows from the rock who is Christ. God is consistently supplying everything we need.

Conclusion

The future for the church in America and in the world looks somewhat ominous. We are certainly moving toward an experience of decreased tolerance and increased hostility. But I want you to be encouraged. God is with us. He remains with his people to the end. It is important that we remember twice the New Testament reminds us of our Lord's constant and unwavering presence. He will never leave us. He will continue with us—He from whom the sea flees, from whom the river turns back, the mountains and hills tremble, and because of whom water flows from a rock. If he cared for his children in the wilderness in this way, how much more will he care for us.

When I think back on the wilderness wanderings and provisions of the children of Israel, I recall that many of the provisions were made by the Lord after a spell of fear, anxiety, or complaint. Backed up against the sea, the children observed Pharaoh's army advancing and cried out, "is it because there are not enough graves in Egypt that you have taken us up to die in the wilderness?" When they were thirsty, they quarreled with Moses and demanded he give them something to drink. When the Lord gave his law they stood far off and said they would rather hear from Moses than from God. As soon as Moses was away, they cast an idol. Moses counsel to them at the sea was right. "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord which he will work for you today." He did work for them again and again. And he will work for his people today. Take heart, brothers and sisters. If the Lord has brought you out of the Egypt of your sin, he will bring you into the land of your inheritance. The going may not be easy. You may experience threats from enemies, affliction from circumstances, and times of thirst. They may even take your life. But my God will supply every need of your according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. And that supply will never stop.