

God on the March

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Well, we never consciously plan the coordination of the songs that we sing with the message that I teach. It's always by divine providence that that fits together so well, and the song that we just sang is a perfect introduction to Psalm 68. If you're taking notes, I know some of you like to take notes, if you want to title this message we could call this message "God on the March." God on the march and the New Testament version of what we sang just now, "All the way the Savior leads me," that is a comfort and a strength to us because our Savior knows how to win victories. Our Savior knows how to overcome opposition whether it be the personal enemies that we face, the enemies of the kingdom of God, whether it be the obstacles of life, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, has a perfect track record of leading his people to victory through everything that occurs in their lives. He knows how to lead his people and he leads them with strength and he leads them with power and he leads them with certainty in such a way that they always attain the victory in the end. He always leads in a way that accomplishes his purposes and that brings him glory and brings the blessing of God to his people without exception and without fail. There has never been, and there never will be, anyone who truly followed Christ and found himself the lesser man or the lesser woman for it. There is no one who has ever followed Christ all the way through life, through death and into heaven, who has not found that God had led him successfully to victory in the end. And Psalm 68 which I read earlier, is a celebration of God's greatness and it's a celebration of his victories. It's a wonderful Psalm, probably not so well-known as some others like Psalm 23 or Psalm 100 that we look to again and again, but Psalm 68 is a wonderful text for us to spend our attention on here this evening. It centers on the inevitable march of God to give victory to his people. It is a declaration of praise to God that praises him for his victories and having recited history and looked to the future, it ends in a universal call for all men everywhere to praise him for his greatness and for his ability to lead his people to victory.

Now, that's a little bit of an overview. The fact of the matter is that Psalm 68 is a difficult Psalm to interpret and it is a Psalm that has different competing views on different passages and some of the verses within it commentators will candidly say any idea, any suggestion about what this particular verse means is nothing more than a guess. So this is a difficult Psalm. What we're going to do this evening, we won't acknowledge different views in this one-time message, we're just going to paint in broad strokes. We won't try to bog down in different difficulties and all of that for the sake of getting the sweep of what is clearly the message of this Psalm, that God is on the march to accomplish victory.

Now, let me introduce this Psalm by saying this and reminding you of a piece of Old Testament furniture, if you will. You may remember the ark of the covenant from reading in Exodus and in the Old Testament, which was the chest that God had Moses make which contained the tablets with the 10 Commandments on them and Israel carried that chest in different places over the centuries, and that ark of the covenant symbolized the presence of the Lord. And when Israel moved about in the desert in the Old Testament, Moses would speak words of triumph as that ark would move forward, the ark symbolizing the presence of God, and I want you to turn to the book of Numbers just for a moment as we kind of lay the groundwork for Psalm 68 here this evening. Numbers 10, and you can keep your finger there as you are turning and also simultaneously look for 2 Samuel 6, and we'll cover a couple of things quickly and then we'll take off in our treatment of Psalm 68.

You remember how when Israel was in the wilderness, God led them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, and when the pillar would get up and move, that was the time for the nation to move and to follow wherever the pillar was leading them, and part of that procession was the ark of the covenant being moved about, and in Numbers 10:35, you see that, actually let's go back, just look up to verse 33, we could say, "Thus they set out from the mount of the LORD three days' journey, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD journeying in front of them for the three days, to seek out a resting place for them. The cloud of the LORD was over them by day when they set out from the camp." So the ark of the covenant is moving forward and you have this visible representation of the presence of God in the pillar and you also have the symbolic presence of the Lord with the ark of the covenant, this chest that they moved about. And as Israel was about to move out and follow God, look at verse 35 with what was said, "it came about when the ark set out that Moses said, 'Rise up, O LORD! And let Your enemies be scattered, And let those who hate You flee before You.' When it came to rest, he said, 'Return, O LORD, To the myriad thousands of Israel.'" So what we see here with this ark, and this is relevant for Psalm 68, the ark is a symbol of the presence of God and when Israel was moving out, Moses would call upon God to go with them as symbolized by the movement of the ark and to bring victory to them, to protect them, and to scatter their enemies before them as they moved about. So this call for God to rise up and defeat his enemies and to protect his people became closely wrapped around their understanding of the presence of the ark of the covenant there.

Now with that said, over the centuries the ark in times was with them, sometimes it was carried off to enemies, and in 2 Samuel 6, you may recall that there was a time where King David brought the ark back to Jerusalem and because the ark symbolized the presence of God, and Jerusalem was the place where the temple was going to be built eventually, this was a time of great rejoicing because it showed that God was with them, that God had led them to the place where the temple would be built, and so there was this great celebration of the presence of God as represented in the presence of the ark.

In 2 Samuel 6:12 it says, "Now it was told King David, saying, 'The LORD has blessed the house of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, on account of the ark of God.' David

went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness. And so it was, that when the bearers of the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. And David was dancing before the LORD with all his might, and David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel were bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouting and the sound of the trumpet." The ark here said, what the presence of the ark was saying is that God was with them, that God was now in their midst again, and many commentators believe that Psalm 68 was written on the occasion when David brought the ark into Jerusalem and Psalm 68, therefore, becomes a statement by which David calls upon God to bless his people and to scatter their enemies. So this is the general tenor of Psalm 68 as we begin to dive into it.

Now before we get into a verse by verse, rapid treatment of it, I want to show you something and to give you a sense of the sweep of the Psalm and I'll show you this in just a moment but I want to give you an overview first. Psalm 68 is depicting a powerful movement of God. It is picturing God moving and there is a movement of God throughout Psalm 68 until he ascends on high. It's a manifestation of the unconquerable way that God moves forward in his purposes and I want to show you this with just a few verses here. Notice in Psalm 68:1 that it says, "Let God arise," and so the idea is God is now going to get up and move. In Psalm 68:7, it recalls how he has moved in the past. Psalm 68:7, look at it with me, it says, "O God, when You went forth before Your people, When You marched through the wilderness." So you start to get this sense, this picture of God moving, of God acting. He arises. He had gone forth in the past for his people and his past movement had culminated in an ascension to the place on high. In verse 18 it says, "You have ascended on high, You have led captive Your captives; You have received gifts among men, Even among the rebellious also, that the LORD God may dwell there." You may remember that Jerusalem is a city that sits on a hill and so as God moved toward Jerusalem, he went up. He went up to Jerusalem as symbolized in the presence of the ark, and so he had arisen, he had moved through the enemies, and now he had been brought to Jerusalem where he was dwelling on high. And in verse 24, again this idea of the movement of God being seen, verse 24, "They have seen Your procession, O God, The procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary." And now ascended on high, he reigns. Look at verse 33, it says, "To Him who rides upon the highest heavens, which are from ancient times; Behold, He speaks forth with His voice, a mighty voice."

So stepping back, I just wanted you to see that little bit of sweep here because you could lose it in the length of the Psalm, there is this movement of God. He has arisen. He has moved forward through his enemies. He has ascended on high and now he reigns. There has been this procession of God throughout the Psalm that the Psalm is recording and remembering. The whole point being this, the whole point being this very point: is that God marches to victory. God marches powerfully through opposition, marches powerfully through his enemies, and he achieves his purposes in a way that guarantees that he reigns on high in the end. And because God is like that, because God is who he is and he has manifested this in history as he dealt with his people Israel, you come to this great point; you step back from that, you see the broad picture of it all, that from the time of Moses through the time of David, God was certainly accomplishing his purposes. Over

the course of those 400 years and longer, he had led his people and now he has arrived in Jerusalem and the thought being: look at this sovereign manifestation of God's power over the centuries, recognize who God is and give him praise. See the great big picture of that. See it in one collected whole and honor him with your praise and with your worship in response. That is the idea of Psalm 68. It is describing a march of God that ends in a call to praise him and we're going to break this Psalm down into four different sections here as we walk through it rather quickly here this evening.

First of all, we're going to see a distinguishing call. A distinguishing call. The opening verses of Psalm 68 distinguish God's enemies from his people. It distinguishes God's enemies from his people. Look at the first two verses here where in the New American Standard it reads as a prayer, in the ESV for those of you using the ESV, it reads more like a prophecy that God will do this; the difference between let God arise and God will arise is simply a function of a certain ambiguity in the Hebrew verbs that allow for different understandings and the translations reflect those differences in the Hebrew verb tense. But in Psalm 68:1, we'll follow the NASB from this point on, it says,

1 Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered, And let those who hate Him flee before Him.

It calls on God's enemies to get out of the way, to flee because they cannot possibly resist the march of God as he goes forward. And in verse 2 it says,

2 As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; As wax melts before the fire, So let the wicked perish before God.

Taking this as the prayer that the NASB has translated it as, David is asking God to display his power in a way that causes his enemies to melt before him and he is saying in light of the unconquerable, sovereign power of God, his enemies are nothing more than smoke in the wind. They can no more resist God than a puff of smoke can stand before the blast of a hurricane. It is just (puff) and it's gone. His enemies are no stronger before God than wax before the flame of a candle. The melting before the flame is inevitable and what David is saying, he's using these vivid word pictures to describe how impotent and how unable the enemies of God are to stand before him. They cannot resist him anymore than a candle can resist the fire and so he calls upon them to leave, to flee. "There is no place for you to go. There is no point in you trying to resist this inevitable march of God against you."

By contrast, by distinction, God uses his strength to help his people and therefore they should praise him with joy and this is where you and I come in, in a manner of speaking, in this Psalm. Those of us that know Christ, those of us that have been redeemed and truly belong to the kingdom of God, this is how we respond to the greatness of God as he marches and accomplishes his will. Look at verse 3 by way of contrast. Instead of being like the enemies, verse 3,

3 But let the righteous be glad; let them exult before God; Yes, let them rejoice with gladness.

You hear echoes of the way that David was dancing with joy and with all of his might when the ark was brought into Jerusalem. He was overwhelmed with gladness and with joy in a way that demanded physical and musical expression. To know that God was present with them guaranteed their well-being going forward so how else could they respond except with gladness, except with joy? God was with them and therefore it had to go well for them as God manifested his goodness to them.

Verse 4,

4 Sing to God, sing praises to His name; Lift up a song for Him who rides through the deserts, Whose name is the LORD, and exult before Him.

And so you see this magnificent portrayal of God and as God moves forward on march to a victory, think about it this way: his people follow like the train of his robe, ascribing glory and honor and praise to him as he moves. We follow in his wake. We honor and bless his name as he leads us in the way ahead.

Now, in verse 4 you see the reference to God riding through the deserts. The Canaanites thought that their God, Baal, was the one who rode on the clouds and provided rain for them, but here in Psalm 68, David is saying, "No, God is the only true God. God is the only one true God and therefore his people should resound in praise with him."

You know, you get to know God through the Psalms and I'm very glad to be back into the Psalms. I've loved preaching as far as we have. I hope the Lord gives me the strength to finish all 150 in the next few years. That's certainly my intention. You come to know God in an intimate way through these Psalms and, beloved, I want you to think with the psalmist, think with David in what we're about to see here as we look at verses 5 and 6. With all of this great majesty of God, if that was all you knew, you might shrink back just a little bit because you were dwarfed by the majesty of it all. You might step back and shrink away because of the sheer power of his ability to accomplish his will and to scatter his enemies, and there would be a sense, perhaps, of fear that accompanied that, a fear that left him somewhat remote. But what you find in Psalm 68:5 is that the greatness of God doesn't leave him remote from his people. He is a friend to the weak into the vulnerable.

Look at verse 5, I need to let the text speak,

5 A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, Is God in His holy habitation. 6 God makes a home for the lonely; He leads out the prisoners into prosperity, Only the rebellious dwell in a parched land.

Do you see, beloved, do you see how sweet this is to see God described in this way? Despite his unconquerable majesty where his enemies cannot touch him, he condescends

to help the weak among his people; that those who are fatherless find in God one who is a father to them; that those who are widows and in that society widows were extremely vulnerable, that God is a friend of widows; that God knows the isolation and loneliness that they feel and he comes and, as it were, he wraps his arms around them and holds them in his embrace. How great is God? I love every time this comes up, I love to see both poles of the majesty of God, majestic in his power over his enemies, and yet majestic in another way with his people and how he loves and cares and shows compassion and condescends to the weakest of those who belong to him. He is great and yet he is a friend to the weak and to the vulnerable.

Deuteronomy 10:18, you don't need to turn there, Deuteronomy 10:18 says this, "He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing." That's who God is, not just great in power but great in compassion, great in kindness. James 1:27 says, "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress." Why is that pure and undefiled service to God? Because that's who God is. That's what God does. That's how he looks upon the most vulnerable. He says, "I will care for them. I will have my hand upon them."

And those of you that are here and walking through life alone, walking through life in the sense of isolation from human comfort and human relationships having lost them through one means or another, oh, look at these two verses here and peer deeply into the character of God and say, "I see who this God is and I see that he has a particular articulated concern for people like me." And that he knows you by name and he knows your situation in all of its details and he extends a hand of love and compassion toward you in that. Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that wonderful to know who God is as all men eventually fall away from us, either through people move on or people betray us or people just simply move on and their life comes to an end and you are left standing alone, humanly speaking. You look up and you see who your God is and you find great warmth and comfort in the realization, "I'm not alone after all. I thought I was alone. I looked around and I felt like I was alone but not with this God because this God is a Father to the fatherless. He is a judge for the widows. He is one who protects and cares for the weakest of his people."

And that's why, beloved, that's why his people should praise him. That's why you and I should have in our hearts that we want to honor him with our lips, that we want to serve him with our lives, that we always continually have this foundation of joy in our lives because that's who our God is. He is great and powerful to accomplish his will and we praise him for that, and yet there is this tender aspect of compassion to his character that we equally praise him for as well. You know, we've all known people with might and power either personally or through seeing them in the news and how people with power tend to become arrogant and aloof and unapproachable. Not our God. Far greater than any human king and yet he is approachable by the lowliest of us all, and so we praise him.

So David is giving a distinguishing call here, "Enemies of God, flee! Go away! You cannot defeat him. People of God, rise up and rejoice and honor him with your lips." That's the call that opens Psalm 68. Let's move on to the second part of this Psalm which we can describe as God's past victories. God's past victories and it's a common theme in the Psalms as you read through them over time, as you read and see that the psalmist is continually calling his readers to remember the acts of God in the past and he does this not simply because he wants to teach history, there is that aspect of it, but he calls his readers, the Psalms call us today to remember the past acts of God as a means of strengthening our own faith now and to instilling confidence in us in our hearts for what lies ahead in the future.

If you step back and you look over the course of some, let's say 4,000 years of the acts of God as we are standing here today, 2,000 years back to the cross, 2,000 years more than that to the time of Abraham, and you look back and you see how Scripture records that through all of the ups and downs and the turnstiles of life and his people, that God has an undefeated record, that God has never lost once, then you say, then that strengthens your confidence and your trust as you look to the future. You say, "My God is really great. Look at what he's done in the past, how he has manifested this in time and space in historical events." It strengthens you there and then as you look to your own uncertain future, you say, "Yeah, I don't know what the future holds and it could be difficult and things are hard now, but I know something better than knowing the future, I know the God who holds the future. I know who my God is. I know what he has done in the past." And that strengthens his people to live with faith and to live in the midst of praise and that's what the psalmist is doing here in verse 7 as he starts to recall God's saving acts in the past history of Israel.

Look at verse 7 with me, he says,

7 O God, when You went forth before Your people, When You marched through the wilderness, Selah.

He is recalling the time as God led his people out of Egypt and led them through the wilderness, how he led them with power, and he is reminding his readers of that as he addresses God in his prayer. What happened then? What circumstances attended this march of God? Verse 8,

8 The earth quaked; The heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God; Sinai itself quaked at the presence of God, the God of Israel. 9 You shed abroad a plentiful rain, O God; You confirmed Your inheritance when it was parched.

Now, those three verses compress a lot of historical allusions into a single compact space. What he's saying is, what he is reminding the people of Israel of is this: remember how God led you through the wilderness after he had delivered the nation from slavery in Egypt. He went before them in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Earthquakes and rain showed both his power and his provision for them, and though they were in a

desert without any visible means of support, God had provided for them, God had led them with power, he supplied their need, with power he led them into a foreign land, and after 40 years, God eventually led them into the land that he had promised way back to Abraham.

Look at verse 10,

10 Your creatures settled in it; You provided in Your goodness for the poor, O God.

So what he's doing here is he is simply reminding his readers, the readers of Israel who were of the nation of Israel at the time that this was written, he is reminding them of their history. Look at what God did for his people. Look at how he moved them forward and provided for them in such abundance. Don't you see that this is a manifestation of the power that he is now presently describing in Psalm 68?

In verse 11, he starts another section reminding them of how God drove out the nations that had been dwelling in the land, and he covers the book of Joshua in a short summary fashion. Verse 11,

11 The Lord gives the command; The women who proclaim the good tidings are a great host: 12 "Kings of armies flee, they flee, And she who remains at home will divide the spoil!" 13 When you lie down among the sheepfolds, You are like the wings of a dove covered with silver, And its pinions with glistening gold. 14 When the Almighty scattered the kings there, It was snowing in Zalmon.

Now this is one of those difficult passages that I alluded to before but the basic message is this: he's reminding them of how when they moved in to conquer the land God went before them and gave them victories. Kings fell before them. Armies fled before them. Why? Because God was on the march, because God was moving ahead for his people, and the women simply celebrated victory as the kings left the spoils behind.

This reference in verse 14 to the fact that it was snowing in Zalmon, it seems to be a metaphor that is referring to a dark mountain that is north of Jerusalem and what he's saying here in a very poetic, picturesque way is that as God was achieving his victories for his people, as his enemies fell, it was like as the corpses fell on the ground before him, it was like snow coming down on this dark mountain; that there was just this inevitable power that was bringing to pass the falling of people onto the ground just as snow fell on the ground as well. So the enemy corpses looked like scattered snowflakes as God defeated his enemies. Very poetic.

Then he goes on in verse 15, the connection is again a bit difficult in verse 15, but just keeping in mind the big picture of what we're talking about here, he is reciting the victories of God for his people. Whatever the details may be speaking to, don't lose sight

of the greater picture that he is describing here, the victories of God for his people. In verse 15 he says,

15 A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan; A mountain of many peaks is the mountain of Bashan. 16 Why do you look with envy, O mountains with many peaks, At the mountain which God has desired for His abode? Surely the LORD will dwell there forever. 17 The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; The Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness.

Now, take a little breath here and catch up with a difficult text. Mount Bashan is now known as the Golan Heights and it sits east of the Sea of Galilee. It sits among high and lofty mountains and what the poet, what David is saying here is he is personifying these great and lofty mountains, looking at the smaller, lower level mountain, Mount Zion, a smaller hill in Jerusalem where God had chosen to make his presence known, and he pictures these greater, physical, higher mountains being jealous of the honor that was given to Zion as the ark of God ascends to its rightful place. Picture these mountains, these greater mountains, it's like the Rockies looking down on foothills and the foothills have a place of honor as God establishes his presence there that seems out of proportion when there are greater mountains in the distance of higher and loftier status, and so he pictures these mountains being jealous of the honor given to the place where God's abode has been established.

God has chosen the lesser thing to be the place where he manifest his glory and in verse 18 he summarizes this whole section when he says,

18 You have ascended on high, You have led captive Your captives; You have received gifts among men, Even among the rebellious also, that the LORD God may dwell there.

So the ark has come and it has been established in Jerusalem. God's presence has been made known. His enemies have fallen and been scattered before him and some of them have simply had to pay tribute to him in the fact that as God has achieved his victory, God has marched through the Old Testament.

Now with that in mind, turn over to Ephesians 4 because Paul uses this verse to describe the ascension of Christ in the New Testament. In verse 8 of Ephesians 4, he is referring to Christ and Paul says, "Therefore it says, 'When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.' (Now this expression, 'He ascended,' what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)" Now in Psalm 68, the ark had ascended to Zion. Paul says there has been a greater ascension that has taken place, Christ has ascended into the heavens on behalf of his people.

So, beloved, what I want you to see looking at this with the benefit of New Testament hindsight, is that as the ark came and ascended and there was rejoicing there, Christ has ascended in a greater way, to a greater place, over a greater foe. Christ has gone through the lower depths of death, you might say, he has conquered death, he has conquered Satan, and now he has risen to heaven where he reigns on high. He has ascended into the highest place imaginable, and here we are as his people in the 21st century, and that's who our God is. David remembers an ascension of God represented in an ark to a hill in Jerusalem. We have the benefit of seeing that that was a figure of something greater, something greater in which our Lord Jesus, the second person of the Godhead, ascended over death, conquering the enemy of death, conquering the enemy of Satan, and now he reigns on high where he intercedes for his people. That's victory, right? That is conquest, right?

That's who our God is. That's who we belong to as believers in Christ and here's what you should, if you're going to follow the logic and the argument and the force of what Psalm 68 is saying, is to recognize this: it's to step back and I'll talk to you as believers in Christ all today, is to realize what the privilege of our position is; that we are following a Christ who has conquered to that great extent and if we belong to Christ, if he has conquered sin for us, if he has redeemed us and we belong to him and he has ascended into heaven and he has promised to bring us there with him one day, then what should our response be? What is the inevitable response of the believing heart to that except for joy, except for praise? "Look at my God ascended on high! Look at what he has conquered! Look at his victory and I belong to him!" There is this joy and there is this confidence and trust and praise that rises up and we realize that in our Lord Jesus Christ we have a Victor. We have one who has triumphed in a way that can never be taken away and we belong to him and he shares the spoils of his victory with us.

And not only that, while we walk this pilgrim pathway during our 70 brief years on this barren sod, he cares for us. He cares for us like a father to the fatherless, like a judge for the widows. He comforts us. He is with us. He prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies. His rod and his staff, they comfort us because he is the Good Shepherd. And we realize that this great Victor has spread his wings of love over us in a way that guarantees our well-being. So we praise him from a position of joy, of gratitude, of comfort, and of confidence as the spiritual birthright of those who he has won for himself. And you start to say, "Wow, to be a Christian is like the greatest thing in the world," and you would be exactly right. There is nothing better than being a Christian. There is nothing more noble than to belong to Christ. There is no greater security than to belong to him, even if it is as a weak widow or a friendless man in a godless world. If you belong to Christ, you have all of the riches that you need and far far more.

This Psalm, following it all the way through through the New Testament usage of it, this Psalm takes us and having led us to contemplate the victories of Israel, it leads us to Christ and we see an even greater victory that our God accomplished than just leading a nation out of Egypt. We have a God, our God, our Christ has conquered death and sin on our behalf and he shares the victory with us. He's on the march to victory and somehow for reasons that transcend our ability to understand, he chose you and he chose me to

include in the spoils that belong to him. So we just look up and we say, "O Christ, you are so great in your victory over death, sin and Satan and you have been so good to me to bring me into your kingdom, to redeem me out of my sin and my spiritual death and I belong to you and I am one day going to share the glories of heaven in your presence. O, I praise you in light of what you've done!" I mean, this just bursts forth. There are just bubbling fountains to drink from throughout this Psalm and where it takes us.

So God has won victories in the past which we saw in verses 7 through 18, now beginning in verse 19, we come to our third section here as David describes God's future victories. God's future victories. David now declares what this means for God's people going forward. Look at verse 19. What does it mean that God is like this? This is so magnificent. Verse 19, he says, "Blessed be the Lord," he ascribes greatness to the name of God,

19 Blessed be the Lord who daily bears our burden, The God who is our salvation. Selah.

He says, "This God who has won these victories in the past is a God who daily bears our burdens as we go through life. He is our salvation, the one who provides deliverance to us."

And look at verse 20, he says,

20 God is to us a God of deliverances; And to GOD the Lord belong escapes from death.

Beloved, here's how you should think in light of what we've seen so far in this Psalm, here's the way that your mind should work, the way that you should think about this God who marches to victory again and again and again and again and again: this is your God. You are following after him. He belongs to you and you belong to him, and because God is a God who always marches to victory, and because you belong to him, because you are his through a ransom price paid by the Lord Jesus Christ, that means that God intends to bring even more victories and deliverances in the midst of the challenges, in the midst of the sharp difficulties that face you now or in the future. There should always be this underlying confidence, "I'm all right. I'm in the hand of God and he is a God who bears my burden daily and he is a God of deliverances. He has the ability to deliver me from this as shown by what he has already done. In the Old Testament, he delivered Israel. In the New Testament, Christ over death, sin and Satan and ascended on high." Well, beloved, those greater things are the context in which your lesser difficulties and sorrows of life, those are the context for all of our difficulties and sorrows of life. God marching to victory and carrying us along in the victory train.

And we let that sink in a bit and we're staggered, staggered at the privilege that has been given to us to belong to a God like that; staggered that a sovereign majesty of his unique essence, that he would set his hand upon us in order to be that kind of God to us. And think about it this way with perhaps one exception, there are very very few of us in here

that have a drop of Jewish blood in us. God chose the Jews and was pleased to make them his nation. We were Gentiles on the outside looking in, not on the receiving end of those Old Testament promises, not on the receiving end of the line of Abraham that would give us a claim in any way to that covenant that he made with Abraham, and yet he grafted us in. He reached to us and outside the promise made to the Old Testament patriarchs, he reached out and he brought us into the promise and was delighted to share all of the benefits of this with us, although we had no claim on him whatsoever. We had forfeited our claim through sin by race, by physical descendancy we had no claim on the promises that he had given to Abraham, and yet here we are on the receiving end of this magnificent blessing. What can we say? What can we think about God except he is so good and so great and so gracious and here I am in the midst of it. And when that is all true, it gives us a sense of perspective as we look forward to what the certainty of our difficulties are as we go through them in this life.

Verse 21 of Psalm 68,

21 Surely God will shatter the head of His enemies, The hairy crown of him who goes on in his guilty deeds. 22 The Lord said, "I will bring them back from Bashan. I will bring them back from the depths of the sea; 23 That your foot may shatter them in blood, The tongue of your dogs may have its portion from your enemies."

And here God having shown his power to bring victory in the past says, "When your enemies, again in the future, there will be more victories ahead. I will bring your enemies," he says, "from the highest mountains, from the depths of the sea, from the highest part to the lowest part, I'll bring them all together from the heights to the depths and provide a total deliverance to you." And we know – here's the thing, beloved – David is cultivating a confident faith in those who are reading, those who belong to this God. He is cultivating a confident faith in us. We know that God will do that. We know that God will deliver his people without fail, without exception, without question. We know that because our confidence is based on what he has done in the past and what he said he would do in the future. As New Testament believers, we think this way: if Christ died for us and brought us into his kingdom already as a completed fact, then he will certainly save us in the end, having delivered us from Satan, delivered us from our sin and saved us and blessed us and placed the indwelling Holy Spirit within us. Beloved, understand that the way that your mind should think is this: that there is absolutely no possibility that I could fall out in the end. There is no way that now belonging to Christ, that anything will happen to me except that I will be with him forever in glory. That is what this means. God is on the march. Christ is on the march. Christ has saved us and he is marching us all the way to victory and glory in the end and it can't come out any other way.

So enemies may arise, trials may challenge us, trials may discourage us, but there is this underlying certainty of ultimate final victory that animates the way that we think and respond to them no matter what they may be. Right? Beloved Christian, I speak to you in the midst of your sorrow and challenges. Right? Isn't it that you should say, "Yes, that's right," in a way that changes the way that you perceive the difficulties of life? You do not

view God through the perspective of your challenges and say, "What is God going to do here? And why this? And why that? Why do these awful things happen to me?" No, you start from the perspective God is on the march, God is bringing victory to his people. He has done it in the past. Christ has ascended into heaven. That's the perspective through which we view everything that ever happens to us and we say there is only one thing that can come, God is on the march to victory and he is going to include me in it and that gives me confidence no matter what. It's the confidence that can breathe hope into a troubled heart laying on its deathbed, facing the uncertainty of what lies just beyond and saying, "No, God saved me. God will bring me through this. God will bring me through the throes of death and bring me to glory on the other side. I can die in trust and I can die in confidence and all points in between."

Well, Israel celebrated God's victory with parade and jubilant singing. Look at verse 24. He goes from the blood of the battlefield to the joy of a parade now. Verse 24,

24 They have seen Your procession, O God, The procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary. 25 The singers went on, the musicians after them, In the midst of the maidens beating tambourines. 26 Bless God in the congregations, Even the LORD, you who are of the fountain of Israel. 27 There is Benjamin, the youngest, ruling them, The princes of Judah in their throng, The princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali.

The references here to 4 of the 12 tribes of Israel: Benjamin and Judah, where the small and the large tribes representing the southern portion of the kingdom; Zebulun and Naphtali representing the northern portion of the tribes. They are representative. Here's the thing, beloved, and I realize we're kind of hurrying through this part of it, but if you picture a map of Israel, Benjamin and Judah are on the southern part, these other two tribes are on the northern part, and all David is doing here is he is using them as representative of all of Israel and saying to all of Israel, the small and the great, the north and the south, calling them all together to join together and praise and bless their God. That's the idea of what he's saying. All of Israel should join together because they have this common heritage. Though from 12 different tribes, they have this common heritage with their one true God and what he does for one, he'll do for all.

So you go on in verse 28 and that celebration provides confident faith for the future.

28 Your God has commanded your strength; Show Yourself strong, O God, who have acted on our behalf.

"God, you've done this for us in the past, now show yourself strong as we go in the future." This informs the way that you pray. "God, I pray not from a spirit of panic, I pray not from a spirit of discouragement. God, I look at the way that you have done things in the past and in the midst of this great challenge I am facing, show yourself strong. Show yourself able to deliver me even through this."

Verse 29,

29 Because of Your temple at Jerusalem Kings will bring gifts to You. 30 Rebuke the beasts in the reeds, The herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples, Trampling under foot the pieces of silver; [God] has scattered the peoples who delight in war. 31 Envoys will come out of Egypt; Ethiopia will quickly stretch out her hands to God.

Here's what he is saying here: he has called all of Israel to praise and now he is expanding into other nations saying other nations are going to come and give tribute, to give praise and to give honor to this strong and mighty God. And when Christ returns and dwells in Jerusalem and reigns from there, that's exactly what's going to happen. Nations will come and honor him and there will be an ultimate fulfillment of what the psalmist anticipates here.

Well, all of that brings us to a fourth and final point and I appreciate you staying with me through all of this. We've seen the past victories, we've seen the future victories, now in light of that, the fourth and final point: there is a call to praise the God who saves. A call to praise the God who saves and there is this final call to praise that is universal in scope beginning in verse 32, and it's a shame to treat this so briefly because I would have you be staggered by the breadth of what we are about to see, what is about to be said here in verse 32.

32 Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth, Sing praises to the Lord, Selah.

This is a call to all men everywhere, to every kingdom under the sun, to praise this one true God. Oh, he's the God of Israel in a special unique sense, but he's the God over the nations and his surpassing glory, his surpassing power means that he is entitled to praise from everyone everywhere so that all men are called upon and it is their duty, it is their obligation, to bend the knee and to give praise to this God. Philippians 2 says that is ultimately what's going to happen, "Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." Do you know what? One thing among many that I am really grateful for as I stand here today, that God by grace has saved me in a way that I can voluntarily give that praise that Christ deserves now rather than having to do it under compulsion against my will then, as will be the case for so many, all the kingdoms of the earth. Oh, a universal praise. All men should acknowledge him in worship and praise.

Verse 33,

33 To Him who rides upon the highest heavens, which are from ancient times; Behold, He speaks forth with His voice, a mighty voice. 34 Ascribe strength to God; His majesty is over Israel And His strength is in the skies.

And he concludes in verse 35,

35 O God, You are awesome from Your sanctuary. The God of Israel Himself gives strength and power to the people.

And the conclusion that he has been building up to all along.

Blessed be God!

James Montgomery Boice concludes his treatment of Psalm 68 with these words, "Let us remember that even though we may suffer discouragements now and sometimes be defeated, we can still press on in steady faith knowing that Jesus is on the throne and that everyone will eventually bow before him, and let us be encouraged by remembering that we will reign with him in that day."

Beloved, do you know Christ? Then the future holds no fear for you. Do you know Christ? Then the outcome for you is joy and confident deliverance. Do you know Christ? Then a response of praise is most appropriate to you this evening.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, as the psalmist says, we ascribe strength to our God. We ascribe majesty to our Christ, the one who has conquered death, who has conquered sin, who has conquered Satan, and who has ascended to the right hand of God where he ever lives to make intercession for his saints. O Christ, you have marched to victory and you have included us in the victory train. We are so very grateful. We are in awe of your majesty to conquer supernatural foes that we could not lift a finger against. And yet we are even doubly awed at the majesty of your grace, that you would show kindness to widows and to the fatherless, that you showed kindness to us in our sin and our rebellion, to redeem us from that at the price of your own shed blood. You are very very very great and it is our privilege to acknowledge that before you humbly, gratefully, joyfully. And Lord, in light of your greatness, we affirm our confidence tonight that you will lead us to that ultimate destination for which you redeemed us. We know that you will bring us to heaven. We know that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. You have delivered us in love and you will keep us by power until we see you face-to-face. March on, O God, and we will give you glory as you do. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

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