

The Victory of God

Psalm 68:1-35

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Psalm 68, as we continue to work our way through the Second Book of the Psalms. Now Psalm 68 may well be a Psalm which dates from the procession of the Ark into Jerusalem in the days of the reign of King David when the Ark of the Lord was brought with great rejoicing into the City of David at the time in which God had given David rest from all his enemies on the outside and on the inside, when the forces of Saul had been defeated, when the Tabernacle had been brought to Jerusalem, when the king had built a beautiful house, a palace of cedar, and when now these two great institutions, the focal point of worship in Israel and the focal point of the reign of the king in Israel, had been brought together.

And, of course, having those two things in the city of Jerusalem was exceedingly important for the Bible's picture of the reign of the Messiah who would be prophet, priest, and king. You have the kingly reign established in one place, and you have the priestly worship established in one place in Israel; and thus these two parts of the picture of Jesus the reigning Messiah-Mediator were prefigured in the history of Israel. And this Psalm may well date from the time of the procession into Jerusalem of David and all the throngs of the worshipping people and the Ark of the Covenant.

At any rate, it is a tremendous celebration of the rule of God—not only on behalf of His people but over all the nations—and indeed this Psalm will end with a call to worship to all the nations. In this Psalm we see something of the Christian experience of celebration of the universal rule of God.

There are at least four parts to this Psalm. We could outline it many ways, but let me give you the simplest outline, I think, that I can do. And that would be, first, to look at verses 1-6 where we see something of an opening fanfare. Really, verses 1-6 provide for us an exhortation to royal praise. Then, if you look at verses 7-18, we see something of the royal progress of God out of Egypt, through the wilderness, up the slopes and into Jerusalem on His holy mountain. So here we see a royal progress, or a royal procession. Then in verses 19-31, the third part of the Psalm, we see God in His reigning session. Here is God in His royal state as King ruling over His people...And then, finally, this closing fanfare in verses

32-35, where we see an exhortation to the nations for royal praise. So we see royal praise in verses 1-6, a royal procession in verses 7-18, the royal state in verses 19-31, and then in verses 32-35 a call to global praise of this great King. Having outlined the Psalm, before we read it together, let's look to God in prayer and ask Him to bless the reading and preaching of His word. Let's pray.

Our Lord and God, every word of Scripture is breathed out by You. It's given by inspiration and it's profitable. And so we pray, O God, that by Your Spirit You would make us to be profitable hearers of Your word, acknowledging it to be the very truth of God and having our lives instructed and bettered and our hearts encouraged and shaped by this great truth. Help us then to hear Your word. Speak to us, O Lord; your servants listen. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hear God's word. Psalm 68:

For the choir director. A Psalm of David. A Song. 1 Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered, And let those who hate Him flee before Him. 2 As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; As wax melts before the fire, So let the wicked perish before God. 3 But let the righteous be glad; let them exult before God; Yes, let them rejoice with gladness. 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. 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. 7 O God, when You went forth before Your people, When You marched through the wilderness, 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. 10 Your creatures settled in it; You provided in Your goodness for the poor, O God. 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. 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. 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. 19 Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears our burden, The God who is our salvation. 20 God is to us a

God of deliverances; And to GOD the Lord belong escapes from death. 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.' 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. 28 Your God has commanded your strength; Show Yourself strong, O God, who have acted on our behalf. 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; He has scattered the peoples who delight in war. 31 Envoy will come out of Egypt; Ethiopia will quickly stretch out her hands to God. 32 Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth, Sing praises to the Lord, 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. 35 O God, You are awesome from Your sanctuary. The God of Israel Himself gives strength and power to the people. Blessed be God!

Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts.

Let's look at four parts together in this Psalm: the royal praise of verses 1-6, the royal procession of verses 7-18, the royal state of verses 19-31, and this call to global praise of the king in verses 32-35.

I. A Call for Praise to the Divine and Just Warrior King (1-6) [The Opening Fanfare: Exhortation to Royal Praise]

First of all, this opening fanfare, which is really a call to worship—this is God's people calling God's people to worship, or perhaps it's King David calling God's people to worship Him. It's a call for praise to the divine and just Warrior-King. There are three pictures of God in these opening verses, in this opening fanfare, this exhortation to royal praise: The first picture you see in verses 1 and 2, the second picture in 3 and 4, the third picture in verses 5 and 6. The first picture is God as a warrior. The Ark is being taken up...Did you recognize the words with which this Psalm opens? Have you seen these words before? Maybe you remember all the way back in Numbers 10:35 that when Moses took up the Ark of the Covenant these words were spoken: "Then 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.' Now how did David start this Psalm?—with this exhortation, "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered, and let those who hate Him flee before Him." And so the language of Moses in Numbers 10:35 is picked up by David at the beginning of this Psalm. This is a picture of God the warrior, God who is leading His people against their enemies. And it's a call for the people of God to remember that God has fought for them.

Then we have this picture in verses 3 and 4: God, the celestial chariot rider leading His people through the desert. "But let the righteous be glad; let them exult before God; Yes, let them rejoice with gladness. 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." What's David asking the people of God to do?—to remember how God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt through the wilderness into the promise land. He's reminding them of the God who accompanied them and displayed His power in the wilderness journey.

But that's not all. The third picture is in verses 5 and 6: God as the just judge and ruler, as the protector of the helpless, as the scourge of the lawless. Listen to David's language. Who is this God? He is "a father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows." This is the "God who is in His holy habitation. A God who makes a home for the lonely; who leads the prisoners into prosperity, Only the rebellious will dwell in a parched land." And so His blessing will be on those who are needy and who are oppressed and poor and marginalized, and His curse will be on those who are lawless and rebellious. And so we have a picture of God as warrior and God as this deliverer, this chariot rider who rides through the desert leading His people, and this picture of God as just judge and ruler.

Now why is David piling up this language? Well, because he's exhorting the people of God to remember who God is. He's exhorting them; he's encouraging them to praise God. And in order to encourage them to praise God he reminds them who God is. And this is a reminder to us that we ought to be encouraging one another to praise and to trust in God because of who He is and what He does. Let me ask you to take your hymnals out and turn with me to # 207. Here's an example of how a hymnist, Henry Lyte, one of the great hymn writers of all time, who wrote what are commonly considered to be two of the greatest hymns in the English language, *Abide with Me* and *Fast Falls the Even Tide*. Brister Ware can quote every single word of it. I've heard you do it on many occasions, Brister. It's a glorious hymn. Well, here's one of his wonderful hymns and look at the fourth stanza. In the fourth stanza, here's the exhortation. And this is a self-exhortation. This is Henry Lyte talking to himself, and so as you sing this, this is you talking to yourself. "Take my soul thy full salvation. Rise o'er sin and fear and care"...Just as John was praying tonight that we wouldn't be bound up with our sin, that we wouldn't follow those tendencies to sin but that we would be conformed to the image of Christ, that we'd rise over sin and fear and care... "Joy to find in every station something still to do or bear." Then the exhortation is

this...Think about this...think about this.

Look at the second half of verse 4, "Think what spirit dwells within thee, what a Father's smile is thine, what a Savior died to win thee. Child of heaven, shouldst thou repine?" You see it's 'think of the Spirit.' Think of the Father; think of the Son. Do you have any reason to cry? Do you have any reason to be depressed? Do you have any reason to be discouraged or downcast? That is the God who dwells in you. That is the God who loves you. That is the God who saves you. That is the God with whom you are going to experience eternal union and communion. That is the God who even now is aiding you. And so Henry Lyte is exhorting himself, and every time we sing that song we're exhorting ourselves to remember our God. And that's why David is opening up this song, 'Remember the God who is your God. He's a warrior. He's delivered you, and He is just. And He cares for those that other people forget about, and He will be faithful to you.' And so David begins this Psalm by exhorting us to royal praise, and he does it by reminding us of who God is.

But let me say, there's another thing that David is doing as well. And he's going to pick up on this language again in verses 7 through 18, but he's reminding us of the story that we share, of the history that we share, of the legacy that we share as the people of God. As the people of God, God's deliverance at the Exodus is our history. We share that with all God's people.

If this Psalm comes from the time that David was going up into Jerusalem with the Ark, none of the people here had experienced the Exodus. Their parents had not experienced the Exodus. Their grandparents had not experienced the Exodus. Their great-grandparents had not experienced the Exodus but David speaks to them as if they had been there. Why? Because it's their story. That's their history; that's their legacy.

You see, God's salvation so ties us up with the blessings that He has given through His promises of the covenant of grace from the days of Abraham on, that our story is their story; their story is our story. This legacy of God's rescue and redemption in the Exodus, that's our story! Those are our people. And he's saying, 'That God is your God who brought the children of Israel out of the Exodus. And it's as if you were there because that God is your God and that people is your people. Those are your people.'

Do you remember Derek telling you the story of becoming a Christian and going to the youth fellowship and suddenly realizing, "These are my people"? It's beautiful, isn't it? I had an experience like that just last Lord's Day. Sunday afternoon I was at the Christ Missionary and Industrial College here in Jackson. Have any of you ever been to CMNI? It is the oldest African American high school in the state of Mississippi. It was founded in 1897 by Church of Christ Holiness ministers. And it's over off of Medgar Evers, off of Martin Luther King, off of Ridgeway, off of Main street. Did you know there's a Main street in

Jackson? And it's right over there off of Medgar Evers and off of Martin Luther King. And I was one of four white faces in a room full of 600 African Americans at the commencement exercise, the 104th commencement exercise of the Christian Missionary and Industrial High School, "the only African American high school in the Mississippi Private School Association" they were very proud to say on several occasions. And I want to tell you something, it was an interesting experience. First of all, these people are fervently evangelical Christians. Second of all, the administrator has been greatly helped by some people in this congregation and by some other folk who are involved in area education in bringing that school back. Thirdly, the administrator's assistant watches our worship service on Sunday morning, every Sunday morning before she goes to her church. She loves First Presbyterian Church. And as I began to look at the bulletin, I started looking at all the last names of the children who were graduating. Do you know what their last names were?—Robertson, Stewart, Reed, Wilson, Williams, Miller. I recognize those names. Now let me tell you I didn't recognize all the first names, but I recognize those last names. And you know what they were singing, friends? They were singing hymns, hymns that you know. They sang hymns of praise and thanksgiving to God for our country. They sang *My Country 'Tis of Thee*. They sang hymns like *Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken*. I knew what they were singing. And as I looked at those names and I heard the singing and read over the history of that school, I don't think that there is probably an African American denomination in the deep South that has doctrine as close to ours as theirs. And I thought to myself, "I'm among my people." It's a little ironic, but I had that feeling. "These are my people. These are *our* people." And they certainly welcomed me as if I was theirs and they were ours.

And you know, every time you go back into the story of God's victories on behalf of the people of Israel, you have to remember, "Those are our people and you're their people," because God has one people, His people. In Old Covenant and New Covenant, from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, they belong to God. They're *our* people. And David wants to remind us of that: that when we're caught up in this great story of salvation of what God has done for His people in the past, He's done for us. We're part of that legacy, that heritage is ours. And because of that we ought to praise God. There's not a time or a condition or an event that doesn't call for praise, because we have God and we have His perfections and His word and His works, and we have Christ and His benefits, and we have food and clothing and shelter and friends. What do we lack? Christian, everything is yours and so every time is a time to praise Him. And so really the first six verses are just a call to worship. They're an exhortation from David to you, from worshiper to worshiper to worship the living God.

II. Direct Praise to God for trek through Sinai, the spoils of victory and ascension to reign

Now when you get to verse 7, now you get into the actual direction of worship to God. Verse 1 to verse 6 is a call to worship. Now we get to the actual business of worship in verses 7 to 18. That's the second part of the song, this royal procession. Here is direct praise offered to God for that trek through Sinai and for the spoils of victory and for His ascension to reign on behalf of His people.

Again, three pictures I'd like you to see here in this second section of the Psalm. The first picture is in verses 7 to 10. It's the picture of the march of God. God's leading and guiding and providing for the children of Israel in the wilderness. "When You marched through the wilderness, 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." It's a picture of God marching through the desert with His people. It's a picture of the mountains quaking before Him because He is so great and majestic and powerful.

One of my favorite Christmas carols is *In the Bleak Midwinter*. It's a very English carol and it gives all sorts of images to the birth of Christ that are drawn right out of an English winter and so are anachronistic when applied to Israel, but the theology of it is wonderful. And in one of the stanzas you sing, "Our God, heaven cannot hold Him nor Earth sustain. Heaven and Earth shall flee away when He comes to reign." I love that phrase, "Heaven and Earth shall flee away when He comes to reign." And this is something of the picture of God marching through the desert and the mountains quaking at His presence.

I love the line from Johann Sebastian Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*...It's one of the arias that I had to learn to sing when I was in college and it goes like this, "Mighty Lord and King all glorious, Savior true for man victorious, earthly state Thou doest disdain." He's so great...He's so awesome that all earthly state He disdains. The mountains quake before Him. This is a picture of the greatness of God. And again, we're praising God for His greatness and His power. And so the first picture in verses 7 to 10 is the picture of the march of God through the wilderness leading His people to victory.

Then in verses 11 through 14 you have a picture that either recalls the spoiling of the Egyptians and the dancing of the woman at the Red Sea, or it recalls the victory of Deborah. But it's a very interesting picture. It's a picture of the domestic results of the spoils of victory and war coming home. Listen to the interesting language, "When you lie down among the sheepfolds," verse 13 "you are like the wings of a dove covered with silver, And its pinions with glistening gold." Is this the picture of shepherd girls? Men are away at battle, and these country shepherd girls when the men, fathers, and the brothers come back with all the spoils of war...Here are these shepherdesses who have been lying down in the sheepfold suddenly wearing the garments of these very cultured, urban women from the nations that have been conquered by Israel in war. They're covered in gold and silver. They are dressed up to kill. They're ready to head to town...best clothing you've ever seen on a shepherd girl. It's a picture of the spoils of victory

after the rout of kings, the blessing of God's people because of God's victory.

And the third picture you see in verses 15 to 18. It's a picture of the procession going up the hill of Zion into the city of David. And again it's ironic because mountains are mentioned here as being envious of Zion. Now if you've seen great mountains, and then you see Mount Zion and you see the hill on which Jerusalem sits, your reaction is probably not going to be, "You know this mountain is one of the largest mountains I've ever seen." That's not going to be your reaction to seeing Mount Zion, the hill on which Jerusalem sits.

But in this passage, David speaks of all those great mountains being jealous of Mount Zion. All those grand peaks—the Rocky Mountains are jealous of Mount Zion. The Smoky Mountains are jealous of Mount Zion. The Alps are jealous of Mount Zion. The Himalayas are jealous of Mount Zion. The Andes are jealous of Mount Zion. The Atlas Mountains are jealous of Mount Zion. Why? Because it's a big mountain? No. Because God has chosen to reign there.

And isn't it a picture of God taking what is little in the eyes of the world and making it His chosen thing? And so there's this picture of the procession up the little hill of David which is the envy of all the nations. But it's from this particular passage that Paul takes these words, "You have ascended on high and led captive Thy captives." And Paul will take it and apply it to the ascension of Jesus Christ, and rightly so, because it's a prefiguration of the ascension of Christ to sit on His throne and to dispense to His people all the benefits of His redeeming work. And this Psalm prefigures the great work of Christ and the ascension and the beneficence of Christ as the ruling, reigning king of Zion.

In verses 19 through 31, we see this king reigning and the king reigning is a surprising picture. In verses 19 to 23, he's a king who serves. He bears our burdens. He delivers us from death. He shatters our enemies. And all the throng of Israel in verses 24 to 27 are represented as being focused on His praise. But then in verses 28 to 31, something that we've seen in Psalm 67 and 66 and 65 happens again. David again anticipates the homage to this God, the God of Israel, the God of the people of Israel. He anticipates the homage to this God of the whole world. All the nations will praise this God. This Psalm is in part fulfilled in Acts 2 and in Acts 15 in the Gentiles coming to Christ; and, of course, it's in part fulfilled in the scene of Philippians 2 when every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord. The Psalmist is picturing God's beneficent reign and the universal praise of His people, but He's also picturing the homage of all the nations.

Only Jesus Christ's exalted reign when all the nations come will fulfill this Psalm in its fullness. And so in verses 32 to 35 the Psalmist looks for global worship. The nations in verse 32 are exhorted to praise. And notice that the focus is on the immense power and the intense care of God. You see the Christian hope is large. The Christian longs to see all the nations, all the kingdoms of the earth

acknowledging the immense power and the intense care of God manifested in the redemption and the reign of Jesus Christ our Lord. Let's pray.

Lord God, receive our praise. Remind us of Your glory and Your power and Your goodness. Make us to be worshippers in all of life and with Your people as Your house, both now and forevermore. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Would you stand and receive God's blessing? Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus the Messiah. Amen.

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