

5/24 TAKE-HOME SUNDAY SCHOOL

Read: Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35

- 1 May God arise, may his enemies be scattered;
may his foes flee before him.
- 2 May you blow them away like smoke—
as wax melts before the fire,
may the wicked perish before God.
- 3 But may the *righteous* be glad
and rejoice before God;
may they be happy and joyful.
- 4 Sing to God, sing in praise of his name,
worship him who rides on the clouds^[b];
rejoice before him—his name is the Lord.
- 5 A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,
is God in his holy dwelling.
- 6 God brings the lonely into families,^[c]
he leads out the prisoners with singing;
but those who rebel live in a sad, barren land.
- 7 When you, God, went out before your people,
when you marched through the wilderness,^[d]
- 8 the earth shook, the heavens poured down rain,
before God, the One of Sinai,
before God, the God of Israel.
- 9 You gave abundant showers, O God;
you refreshed your weary inheritance.
- 10 Your people settled in it,
and from your abundance, God, you provided for the poor.

32 Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth,
sing praise to the Lord,
33 to him who rides across the highest heavens, the ancient heavens,
who thunders with mighty voice.
34 Proclaim the power of God,
whose majesty is over Israel,
whose power is in the heavens.
35 You, God, are awesome in your sanctuary;
the God of Israel gives power and strength to his people.
Praise be to God!

Some helpful background info

- **What are the Psalms?** The book of Psalms, dated back to the fifth century B.C., is a long collection of sayings originally meant to be like poetry, many of which were passed down in song. Many of them are attributed to King David. There are many kinds of psalms – ones that express thankfulness to God, ones that express sadness that bad things are happening, ones that talk about feeling guilty, etc. Because of this, psalms are really helpful to read because they express genuine human emotion that we can all relate to.
- **“Righteous” vs. “Wicked”:** In Old Testament times, the “righteous” are those that loved ONLY God (not the many other gods people were worshiping), and as a result, followed God’s strict laws regarding clothing, behavior, worship practices, etc., to keep them safe and separate from others. Unfortunately, the “wicked” in the Old Testament are often portrayed as anyone who is NOT Jewish. However, (this is harder to see in the Old Testament), but in God’s eyes, it was and is always about “faith”; there were many Jews that were seen as “wicked” because they ignored God’s commandments and there are even a few examples of non-Jews being “righteous” (see the Book of Ruth).
- **A note on the Old Testament understanding of salvation:** In the Old Testament times, there was still not a belief in eternal life. Salvation in people’s eyes meant being looked upon with favor from God and as a result, getting a long, peaceful life with a good “inheritance” (lots of land and many kids). A good quality of existence for oneself and one’s descendants is what salvation meant to them. This is why we see most Old Testament folks see their enemies as *physical, military opponents* – because they viewed life only mostly in terms of earthly safety.

Reflect:

- 1) If God is a God of mercy, that sees ALL as His Children, why in this text does God have “enemies” that He will wipe away? Why would He want anyone to “perish”? There are no right answers to this – I’m curious what you think!
- 2) Today, it may be helpful to think of your enemies not as “people” but as personal and communal sins that hold you back from God. What are some temptations and bad tendencies you see around you that you pray God can help you eliminate from your life?
- 3) A big theme of this passage is that we should praise the goodness of God. My question is why should we give thanksgiving? What happens when we don’t? I mean, aren’t we still getting the goods, so what difference does it make?
- 4) Isn’t it interesting that when God is being praised here, He is being praised less for incredible miracles and magic tricks but more for helping those in need (the lonely, the orphans, the poor, etc.)? What does this say about our God’s nature?

Suggested answers to reflection questions:

- 1) My best guess: In Old Testament times, because, again, “salvation” was seen as earthly safety, “enemies” were those that posed a threat to God’s Chosen people, and they had to be removed so that the truth of God could remain in the world through the Jewish people. If the Jews were killed, nobody could spread the news of God, and so God needed to remove their enemies and that’s why He helped them get past the Egyptians and eventually conquer their way to the Promised Land.
- 2) While in the Old Testament “enemies” were often non-Jewish foreigners (something that still doesn’t sit well with me), we know today that God loves ALL people and so perhaps the best way to see “enemies” today is as temptations that keep us from being loving people. *THAT’S* what we need God’s help eliminating, not other people, because we trust God gave them gifts and a purpose too. Possible answers here could be: pride, selfishness, lack of concern for the environment, greed, lack of patience or forgiveness on people that make us mad, and many others.
- 3) It is a truth of this world that the less we say thanks and appreciate the gifts around us, the more we begin to take life for granted. By constantly counting our blessings, we can continue to see God as amazing and trustworthy (it builds up our faith as a result), and it makes us much happier. Also, by always trying to express gratitude, it may make us attentive to small ways God shows up and surprises us in our day-to-day lives that we otherwise wouldn’t have noticed.
- 4) Our God cares far less about fancy shows of power (this is what other “gods” at the time were based on), and instead He cares most about helping those in need. True “religion” is found in loving people deeply and, in particular, supporting those that are struggling in life.

Closing Prayer:

One method to continue to “open our eyes” to God is gratitude. It helps us “never forget” all God has done for us. As a closing prayer, make a list of 10 things you are grateful for that God has given you or that you have in your life. God is all around, we just need to take time to notice it.

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AMEN!