

Calm the Chaos.4.To Celebrate
Psalm 68:1-6
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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, extol him who rides on the clouds; 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 sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.

We're looking at Psalm 68 today, if you'd care to turn back there to the passage that was read for us. Just the first few verses of Psalm 68.

This picture typically hangs on the wall in the foyer near the office door. Looking at it as you are, you can obviously tell it's an image of someone washing someone's foot...an image of servanthood.

What you can't see from where you are is...if you focus in on it at a very tiny level, you see that it's made up of tiny pictures of Free Methodist church buildings from all over the country. Ours in on here...sometime see if you can find it.

So at the larger – call it the 10,000 foot level, the image is clear; just as it is at the small, almost microscopic level.

But...everywhere in between...if you look from here at just this part, or this part or this part, it looks like a random bunch of lines and colors that make no sense.

The image is discernable both up close and far away, but anywhere in between...it's chaos; you can't determine what's really going on.

That same principle is true for many things in life.

Time, for example.

In a given moment or even an hour, we can say we did this or that for this or that reason. We went to the park to play. We mowed the yard. We did a load of laundry. We went to class.

What we do moment by moment is easy to describe.

And then over a lifetime, we might say that we built a business, or we taught thousands of fourth graders, or we kept a home, or we flew airplanes.

Over a lifetime, we can hopefully say that we used our gifts to serve the Lord.

Usually, both moments and lifetimes are easy to describe.

But the in-between timeframes...over the course of a week or a month or in a few years...even a decade...sometimes those blocks of time...what we did...what their purpose was...those can hard to describe easily, and especially so if they are blocks of time where life was tough-going for us.

We look at certain experiences...parts of our lives...eras, to borrow from Taylor Swift, and wonder, at times, what we accomplished...what their purpose was...why we had to go through this or that...what may seem fruitless or senseless or painful.

In the *instant*, we can see *plainly*, and looking back over the *long haul*, we can make *sense* of it.

But in those in-between times, the purpose isn't always so clear.

This Psalm works something like that.

Scholars say this is the most difficult psalm to understand. With regard to interpreting it, it has more problems than a math book.

For example:

- there are 15 words in here that occur only once in the Hebrew Bible,
- the relationships between many of the words are obscure,
- some of the poetic lines don't make perfect sense,
- the relationships between the different segments are not often obvious,
- there is an unusual amount of allusive language,
- God is referred to in just about every verse, and by at least seven different names,
- and the styles of writing can shift unexpectedly.

And that's just for starters.

So besides being a sucker for punishment, why on earth did I choose this for our text?

Because...this psalm, like this picture, helps us understand much about our life with God.

If you try to look at an intermediate sized segment of this Psalm and figure out exactly how all the different parts connect to each other, you'll run into trouble.

But...if you look at just each, individual, smaller part...they make sense on their own.

Though the individual lines don't always connect perfectly *together*, they all speak clearly of some character mark of God...God's *greatness*, God's *honesty*, God's *power*, God's *provision*, God's *faithfulness*, God's *worthiness* of *worship*...

They all make sense on their own.

And...if you look at this Psalm from the 10,000 foot level...the work as a whole makes sense because it paints a picture of the *sure and certain reign of God, even*, and maybe *especially, in the midst of difficulty*.

This Psalm declares that our **God...who is great and honest and powerful and faithful...our God reigns**, even when things don't make sense...even in hard times...even when people and events try to stand against Him.

Which makes this a great Psalm to read when life doesn't make sense. When things seem to hit us in random ways, such that we're tempted to wonder if God really is holding things together.

This Psalm reminds us and assures us that, yes, He really is holding things together.

God does reign. God is in charge.

Actually, you get that message right from the start. Right there in verse one, **"Let God arise and His enemies be scattered!"**

Chapter ten of the book of Numbers tells us that these are the words that were spoken whenever the Ark of the Covenant was moved from the camp of Israel in the wilderness.¹ This was the indication that God was engaged...He was moving...He was at work.

And of course, whenever that happened, you could be sure that, no matter what, God would prevail over any enemies, which would naturally cause those who belong to Him – the **"righteous,"** verse 3 calls them – to be glad and happy and full of rejoicing.

I mean, what do we do when something good happens to us? We celebrate!

What do we do when something good happens in the life of someone we love? We celebrate!

What do we do when our cause...our army...our team wins? We celebrate!

And what do we do when these things happen in the face of what seem like overwhelming odds?

When it seems like victory is unlikely?

When the opposition is too big, too strong, too numerous, too talented, too well-armed, too experienced?

What do we do when we win, even in those circumstances?

We celebrate **all the more!**

I think the point of this Psalm...and maybe even why it was written as it is...is to remind us that, yes, life **can** be chaotic (as if we needed the reminder, right?)

Life can be chaotic. Days and weeks can be disconnected and disparate.

Things happen to us that don't go together...that don't make sense together.

Things come at us from different sides that push us this way and then that way; we can experience a great thing and then a terrible thing within minutes of one another.

That's just how things are in a broken and unpredictable world.

¹ Numbers 10:35

Maybe this Psalm was written like this, and given to us to let us know that God sees all this...He understands all this, and in the midst of it all, God continues to reign.

That is the fact of the larger picture.

That is true...even when we can't see it in this or that particular week or month or season of life.

Even when we can't quite make it out, God does still reign, just the same.

And while the sure reign of God is always cause for celebration, it's cause for special celebration in chaotic times.

One interesting theory about this Psalm is that it was written as a poetic description of God's leading of the Israelites through the wilderness to their promised land.

In that way, it's own internal disconnection is said to illustrate the constant and variety of opposition they faced in that journey, since the reality was, every time they turned around there in the wilderness, they faced some sort of battle.

Sometimes the battle was from within themselves – their own number. Sometimes the battle was one of faith or trust or doubt from within their own camp.

Other times the battle came from outside Israel. An opposing nation or people or army.

In the wilderness there, they faced a wide variety of circumstances...each of them, in themselves, pretty easily definable and identifiable, but at the same time, often unrelated one to another.

And yet...when they were able to step back and see the whole, they could tell that God was with them all the while...even in the difficult times and seasons.

God reigned...God was in charge the whole time...even when it may not have seemed to be so, and He led them where He wanted them to go.

Though the moments, at times, were hard, and the context hard to see and make sense of...in the end, God did arise...and His enemies were scattered... and that means the righteous, God's people, can rejoice and be happy and celebrate.

Israel could celebrate the reign of God even in the face of evidence to the contrary.

And so can you and I today.

Life brings hard, chaotic times and events...that so often seem totally disconnected to each other. We can feel like a boxer getting hit with a left, then a right, then an uppercut...before we even realized we were in the ring.

The randomness and strangeness and suffering that just are some seasons of life can tempt us to call God's reign into question.

But rest assured – God does reign.

In those chaotic times when we may wonder...that's when it's so important to step back and look, again, at the big picture...and then to celebrate what that big picture declares: Our God does reign. His enemies are scattered, and so we can rejoice and be glad.

We can celebrate that fact.

And you know, He will even give us the power and strength we need to do it.

He promises us that at the end of this Psalm – in verse 35 – after all the different verses here present all these random thoughts, it closes with the words, ***“The God of Israel gives power and strength to His people.”***

The power and strength to believe, and even to celebrate the reign of God. God provides for us even that!

And of course if those ancient Jews could receive this promise, how much more can we receive it in the power of Jesus!

In fact, the Apostle Paul speaks from this psalm to the Ephesian church in just that way, declaring that the risen Christ provides all we need to have victory...to celebrate, even in chaotic moments and days.

God is all we need.

Even when the days and weeks and even years are tough and make no sense to us, step back and see and remember – God does reign.

He rises up.

He scatters His enemies.

And He keeps His own.

Closing Song: Our God Reigns