



Sermon Transcript January 24, 2021

Psalms of Encouragement Where Is Your Hope? Psalm 68

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on January 24, 2021 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com

Sermon Text: Psalm 68

God Shall Scatter His Enemies - To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. A Song

¹ God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered; and those who hate him shall flee before him! ² As smoke is driven away, so you shall drive them away; as wax melts before fire, so the wicked shall perish before God! ³ But the righteous shall be glad; they shall exult before God; they shall be jubilant with joy!

⁴ Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts; his name is the LORD; exult before him! ⁵ Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. ⁶ God settles the solitary in a home; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious dwell in a parched land.

⁷ O God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness, *Selah* ⁸ the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel. ⁹ Rain in abundance, O God, you shed abroad; you restored your inheritance as it languished; ¹⁰ your flock found a dwelling in it; in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy.

¹¹ The Lord gives the word; the women who announce the news are a great host: ¹² “The kings of armies—they flee, they flee!” The women at home divide the spoil— ¹³ though you men lie among the sheepfolds—the wings of a dove covered with silver, its pinions with shimmering gold. ¹⁴ When the Almighty scatters kings there, let snow fall on Zalmon.

¹⁵ O mountain of God, mountain of Bashan; O many-peaked mountain, mountain of Bashan! ¹⁶ Why do you look with hatred, O many peaked mountain, at the mount that God desired for his abode, yes, where the LORD will dwell forever? ¹⁷ The chariots of God are twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands; the LORD is among them; Sinai is now in the sanctuary. ¹⁸ You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell there.

¹⁹ Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up; God is our salvation. *Selah* ²⁰ Our God is a God of salvation, and to God, the Lord, belong deliverances from death. ²¹ But God will strike the heads of his enemies, the hairy crown of him who walks in his

guilty ways. ²² The Lord said, “I will bring them back from Bashan, I will bring them back from the depths of the sea, ²³ that you may strike your feet in their blood, that the tongues of your dogs may have their portion from the foe.

²⁴ Your procession is seen, O God, the procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary— ²⁵ the singers in front, the musicians last, between them virgins playing tambourines: ²⁶ Bless God in the great congregation, the LORD, O you who are Israel’s fountain!” ²⁷ There is Benjamin, the least of them, in the lead, the princes of Judah in their throng, the princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali.

²⁸ Summon your power, O God, the power, O God, by which you have worked for us. ²⁹ Because of your temple at Jerusalem kings shall bear gifts to you. ³⁰ Rebuke the beasts that dwell among the reeds, the herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples. Trample underfoot those who lust after tribute; scatter the peoples how delight in war. ³¹ Nobles shall come from Egypt, Cush shall hasten to stretch out her hands to God.

³² O kingdoms of the earth, sing to God, sing praises to the LORD, *Selah* ³³ to him who rides in the heavens, the ancient heavens; behold, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice. ³⁴ Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel, and whose power is in the skies. ³⁵ Awesome is God from his sanctuary; the God of Israel—he is the one who gives power and strength to his people. Blessed be God!

Introduction

Marva Dawn tells the story of an affluent North American who went to visit a mission church that was located in the village dump in a city in Africa. This gentleman shadowed the pastor for much of the day, taking it all in. What he observed was that this African pastor had no tools to put to good use. He had no materials to even build anything. And he had no food to share with the poverty-stricken people he served. As the day was coming to a close, this North American visitor could hold it in no longer. He looked at this pastor and asked, “Where is your hope?”

Looking around at this impoverished village, this North American visitor couldn’t imagine how this pastor could find any hope in this terrible situation. The location where he served was dangerous to the extreme. All sorts of diseases are rampant in such a place. You could easily cut your foot on a glass shard lying hidden there. Soon the cut turns to infection. How can anyone find hope in such a situation?

So he looked at this pastor and asked, “Where is your hope?” Without any hesitation, this pastor responded with an enormous smile and brilliantly bright eyes. “My hope is in Jesus Christ,” he said confidently. And for the rest of his visit, this pastor showed him how that could be the case.

Reflecting on this, Marva Dawn concluded that our problem here in North America is that we have too many other things. We start to rely on our abilities, our skills, our ingenuity—and that is only a quick step to relying on our possessions, our “stuff,” our money, our investments . . . No matter what our hopes are—if they are human hopes—we will wind up dissatisfied in some direction or another. The only hope that can ultimately fulfill our desires is Jesus Christ.”¹ Where is your hope?

Assessing “the mood of the country” has become a staple of American public opinion polling.² We are constantly being asked whether we are satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in the United States. Or, another survey question that seeks to assess “the mood of the country” is the question: “Are things in this country headed in the right direction or are things getting off track?” I’m sure we all have opinions—legitimate opinions and concerns—we could share in response to these questions. But as followers of Jesus, are these the things that define our mood? And if so, what does this tell us about where we find our hope? If this African pastor, who serves a mission church located on a city dump is able to reflect his hope with an enormous smile and brilliantly bright eyes and a confident assertion—“My hope is in Jesus”—why can’t we? Is it because our hope is found in something other than Jesus?

Psalms 68 is a psalm that reminds us where we find our hope. Right in the middle of this psalm, verses 19-20, we have this statement about God. *“God is our salvation. Selah (Stop! Pause! Instrumental Interlude! Reflect!) This is another way of reminding us to stop and take note: God is our hope. “God is our salvation. Selah Our God is a God of salvation, and to God, the Lord, belong deliverances from death.”*

We are not denying that we live in a broken-down world and that brokenness is seen and felt in every square inch of our country—our government—our communities—our homes—and our lives. But we have a triumphant hope in Jesus that transcends our brokenness. This triumphant hope enables us to smile broadly and with warm and inviting eyes embrace the one in need as we quietly do good to our neighbor. And so David is telling us through this psalm where we can find such hope and why we can say that even in this broken-down world—whatever your village dump happens to be—with a broad smile and bright eyes, “My hope is in Jesus Christ!”

Our hope is in the triumphant and ascended King

The reason David can say in verse 19 that *“God is our salvation”* is because of what God has already done. In Psalm 68:1-18, David looks back on Israel’s story and he recounts for them what God has already done. This is now our fourth Sunday in this series on Psalms of Encouragement and have you noticed this pattern in the Psalms of looking back and remembering what God has done for us in the past? Looking back to the past is one of the ways we see God through the clouds of the present. It is one of the reasons why Jesus said, while holding the bread and the cup, *“Do this in remembrance of me.”* Don’t forget what God has done. We find hope when we first look back and remember what God has done. That is what David does in the first eighteen verses of this Psalm.

In the first part of this psalm, David calls them to remember what God has done by tracing the journey of the ark of the covenant from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion. Mount Sinai was where Israel was camped after God delivered them from bondage in Egypt. It was here where they were given the Ten Commandments, along with instructions for building the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant. And of course, Mount Zion is the city of Jerusalem, the city of God. It was where the temple would eventually be built and the ark of the covenant would come to rest. The ark of the covenant represented the throne of God, the very presence of God. And so Psalm 68:1-18 retraces the steps of God with his people as they traveled from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion.

In the very first verse of this psalm, we are clued in to the fact that the ark of the covenant is the focus of attention in this part of the psalm. Here David says, *“God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered; and those who hate him shall flee before him!”* What is it about this verse that tells us that the ark of the covenant is the focus of this passage? We discover at the end of Numbers 10, as Israel begins their journey from Mount Sinai, that this is what Moses would say every time they would pick up camp and move to the next spot. The ark of the covenant would go out in front of the people a good three days journey. A cloud would lead the people to where God was taking them. And whenever the ark set out ahead of the people, Moses would say what David said at the beginning of this psalm, *“Arise, O LORD, and let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee before you.”* God was with them, so anyone who stood opposed to them would be like (verse 2) “smoke” driven away or like “wax” that melts under fire. God was with them! God was their hope!

David unfolds the story of what God has done for them in the past in four major movements. He first alludes to how God delivered them from bondage in Egypt in

verse 4-6, reminding them of God's compassion for them. He heard their cry when they were in bondage. David says of God in verse 6, "*God settles the solitary in a home; he leads out the prisoner to prosperity.*" That was the story of this formerly enslaved people as they made their way to the promised land.

David then reminds them of how God brought them to Mount Sinai in verses 7-10. If you recall from Exodus 19, it was an awesome and fearsome scene when God came down to Mount Sinai. There was lightning and thunder and fire and thick clouds and *a very loud trumpet blast*. The people were assembled at the base of the mountain and Exodus 19 tells us that the mountain itself trembled greatly. Exodus 19:18 understandably says that when the people saw this awesome display of God's power *they were afraid and trembled*. And so David recalls this scene of the display of God's awesome power in verse 8 when he says "*the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel.*" It is here where Israel became "the people of God." They entered into covenant with God and this all powerful God promised to be with them and to lead them and protect them.

This divine protection is indeed what we see in verses 11-14. Time and time again, God delivered them from their enemies as he brought them into the promised land and settled them. David alludes here to one particular time when God delivered them from their enemies through some women. This takes us to the story of Deborah in Judges 4-5. When the male leader was too afraid to stand up to their enemies, Deborah stood in the gap and led the people to victory. I love what she says to this timid male leader in Judges 4:14. She looks at him, rather incredulous, and says "*Up! (Come on, boy!) For this is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hand.*" Where does she get such hope? She said to Barak, "*Does not the LORD go out before you?*" Now Sisera was coming at them with 900 chariots of iron—he had the upper hand when it came to the weapons that were at his disposal. Or so he thought. Look what it says of God in verse 17, *The chariots of God are twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands* in the heavenly army of God. And Deborah knew that Israel's God is the God whose awesome power was on display at Mount Sinai. And because Barak, was too timid, God delivered them through a woman who drove a tent peg through Sisera's temple as he sought refuge in her tent. So David reminds them, "*The Lord gives the word; the women who announce the news are a great host: 'The kings of armies—they flee, they flee!' The women at home divide the spoil—though you men lie among the sheepfolds.*" Clearly, her hope was in God.

This brings us to the climax of what David wants us to see about what God has done

in the past for his people. God has established his throne among his people. Mount Zion becomes the envy of all the other mountains, because Mount Zion—the city of Jerusalem—is (vs. 16) *the mount that God desired for his abode, yes, where the LORD will dwell forever*. My favorite phrase in this psalm is found in verse 17. Through the building of the temple and brining the ark of the covenant—the throne of God—to rest in the holy of holies, David reminds them that God is among them. And then he says, *“Sinai is now in the sanctuary.”* Sinai has now come to Zion. In other words, that awesome God you saw on display at Mount Sinai has not only established you in the land of Israel. But THAT God is with you! “God is in the house!” That is the source of your hope. This is why David says in Psalm 27, *“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”* The triumphant ascended King is with you.

This Psalm begins with the assertion in verse 1, *“God shall arise!”* Indeed he has! Psalm 68:18 affirms that God *has ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell there*. In other words, God is the triumphant ascended King who has defeated your enemies and he is reigning in your midst. This is why David can say that *God is our salvation*. That is why their hope is in God. He has safely taken them from Egypt to Sinai to Jerusalem. And God is with them, their salvation and hope.

Our hope is in the triumphant ascended Christ

It is fascinating to me that the Apostle Paul quotes from this Psalm when he talks about the ascension of Jesus. I have mentioned this before—the ascension of Jesus has become the forgotten part of the story of Jesus, at least among evangelicals. We make much of Christmas, the birth of Jesus—the great mystery of God in the flesh. We make much of the life of Jesus—his miracles, his teachings, his compassion and love, his perfection. We observe Good Friday and the cross of Jesus—rightfully so—the very center of our faith. But then we tend to bring the story to its climax with the resurrection of Jesus—there is no Sunday like Easter Sunday. But that is not the end of the story. Forty days later, Jesus ascended into heaven. But that day passes on the church calendar with hardly any mention. And yet, what may be forgotten to us, was at the center of the minds and hearts of the early church. The ascension of Jesus was the clinching argument that Jesus was Lord and therefore our very hope.

On the day of Pentecost, Acts 2, when Peter is proclaiming Jesus to the crowd, he talks about the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. In fact he says in Acts 2:32, *“This*

Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses.” But he didn’t stop there. He went on to say, *“Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God (that is the ascension) . . . and he went on to say “David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”* So what is significant about all of this? Listen to what Peter says next, *“Let all the house of Israel therefore know that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”* The ascension of Jesus is not just telling us that Jesus went up into heaven. R. C. Sproul says “it means something far more weighty than just going up into the sky or even to the abode of the heavenlies. In his ascension, Jesus was going to a specific place for a specific reason. He was ascending into heaven for the purpose of his investiture and coronation as the King of kings and the Lord of lords.”³ This week we witnessed the inauguration of a new President. The ascension of Jesus is the inauguration of the eternal King of kings! Jesus is Lord! This is the source of our hope.

In Ephesians 4, Paul quotes from Psalm 68:18. The verse begins by saying, *“You ascended on high, leading a host of captives.”* There is some debate as to who these “captives” are that David is referring to. Are these “captives” the enemies of God who are defeated and subjugated to some kind of death march? Are they prisoners of war who are paraded in front of the heavenly host and forced to march to wherever their captors are taking them? Probably not. When Paul quotes this verse in the light of the ascension of Jesus, these “captives” are those who accompany the ascended Christ, they are paraded with Jesus— *“When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives.”* It reminds me of what Paul says of us in Ephesians 2:6, *“he raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”* These are the one who have been set free from the enemy. That is one of the marks of the ascension of Jesus. That is one of the features of the ascension of Christ. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:25-26 that Jesus must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet, *The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*

Now the tricky part with how Paul uses Psalm 68:18 is that in the psalm it says that God “received” gifts from men, but in Ephesians 4:8 it says that “gave” gifts to men. Paul says, *“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men.”* Eric Watkins asks, “Which is it?” “Both” he concludes. “Those who God liberated not only gave gifts (themselves being the gifts) but they were also furnished by the Spirit of God with gifts for the service of the church.”⁵ When Paul says this he is talking about the church and the gifts God gave to the church so that the church can do the work of God in this world. See, if Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of

lords, R. C. Sproul says, “it is unthinkable to have a king without a kingdom . . . That realm of his kingdom is all of creation.”⁵ And so at the end of Psalm 68 it is not just Israel that finds hope in the ascended King. Psalm 68:32 says “*O kingdoms of the earth, sing to God, sing praises to the Lord, Selah.*” The ascension of Jesus means that God has given us authority to do his work and he gives us all we need—gifts—to do his good in this world. We know that our labor is not in vain because Jesus has ascended to heaven and is reigning over it all. This is our hope! Our hope is found in the triumphant ascended Jesus!

Our Hope and Our Smile

Can we return to that church at that city dump in the city of Africa and to that smiling pastor? Can we return to the American pollster who is wanting to know what your prevailing mood happens to be in light of what is happening in our country? What does the triumphant ascension of Jesus have to do with these two scenes? It explains where our smile comes from.

In verse 24-27, David describes the joyful procession of the people of God as they bring the ark of the covenant into the tabernacle. In 2 Samuel 6 we see David leading this procession with joyful dancing as the ark of the covenant is brought into Jerusalem and placed in the tabernacle. The psalm captures this joyful procession by saying, *Your procession is seen, O God, the procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary—the singers in front, the musicians last, between them virgins playing tambourines: Bless God in the great congregation, the LORD, O you who are Israel’s fountain!* There is Benjamin, the least of them, in the lead, the princes of Judah in their throng, the princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali. It is kind of like the reaction of the disciples after they saw Jesus ascend to heaven. Luke tells us that they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God. That is strange. Jesus just left them. When he first told them that he was going to leave them—before the cross—they couldn’t see any good in that. But now, they return with joy—like David dancing in front of the ark of the covenant—because they understand that the ascension of Jesus means that the kingdom of God has come and the reigning Jesus is using them to advance his kingdom.

Where your hope is where your focus is. That American visitor was focused on a city dump and the extreme poverty he saw. But don’t lose sight of what the pastor saw. In that seemingly hopeless spot was a church. The reign of the ascended King Jesus, who liberates us from the enemy of Satan, sin and death was present in that place.

I'm sure that pastor felt the burden of that work. But whenever the burden grows heavy, he reminds himself that Jesus is reigning and this pastor is "the gift" that God has given to this church to bring many sons to glory. With that hope comes a smile.

In the middle of working on this sermon, I was also taking in the spectacle of the inauguration of President Biden and Vice President Harris. No matter who you voted for, the event itself is an amazing thing to behold—it is full of hope. I couldn't help but compare the "ascending of a President to power" to the "ascending of the ark of the covenant to the sanctuary in Mount Zion and the ascending of Jesus to the right hand of God." And it got me thinking about what it is that forms the defining mood of the follower of Jesus. Is your mood impacted more by who sits in the Oval Office or by who sits at the right hand of the Father? It may tell you where you find your hope.

I think this contentious year that even saw an attempt at insurrection has revealed an idolatry that has settled into the heart of many evangelical Christians. Trevin Wax wrote an article with the title *Dethrone Politics*. He made this observation. "With politics as the ultimate sphere of significance, some Christians begin to identify themselves primarily, not as citizens of God's kingdom, but as foot soldiers in a war in which people on one side want to destroy the nation, while people on the other side fight to valiantly protect it. Even worse, some Christians conflate the two—thinking their political involvement is equal to the work of God's kingdom."⁶ He called that what it is—idolatry—which, by the way, God hates.

Do you know what he said is the corrective to all of this? It is the ascension of Jesus! He said, "our fundamental allegiance must be to another King . . . Our allegiance must be higher than any party, ideology, or nationality. Yes, we engage in politics—so we can love our neighbor, not fear the opposition—but our faith is never equated with any party or partisan ideology."⁷ And so we can truly smile, no matter who sits in the Oval Office. How so? Last time I checked, Jesus is still the reigning King and he has given us gifts so that we might do his good in a broken world. May our prevailing mood ever be one that is conveyed with a smile and the warmth that comes with bright eyes of hope and love. How so? *Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.* With this hope comes a smile.

Conclusion

Where is your hope? With an enormous smile and brilliantly bright eyes, we join

with this pastor and we confidently say, “Our hope is in Jesus!”

¹Marva Dawn “Where Is Your Hope?” www.ligonier.org, September 1, 2011

²Geroge F. Bishop and Stephen T Mockabee “Understanding the meaning of ‘the Mood of the Country’” www.surveypractice.org July 31, 2008

³R. C. Sproul “The King of Kings” www.ligonier.org December 1, 2007

⁴Eric Watkins “The Ascension of Jesus” www.tabletalkmagazine.com April 2019

⁵Sproul

⁶Trevin Wax “Dethrone Politics” www.thegospelcoalition.org January 19, 2021

⁷Ibid

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COMMUNITY
GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. What has been your prevailing mood today and what are the things that have shaped it?
2. What is one thing you feel God has recently been teaching you?

Diving Into The Word

3. Read Psalm 68:1-18. This passage reminds Israel what God has done for them in the past and how he protected them and delivered them. Pay special attention to verse 15-18. What is the cause for hope in this passage? How does this give you hope?
4. Read Acts 1:9-11; Eph. 1:20-21; 1 Peter 3:22; 1 Cor. 15:25-28. What do these verses teach you about the ascension of Jesus? How do these verses give you hope when things around you seem broken?
5. Read Ephesians 2:16 and 4:7-16. What are some of the practical benefits of the ascension of Jesus? What “gifts” have you been given to use to bless others?
6. Read Psalm 68:24-27; 2 Samuel 6:16-23 and Luke 24:50-53. Why does the hope we have in the ascended Jesus bring great joy? What is robbing you of this joy? How can the ascension of Jesus help you smile in the midst of brokenness of life?

Taking It Home

7. Can you identify something in your life that is robbing you of the joy that comes with the hope of the ascended Jesus? What step can you take to recover your joy?
8. What can you do this week to bring hope to someone in need?