

Psalm 75

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[0 : 00] Psalm 75. To the arrogant I say, boast no more.

And to the wicked, do not lift up your horns. Do not lift your horns against heaven. Do not speak so defiantly.

No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt themselves. It is God who judges. He brings one down.

He exalts another. In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices.

He pours it out. And all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs. As for me, I will declare this forever.

[1 : 28] I will sing praise to the God of Jacob who says, I will cut off the horns of all the wicked, but the horns of the righteous shall be lifted up.

Now, second reading from the New Testament, from the Acts of the Apostles. And I'm going to read some verses from chapter 17.

Paul is at Athens. A city very much like our world today when there's lots of idols.

Lots of people are quite religious, but they don't really know the God who is the living and true God. Paul corrects them.

And if we go down to verse 24. Well, verse 24. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands and is not served by human hands as if he needed anything.

[2 : 38] Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man, he made all the nations that they should inhabit the whole earth.

And he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him.

God is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, we are his offspring.

Therefore, since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image made by human design and skill.

In the past, God overlooked such ignorance. But now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

[3 : 38] For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He's given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.

For he has set a day when he is.

So whether you have begun to turn off and think, not another one. But that's what's been happening. A bombardment by politicians wanting our vote.

And our response, of course, is either to praise them and think, what a wonderful person that is, or maybe doubt their ability to deliver their promises. and of course there are other prominent people such as the captains of industry that feature in the media and confidence is placed in them or not.

Football fans that follow a particular football club are renowned for making judgments on the managers of their club. They're quick to praise the manager when their team wins several matches in a row and you get comments like this I trust him to get our team into a higher division or perhaps my team will now win the league now that we have this manager and that sort of thing.

[5 : 25] That's what goes on in this world. People are constantly exalting one or maybe putting another person down and of course we all know that politicians like football managers have their day.

Now in Psalm 75 we're introduced in verse 1 to a group of people who respond as one with praise to God who is ever present, ever active as ruler over history.

He never gets voted into or out of office. He's never made redundant like a football manager. Listen again to the worshipping congregation in Psalm 75 and it is a congregation that are meeting together to praise the Lord.

Verse 1 We praise you, O God. We, we praise you for your name is near. People tell of your wonderful deeds.

And this praising community, speaking in Psalm 75, is drawn from ancient Israel. It's celebrating God's nearness and his many marvellous acts of deliverance when the Israelites called upon him in confusing and frightening times.

[6 : 53] And then if we go towards the close of the psalm, there's a response by an individual. It starts by a congregation worshipping God and of course we've been doing that tonight and right at the end it focuses in on an individual.

You as an individual are also responsible to God to praise him and you as an individual should make some sort of response in your heart to this God who is worthy of such praise.

Verse 9 begins like this. Ask for me. And you remember that Jacob, the individual was praising the God of Jacob for his righteous judgments and of course Jacob, as you know, was one of the patriarchs or fathers of the nation of Israel.

Who was Jacob? Well, you know. If you read Hebrews, you see that Jacob, although he's a deceitful man, was accepted by God because of his faith.

And the righteous described in verse 10 are those whose faith is in God and they're contrasted with the wicked who do not trust God.

[8 : 20] That's the difference basically between the righteous and the wicked in terms of the Bible. The righteous puts his trust or her trust in the living God, the ungodly do not trust God.

And in our opening hymn, opening hymn phrase we sung, happy the man whose hopes rely on Israel's God. Now Psalm 75 is a song of praise suitable for each and every person who is accepted by God because they trust him and his wonderful deeds and not themselves and their deeds.

Now if your confidence is in yourself or in those who boast in their power, this psalm is especially written for you because it tells you to think again.

Verse 1 tells us that God is to be praised because his name is near and the Lord is near whether you knew it or not.

In our second reading from Acts 17, Paul described the governor of the whole of mankind. And Paul went on like this, from one man, he made all the nations that they should inhabit the whole earth and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

[9 : 59] God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he's not far from any one of us.

God determined the whole history of the human race. He determined our movements, your movements, from the time that you were born, where you live now and where you shall go, where you shall die.

He knows absolutely everything about you. He's determined every aspect of your life. He set out the times of your life.

And this is the intention that we should reach out to him and find him. He's not far from any one of us. And that is why you're here tonight.

I wonder if you thought that, that God has brought you here tonight, that you should reach out and find him. Whether you're a Christian or whether you're not, that's God's purpose for you.

[11 : 05] He's here tonight and he's here that you might reach out and find him. But here's the question. How do you reach out for him?

In one of the early incidents in the history of the church, there's a Roman centurion called Cornelius. And although the story is quite a long one, basically Cornelius invited the apostle Peter to explain the Christian gospel to him and to his friends and to his family.

And the Gentile, Gentile Cornelius, addressed his guests with these words, we are all here in the presence of God to listen to God.

To listen to everything that the Lord has commanded you to tell us. So you can reach out for God, reach out to God when you listen to the word of God as it's being preached.

You can find him. If you don't know God, well, you can reach out. How do you reach out for him? Well, the apostle Paul wrote something that's very helpful for you in Romans chapter 10, verse 6.

[12 : 31] And Paul says, you don't have to ask for the risen Christ to come down to you from heaven. You know, if you're expecting a vision or something like that, you don't have to ask for that. And if you're a skeptic and you would like to say, well, come up from the dead, well, don't say that.

Paul said this, do not say in your heart who will ascend into heaven, that's bring Christ down, or who will descend into the deep, that's to bring Christ up from the dead. The word, the word is near you.

It's in your mouth and in your heart. That is the message concerning faith that we proclaim. And then he goes on to say, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

What does that mean? It means this, that you reach out to God by accepting his word about the Lord Jesus Christ and then calling out upon the name of the Lord.

Why the name of the Lord? Why not simply call upon the Lord? Why is it so important that you should call upon the name of the Lord?

[13 : 54] Well, the Bible uses names to describe what people are like. We do that when we give a child a name. We hope that the child lives up to the name that he has. Sadly, that doesn't always happen.

But God always lives up to his name. He is the God who has made himself known.

And when you cry out to the Lord, it's not to some mystical force that you don't know. It's to a God who has a name, who has a character, who's got attributes, those that he can call upon.

Otherwise, it's a meaningless exercise. We praise you, God. We praise you for your name is near.

At election times, politicians love photo opportunities that prove that they're not distant but close to ordinary people, one with them.

[15 : 02] and they hope that that'll win people round. He's one of us or she is one of us. The Bible brings a name to us that completely outshines the name of any politician.

It's Emmanuel, meaning God with us. It's not some mere politician. It's the creator of the whole universe, the one who orders all history, the ultimate politician, the one who is above everything, the governor of mankind.

And that God is with us. That's the name given to the Lord Jesus Christ. God with us. And then again, another Christmas reading, the writer Luke wrote of a visit of an angel to Mary.

This is what the angel said to Mary. Mary, you will conceive and give birth to a son and you will call him Jesus. He will be great and be called the son, the son of the most high.

His kingdom will never end. Why is he called the son of the most high? Well, one reason is this. He's the perfect image of his father.

[16 : 24] And the Bible informs us that when we look to him, we see the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being.

The apostle Paul spoke of him, for in him, in Jesus, in Christ, all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authority, all things have been created through him and for him.

He is before all things and in him all things hold together. And yet, he became the son of man.

He became one with us. He took on our flesh, our blood. He's a son of God, he's a son of man. He's very God of very God and very man of very man.

This is the Lord Jesus Christ that we worship the one whose name we should call upon. Have you called upon that name? Now, you wouldn't call on a distant, unknown, unpredictable God.

[17 : 38] The people of Israel in the Old Testament had a history of experiencing God's powerful, gracious and faithful deeds. In verse 1, it speaks of them telling each other, reminding each other of his marvellous saving deeds in history and he was a very present help in time of trouble.

And they knew it and they called upon him in time of trouble. When they provoked the Lord by disobedience and he brought trouble upon them in the form of famines or oppressive powerful enemies, if they called on him, if they called upon the name of the Lord, he saved them.

Psalms 107 is a psalm worthy of your study. Psalm 107 lists several examples of individuals who called upon the name of the Lord when they found themselves in trouble.

Some found themselves in a confused upside-down world that seemed out of control. Seem familiar? Some experienced loneliness. Some were exhausted at their wit's end facing death by starvation in a desert, death by illness, death at sea in a storm or death in prison.

They were without hope and yet they called on the name of the Lord and he saved them from all their fears. And their stories are encouraging.

[19 : 13] if you find yourself at your wit's end, at the end of your tether, plagued with guilt or fear or without hope. In Psalm 107 verse 2, the redeemed of the Lord were told to tell their stories.

And if you've been delivered from hopelessness, you should tell others about the work of God in your life. you're able to tell of God's wonderful deeds.

Are you not? Perhaps you don't have a story to tell because you've never looked in the right place or to the right person. The Apostle Peter boldly proclaimed, there's no other name under heaven by which you must be saved.

You must call upon the name of the Lord. the Lord who's revealed himself. The Lord who's holy, just, wise, good, merciful. The Lord who gave his son there at Calvary.

Have you come to trust in that Lord? Or are you still trusting in the ideas of men? Those who are impressive in their speech, their language, their manner, their dress.

[20 : 31] Nice people perhaps, but do they know the Lord? Who are you trusting in now, today? Have you got a story to tell? Well, if you have, tell others. Don't keep it to yourself.

Share it with your Christian friends. Now, Psalm 75 was written for the relatively small nation Israel that was surrounded by immensely powerful nations such as Egypt and Babylon.

the territory of Israel was invaded as kings looked to support to one of those nations and then the other. There was panic and confusion.

Which power block should they look to for safety and continue prosperity? Who should they fear most? Should they fear the one that made the greatest boast?

That's not a political choice, wasn't it? You know, I was intrigued by one of our TV adverts that called 2019 the year of confusion.

[21 : 39] Perhaps you have seen that advert. Listen to it. The year of confusion, 2019. Confusion in industry, confusion in ethics, confusion in politics, confusion multiplied as a nation listened to the arguments of one political viewpoint and then the other.

who do you trust in when you're confused and troubled? It's tempting to listen to the one who boasts that they have the power to give you a certain hope for the future.

Psalm 75 tells you not to put your trust, your confidence in political leaders and their messages. You need to listen to the Lord.

Listen to the Lord himself as he speaks in verses 2 to 5. In these verses the Lord warns against trusting in overconfident national or international leaders.

leaders. He warns those very leaders not to boast in what they have achieved or think they can do. And in particular, he rebukes those who proudly scoff at him, at his words, and oppose his will.

[23 : 11] Firstly, the Lord rebuked those who confidently asserted that times are in their hands. Verse 2, the Lord chooses the appointed time.

It's not just political leaders that guarantee that an event will happen by a certain date. Business leaders might boast that on such and such a day, they will complete a deal or open a major store in a town.

that the New Testament writer James rebukes overconfident, boastful businessmen in James chapter 4, verse 13.

Now, listen, you who say, today or tomorrow, we'll go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money. Why?

You don't even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? life? You're a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, if it's the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.

[24 : 28] As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. Now, of course, you should plan for the future, but ultimately, your future is not in your hands.

The Lord has his appointed time for all the events in our lives, great or small. And then look at verse 2.

The Lord asserts that he is the one who judges with equity, with fairness, with justice. School teachers should be fair, of course, in judging over classroom fallouts, but they may fail to judge impartially, into a lack of knowledge of the facts, or favoritism.

Local counsellors may be swayed by bribes in making important spending decisions. How often do we hear of postcode lotteries when it comes to the administration of care?

Perfect justice can only come from one with a totally righteous character, who has the power and the knowledge to administer it.

[25 : 49] Listen again to Paul as he spoke to the wise men of Athens. Paul said this, for he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice righteousness by the man he has appointed.

He has given proof of this by raising him from the dead. Jesus, the righteous one, the one in whom the Father was well pleased, the one who conquered temptation, the one to whom all power and authority has been given, he is the one who will judge the nations righteously.

The apostle Paul reminded Christians and non-Christians alike that we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

In Psalm 75, verse 2, God says, I choose the appointed time, it is I who judge with equity. equality. That's the appointment we all have to face.

Sometimes we try to avoid appointments we don't really fancy or the ones that we are nervous about. This is an appointment that we have to face. There's no excuse.

[27 : 16] We'll all have to face that appointment on that day and no one knows when that day shall be. But it will be a day of awesome, perfect justice.

But what about now? Is the world out of control? It might seem to you that people in the world are rather like clothes being randomly tossed around like clothes in a washing machine.

And we're constantly here of terrorism, wars, rumours of wars, the threat of global warming. Apparent chaos is not new, it's not something that's new to the 21st century.

Many of us can look back to the middle of the last century, when the major military powers of the world spoke about MAD, mutual assured destruction.

Some of you might recall the Cuban missile crisis in the early 60s. It came to nothing. And if baby boomers feared the end of the world through nuclear war, what's the great concern of millennials?

[28 : 28] Isn't it global warming and the poisoning of the environment? Know what the Lord says in verse 3? When the earth and all its peoples quake, it is I who hold the pillars firm.

How? Well, a thousand and one ways, but ultimately it's because in him we live and move and have our being.

Of course, this doesn't mean that the world as we know will carry on forever. The Lord does not hold that world's pillars firm.

Pillars are intended to support the roof, and on the day of his appointment, the roof of this world will come down. And the apostle Peter wrote of the final appointed time.

Peter said this in one of his letters, the day of the Lord will come like a thief, the heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare, but not yet.

[29 : 48] Why? Peter went on. He's patient with you, not wanting that anyone should perish, but that everyone come to repentance.

Now, you cannot prevent God's appointed times. It's pointless shaking your fist at God if he crosses your plans.

Listen to verses 4 and 5. To the arrogant, I say, boast no more, and to the wicked, do not lift up your horns.

Do not lift up your horns against heaven. Do not speak defiantly. You know, I don't see many people walking around with horns.

So, what was meant by that expression horns? I don't think any of us have got horns, have we? Well, if you go back to ancient times, to the time of the psalmist, ancient warriors used to have horns fastened onto their battle helmets as a symbol of their power.

[30 : 57] They probably had in mind stags fighting against each other. Have you seen pictures on the TV of deer, even ordinary deer, heads down with their horns?

Showing their power, destroying opponents? Well, the psalmist says, do not lift your horns against heaven. It's figurative language.

So, that's the Lord's word in verses 2 to 5. Now, what's your response to those words? Are you proud and rebellious against him?

Are you submissive to him? How are you responding to his patience? Are you presuming that he will continue to uphold your life?

That's the words of the Lord, verses 2 to 5. Verses 6 to 7 are spoken as a wise observer, spoken from a wise observer looking at human history.

[32 : 06] This is what the wise observer has to say. No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt themselves. Anxious citizens of Israel or Judah might follow the path of the sun as it rose in the east and sets in the west.

They might look to where the sun was at its height in the south where the desert is. And in scanning the world they may perceive threats to their security.

And they needed to remember this that no one can exalt themselves. It's God who judges. He brings one down he exalts another.

And it's true of nations it's true of individuals. Do you like watching bubbles? Children do you like watching bubbles and you see bubbles going off into the sky big ones and you wonder how long that bubble is going to last.

And you follow it do hope it's going to last for a very long time. It's such a big and beautiful bubble and then all of a sudden it pops and it's gone.

[33 : 18] And the great men of history are like this. The men and women that the media follow are like large bubbles. Now of course they're not propelled by a child's breath.

We say they're thrown up by history. And of course that's absolutely right. They're thrown up by his story. That's what history is all about.

The great men of history are God's people. Those that God has raised whether they be good or bad. Remember that God raised up other people in the Old Testament.

Not necessarily good people. It's God who judges. He brings one down he exalts another. Now it's a good thing to remember when we see a rising political power that causes us to worry whether it's a national power or an international power.

It's God who judges. He brings one down he exalts another. It's a good thing to remember when we see someone we don't particularly like being promoted at work perhaps a rival.

[34 : 28] And it's a good thing to remember good thing to remind yourself if you receive any kind of promotion it's God who exalts it's God who brings down.

Bubbles. What do you have if you've got lots of bubbles together? You go to the seaside sometimes you see foam particularly after an angry storm.

And foam is produced when milk is boiling. And if you look at milk boiling of course you don't stay very long watching milk boiling over there are lots of angry bubbles large bubbles small bubbles suddenly appearing moving around erratically and unpredictably and then quickly bursting.

And then sometimes the unstable foam overflows angrily and threateningly. Angry almost unpredictable foam is held in the confines of a pan and a terrifying picture of the wrath of God.

The wrath of God even now it's been revealed against all the ungodliness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.

[35 : 50] See how the psalmist describes it in verse 8. He spoke of a foam made by adding spices to wine. Verse 8 In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of fermenting wine mixed with spices.

He pours it out. Did you notice the present tense there? It's not something that's going to happen. It's something he pours out now. The wrath of God is being revealed against all the ungodliness of wicked men.

And all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs. And that's the sad explanation of history.

Nations rising, nations falling, tyrants rising, tyrants coming down. And whenever tyrants are brought up and brought down, there's great suffering upon humanity.

So what are the spices of history? Well, there are loads of spices, so we might like spices, but these are not nice spices. The sort of spices are in mind here, things like human covetousness, lust for power, warfare, famine, disasters, death, those are some of the spices, some of those things that mark out our confused world.

[37 : 12] it's a form poured out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs, until there's no more left, and life as we know it is extinguished on that final day of God's appointment.

judgment. It's a dreadful picture, isn't it? Are you part of that world? Have you been delivered from that world? I'd like to take you to another picture, another cup, another cup of wrath.

There at Gethsemane, the night before Calvary, Jesus prayed, Father, if it's possible, take this cup from me, not my will, but yours be done.

Jesus experienced the full horror of God's wrath, that you might call out on him, and find him, and find righteousness and peace with God.

That's love, is it not? What a wonderful thing, that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

[38 : 39] Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. So that brings us to the close of the psalm.

The psalm closes with the words of that particular individual who was able to rejoice in singing praises to God. He identified himself with the righteous.

He was one who called upon the Lord, who trusted in his mercy and found peace with God. Are you such an individual?

Have you found peace with God through that wrath that was poured out at Calvary? Let's pray. Let's pray.