

Knowing God

Psalm 76:1-12

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Psalm 76. We've already commented that Psalm 74 and 75 are tied together. Psalm 74 ends with a plea for God to rise up and defend His own cause (in the 22nd verse), and Psalm 75 contemplates the confidence of the believer at the very thought of the coming of God's judgment, whereas Psalm 76 contemplates that judgment at least in some measure as already having come. The Septuagint (or, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was commonly known and read in Jesus' day) even adds to the inscription of this Psalm that is occurred on the occasion of the victory of God against Sennacherib and the Assyrians, and Hezekiah lifted up his prayer before God for the defense of His people against this mighty army of some 200,000 Assyrians. And we'll see what the Lord did in this story tonight. This Psalm seems to be in praise of God for His judgment against the wicked and for His vindication of His people in a great time of national need.

Let me outline the Psalm for you. It's entirely possible that in your own translation the Psalm is broken into four parts, and that's appropriate.

The first part you'll see there in verses 1-3. In those verses we are told by the Psalmist that God's people know God. Now, you know that "knowing God" is both an Old Testament way and a New Testament way of indicating the privilege that the people of God have in the knowledge of God — the true and saving knowledge of God, whereby we experience Him in His benefits and He draws near to us.

Well, in these three verses we're told by the Psalmist that God's people know God in at least three ways. First of all, we know Him because He has revealed himself uniquely in His name to His people; secondly, we know Him in His ordinances (that is, in the things that He has established for His worship He reveals Himself to His people); and, we know Him in His deliverances. And these three verses, this first section of the Psalm, celebrate the people of God knowing God in His revelation to them, in His ordinances, and in His deliverances.

The second part of the Psalm you'll see there in verses 4-6. This part of the Psalm reminds us that God's people are confident in God to deliver them

because they know His character (and it doesn't change), and they know His power (and it doesn't change). And so God's people are given comfort because they know that God is greater than His enemies. That's the second part of the Psalm.

The third part of the Psalm you'll see there in verses 7-9. In this part of the Psalm, we're told that because God's people know God they know that He will judge. Now, when we hear the word *judgment*, normally we think of God's judgment on the wicked, and that is appropriate. The Bible talks about that judgment of God against the wicked all the time, and as Christians we especially think of God's judgment on the wicked at the Last Day, on the final Judgment; but what we very often leave out, and this is a great comfort to the people of God, is that in the Bible just as often as God's judgment is about His condemnation of the wicked, it is also about His vindication of the humble of His people, of those who are in need. And this section of this Psalm celebrates both of those aspects: God's judgment against the wicked, but His vindication of His people. That's the third part of this Psalm.

And then, if you'll look at verses 10-12, you see the fourth part of this Psalm. In these verses we see again God's sovereignty expressed even against the backdrop of anger of unbelieving men against Him. Here in this portion of the Psalm we're told that even the wrath of man will be made to preserve the praise of God. These are the three portions of this Psalm.

We won't necessarily follow the outline in a four-point shape. I want to draw your attention to seven particular things as we work through the Psalm, but drawn from each of these sections for our comfort and our meditation tonight. Before we read God's word and hear it proclaimed, let's look to Him in prayer and ask for His help and blessing.

Lord, we do thank You for Your word. We feed on it day by day. We can remember times when You brought Your word to us in such a powerful way it was as if You were whispering in our ear. Lord God, we also remember times when You have visited us in the preaching and teaching of Your word, and You have spoken so clearly as to give us a life-changing grasp of Your truth.

Lord, we do not know all the circumstances of Your people tonight. We do not know the burdens that they bring as they come to worship You, but we know that You know, and so we ask that You would give a word to them from Your word. By Your Spirit, so apply the truth of Your word to their lives, to their hearts, to their circumstances, that they can say 'Lord God, You have spoken, and Your servant has heard, and I delight in the truth of Your word.'

Lord God, Your Bible, the word of God, is a lamp to our feet and a light to our way, so show us the way by Your truth from Your word. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

This is the word of God.

For the choir director; on stringed instruments. A Psalm of Asaph, a Song.

God is known in Judah; His name is great in Israel.
And His tabernacle is in Salem, His dwelling place also is in Zion.
There He broke the flaming arrows, The shield, and the sword, and the
weapons of war.

[Selah.]

Thou art resplendent, More majestic than the mountains of prey.
The stouthearted were plundered; They sank into sleep;
And none of the warriors could use his hands.
At Thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, Both rider and horse were cast into a
dead sleep.
Thou, even Thou, art to be feared;
And who may stand in Thy presence when once Thou art angry?

Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven; The earth feared,
and was still,
When God arose to judgment, To save all the humble of the earth. [Selah.
For the wrath of man shall praise Thee;
With a remnant of wrath Thou shalt gird Thyself.

Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them;
Let all who are around Him bring gifts to Him who is to be feared.
He will cut off the spirit of princes;
He is feared by the kings of the earth.

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

Some 200,000 Assyrians were hard pressed against Israel, waiting for the word
of their commander to begin the assault. Hezekiah lifted up a prayer, and the
Lord said to Hezekiah, "Hezekiah, because you have prayed to Me..." —
Hezekiah didn't go to the false gods that were so popular amongst his people, he
went to the one true God — and so the Lord said, "Hezekiah, because you have
prayed to Me, I have heard and I will answer." And He answered in the most
remarkable way, and in the wake of that answer came this Psalm: this Psalm
which celebrates God's judgment on the wicked and His vindication of His
people, and there are seven particular things that I'd like you to see that God is
saying to you and to me tonight as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I. God's people know God and know Him to be great.

And the first thing you'll see right off the bat in verse 1. God there reminds us that He has revealed Himself to His people, and that they know Him and that they know Him to be great.

Listen again to these words: "God is known in Judah; His name is great in Israel." The Psalmist is reminding us there of the greatest blessing, the greatest privilege that we enjoy as the people of God. We know God. We have been blessed with a saving and experiential knowledge and communion with the living God. He has revealed His name to us, His character, and His reputation. He has told us what He is like. He has shown us His mercies. He has given to us benefits which we could not have enjoyed unless He in His mercy had bestowed those benefits on us. And this is one of the ancient themes of God's word: that God is known among His people. Yes, the Apostle Paul makes it clear in Romans 1, that everyone knows there is a God; in fact, it's not just that everyone knows that there is a God, but everyone knows that there is the true God who ought to be worshiped. The words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 1 remind us that the reason there are people in this world that do not worship the one true God is not because they don't know enough; it is because they refuse to do what they ought to do with the revelation of God which is so clear in nature and even in their own hearts. They worship the creature rather than the Creator, even though they know that there is one true God who ought to be loved and served and worshiped.

But that's not the kind of knowledge that the Psalmist is talking about. The kind of knowledge that the Psalmist is talking about is the kind of knowledge that Moses speaks about in Exodus 6. Turn back with me to that great passage. You remember the scene: Moses is told by the Lord,

"I am the Lord," [Ex. 6:2] "...and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty [*El Shaddai* — God Almighty], but by My name, LORD, [*Jehovah* or *Yaweh*] I did not make Myself known to them. And I established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned. And furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage; and I have remembered My covenant. Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."

Now that is a most interesting passage, because in that passage God tells Moses that He has not revealed Himself by His name, LORD, or *Yahweh*, to His people. But if you look back in Genesis, which Moses also wrote, God did indeed

reveal Himself by His name LORD or *Yahweh* to His people from the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So is this a discrepancy? Did Moses blow a gasket and forget what God had already revealed to the people of God in the history of His dealings with them? No.

What is God saying? So clearly here He is saying this: 'I have told the people of God My name, LORD, in days past, but when I am finished with the Exodus, My people are going to know what it means that I am the LORD. They are going to know Me in ways that they have not known Me before, even in ways that transcend the way I revealed Myself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are going to know things about Me; they are going to know Me in ways that far surpass what I have revealed to them before.' And so this great Exodus is not only going to be an event of redemption, where the people of God are brought out of bondage and slavery, but it's going to be an event of revelation.

And so the Psalmist can again say "God is known in Judah; His name is great in Israel", you see, in the wake of this great deliverance from Sennacherib. Once again the Psalmist can say just like the people of God came out of Egypt, and through the Exodus knew God in ways that they had not known Him before, so also the people of God know Him and He has made Himself known in Judah in this mighty deliverance. God has revealed Himself to His people, and they know Him, and they know Him to be great.

Perhaps you've had that kind of experience, where the Lord God has revealed Himself in His word or in answer to prayer, and you feel as if you have known Him again for the first time. Perhaps you've been studying the word, and some truth of God has been brought home with such force you've said to yourself, 'I never knew that before.' You may have read the verse a hundred times; you may have heard it taught a hundred times; but it has come home with such truth that you say 'I never knew God did that. I never realized that God was like that. I never knew God before.'

Or perhaps it was in answer to a prayer — a hopeless prayer that you had lifted up to the Lord, and you just didn't think it was possible that that trial could be overcome, or that situation could be conquered, and God in His mercy answered that prayer, and you knew God to be a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God in ways that you didn't know before. And here's the Psalmist saying 'When we saw the way that God answered in the trial of the invading army of Sennacherib, we knew God was Lord, and we knew He was great.' My friends, that is the very foundation of our praise: the privilege of knowing God and know that He is great. And it is something that we need to cultivate in our reading of the word. We ought to pray as we're reading through the word, 'Lord, reveal Yourself to us and reveal Yourself to be great, and give me the faith to believe it and the thankful heart to praise You for it.' So there's the first thing we see. God has revealed Himself to His people, and they know Him, and they know Him to be great.

Think of the Book of Ezekiel — what is it? Fifty some-odd times, God says what in the Book of Ezekiel? In response to what He will do — what? “They will know that I am the Lord.” And think of what Paul prays for you and me in the Book of Ephesians. We haven't gotten there yet, but in Ephesians 3 he is going to pray that each and every one of you who love Jesus Christ, who trust in Him, who have been united with Him by grace, by the work of the Holy Spirit, will know the height and depth and breadth of the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ. That is the heart of religion, and this is where the Psalmist begins. So the first thing we see is that God has revealed Himself to His people, and they know Him, and they know Him to be great.

II. God's people know God to be greater than any enemy.

But here's the second thing. Look at verses 2-3. Here we're reminded two specific ways in which God makes Himself known:

“His tabernacle is in Salem [Salem is a short term for Jerusalem], His dwelling place is in Zion [Zion is the name of the mountain of the Lord, the hilltop, the high place that David had established as his capital]. There He broke the flaming arrows, the shield, and the sword, and the weapons of war.”

So there we see God making Himself known in two ways: in His ordinances and in His deliverances.

First, in His ordinances. Notice the mention: “His tabernacle...His dwelling place.” The tabernacle was the place where God visibly manifested His nearness to, His presence in the midst of His people. You remember, when the tabernacle was dedicated, God's glory cloud came down so that the people of God could visibly see witness to the fact that God was going to be going in the wilderness all the way into the Promised Land. He was going to be going right in their midst.

The tabernacle was the place where the people of God met with God, because that is where He manifested His nearness. It's not that the great God of heaven and earth could be contained in this tiny tent, because as glorious as the tabernacle was that was basically what it was — it was a big tent, just like a sheik in the desert in the nomadic tribes would live in. It was a really big tent, it was a nice tent, it was an ornate tent, but it was a tent! And it couldn't contain the God of heaven and earth, but it could manifest to the people of God that God was right in the middle of their situation. He was right in the midst of them. Whatever predicament they were going to go through, He was going to go through it with them.

And here the Psalmist is reminding the people of God that that tabernacle that once traveled through the wilderness is right in their midst in Jerusalem, in Zion. That's where it is, and God has made Himself known through that ordinance.

He's the One that commanded that tabernacle to be built. It's an ordinance: it was something that God ordered to be done. But He did it not only for His glory, but for His people's comfort and good, so that they would know that He was near to them, so that they would know that they could meet with Him, so that they would know of His presence, so that they would know Him.

Today there is no longer a tabernacle...at least, not a tabernacle made with hands. No, the temple of God's presence now is God's people, so that when you gather in the name of Jesus Christ for His praise, you become His house, His tabernacle, His temple, the dwelling place of God. And that is why it is such an especial blessing, that is why the people of God count it a privilege to gather, because there they know the presence of God because He makes Himself known in His ordinances.

But he also makes Himself known in His deliverances. Notice how the Psalmist speaks of God's "breaking the flaming arrows, the shield, and the sword, and the weapons of war." They can look and see how God has miraculously delivered them, and in this they see God make Himself known.

And so God makes Himself known in His ordinances and His deliverances, and we may not have deliverances like the children of Israel did with Sennacherib, recorded for us in Isaiah 37, but we have our deliverances, and we praise God for them, and we know Him in those deliverances.

III. God's people know God and thus know that He will judge.

Thirdly, look at verses 4-6. In these verses the Psalmist celebrates this truth: That no aggressor is a match for God. There is no enemy who is a match for God. Take your Bibles and turn with me to Isaiah, Isaiah 37. We've alluded to it several times, now let's turn to it. Allow your eyes to look through this verse. Hezekiah has received a message, and upon receiving that message he's undone, and he takes the message in hand and he goes up to the house of the Lord, and he literally spreads the message out before the Lord [you see this in Isaiah 37:14ff], and he begins to pray to the God of Israel, acknowledging that He alone is God. And then this message comes to Hezekiah through Isaiah the prophet:

"Thus says the Lord [verse 21], the God of Israel, 'Because you have prayed to Me about Sennacherib king of Assyria, this is the word that the Lord has spoken against him: 'She has despised you and mocked you, the virgin daughter of Zion; She has shaken her head behind you, the daughter of Jerusalem! Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? And against whom have you raised your voice, and haughtily lifted up your eyes? Against the Holy One of Israel!'"

And then He pronounces His judgment on Sennacherib and his armies, and

we're told this:

“Then this shall be the sign for you: you shall eat this year what grows of itself, in the second year what springs from the same, and in the third year sow, reap, plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. And the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward. For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and out of Mount Zion survivors. The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this.” Therefore, thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, “He shall not come to this city, or shoot an arrow there; neither shall he come before it with a shield, nor throw up a mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come to this city,” declares the Lord. “For I will defend this city to save it for my own sake and for My servant David's sake.”

Then we read,

“Then the angel of the Lord went out, and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, all of these were dead.”

And the Psalmist says in Psalm 76:4 —

“Thou art resplendent, More majestic than the mountains of prey.

The stouthearted were plundered; They sank into sleep; And none of the warriors could lift his hands.

At Your rebuke, O God of Jacob, Both rider and horse were cast into a dead sleep.”

God delivered his people in the days of Moses and “cast the horse and rider into the sea”; God delivered David from all his enemies, and in II Samuel 5 and 7 we are told that “He gave David rest from all his enemies.” And then God delivered Hezekiah. Over and over, God miraculously delivered His people, and they learned that no aggressor is a match for God. No enemy of the people of God is a match for Him, and this confidence is a confidence that causes the people of God to be confident in His promises to help them in their time of need, because God's people know that He does not change, and His power does not change. And so we trust in Him no matter what we face.

IV. God is so sovereign that even man's angry rejection of Him will serve to bring Him praise in the end.

There's a fourth thing I want you to see, and you see it in verses 7 and 8. Here

we learn that God will judge the world, and therefore should be feared — should be held in reverence and awe. Look at these words:

“You, even You, are to be feared; and who may stand in Your presence when once You are angry? You cause judgment to be heard from heaven....”

This is the assurance that God will judge the world, and even has He has judged Sennacherib in his arrogance against God, just as He has brought His judgment against the army of the Assyrians, so also God will judge the world; and therefore, He is to be held in reverence and awe. That's the negative part of God's judgment against the wicked.

V. But we see a fifth point as we look at verse 8. Notice these words: “The earth feared, and was still, when God arose to judgment....”

Now, that sounds like it's continuing this idea of God's rising to judge the wicked, but look at the final words of verse 9:

“...When God arose to judgment, to save all the humble of the earth.”

So, God's judgment is going to be salvation for His people, and this verse is describing the earth standing in dumbstruck awe as God vindicates His people. The world stands dumbstruck as God arises to judge His people, to reward His people, to vindicate His people.

I think most of us who have grown up in the evangelical church have grown up trembling somewhat at our thoughts of the Judgment Day, and of course it is an appropriate thing to do, to tremble at the great Day of Judgment. But equally, it ought to be a Day that we look forward to if we understand justification by faith, because on that Day, because our justification rests upon the righteousness of Christ, it is going to be a Day of vindication. And even as we read in Psalm 35 this morning, on that great Day every accusation against the people of God is going to be found to be without cause. There will be no accusation that will stand, and God's people will be vindicated. The Psalmist wants us to know that and to revel in that truth.

VI. There's a sixth thing I want you to see in verse 10, because here we're told that even the wrath of man will be to the praise of God:

“For the wrath of man shall praise You...”, the Psalmist says. In other words, even the anger of unbelievers against God will bring Him praise. The picture again is of the judgment of God against the wicked, and I think some of us (going back to that image of the last Day) often wonder at what that scene will be like. Surely, (we think in our hearts) the wicked, the ungodly, will be penitent as they

stand before the throne of Judgment and realize that they have been wrong, that they should have followed the one true God, that an eternity of separation from Him awaits them. Surely (we think to ourselves) they will be penitent. They'll be repentant. They will be undone. They will be filled with godly sorrow at the thought that they have not worshiped the one true God.

And yet the picture of the Book of Revelation is that of the wicked standing before even God's great throne and gnashing their teeth against Him in anger, rebelling against Him even against the open and evident manifestation of His sovereignty. And then we are told that even that wrath will serve His praise, for He will visit just judgment on them, even as He vindicates His people. And so even the anger of unbelievers against God will bring Him praise, and the Psalmist reminds us of that.

VII. Then there's a seventh and a final thing I want you to see. You see it in verses 11-12: "Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them; let all who are around Him bring gifts to Him who is to be feared. He will cut off the spirit of princes; He is feared by the kings of the earth."

In the face of God's just judgment against His enemies, in light of God's vindication of His people, what are we to do? Well, the Psalmist tells us in verse 11: "Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them; let all who are around Him bring gifts to Him who is to be feared."

You knew it was coming in stewardship season! The response of God's people to this great judgment and victory which He has given to them, and this great judgment upon the enemies of God, is to bring gifts to God. The vows, we've studied together in the Book of Leviticus. Those vows both confirm that the people of God recognize that everything that they have comes from God, and so a portion of what they have is vowed back to God, in confidence of God's fulfilling His promises to them.

This is not the sly strategy of televangelists who want you to make a vow and send them a thousand dollars, and surely you'll make \$25,000-\$30,000 if you'll just send them in that vow, that pledge, of a thousand dollars. No, this is the people of God being told to bring gifts to God in recognition of the fact that everything that they have God has given them, and in recognition of the fact that God has promised to bless them, to heed their prayers because of His mercy; and, therefore, they are to give to Him because of His judgment.

This is part of the worship of the people of God, and it continues to this day as we give alms to those in need and we give to the work of His kingdom in response to the greatness of the victory that He has won on our behalf.

This Psalm is, in the end, about knowing God; about knowing God in the way He

has revealed His name to us, and the way He has revealed Himself to us in His ordinances, and the way He has revealed Himself to us in His deliverances and in His judgment; and those who know God long to worship God in giving God of what He has given to them. Let us pray.

Our Lord and our God, thank You for this Your word. We thank You for this Psalmist who had seen the deliverance of the Lord, and his response to it was thanksgiving because that deliverance had revealed to him something about God. We would know You, Lord. We would know You in Your word; we would know You in Your worship; we would know You in all the circumstances of our lives in which You show Your hand of deliverance. And then we would worship You and give You praise because You have revealed Yourself to us, and we know You and that Your name is great. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please stand for God's blessing.

Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, through Jesus Christ our Lord, until the day break and the shadows flee away. Amen.

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