**Awesome power of God to deliver** 15/9/24 dkm md am

Read: Psalm 114, Matthew 16:13-27

Text: Psalm 114

Psalms: 68:17-20, 77:15-20, 18:6-15, 72old

I hate speed bumps! A few years ago, the road turning from the highway into my place was ruined by no less than six speed bumps. I now take a different road which is a bit risky but at least is smooth. The road along the riverbank where we lived in India was a smooth road until they decided to build speed bumps on it. But one day I saw workmen removing the speed bumps. I was so pleased but was told they were only being removed because the prime minister would be driving down the road.

I am reminded of the way being prepared for the coming of the Lord, a straight highway with rough places made smooth (Isa 40:3,4). In Psalm 114 we reflect on the Lord bringing his chosen people out of slavery in Egypt and into Canaan. The sea and the river became a dry path as God, who was in the presence of his redeemed people, approached.

Psalm 114 is the second of the Hallel psalms. In Psalm 113 we sang praise to the Lord who dwells on high, the God who made the universe and rules over all the nations. That psalm ended with God humbling himself to come down, and lift up the poor and the needy. Here in Psalm 114 the Lord did just that; he came down and delivered his people out of bondage and brought them into their own land.

God came from on high to dwell among his chosen people. While ever God was with them, they were invincible. Other nations could not stop their advance. Indeed, terror fell upon the people of Jericho as the nation of slaves approached (Josh 2:9). Like the Egyptians, they thought the river, or the sea, would stop the Israelites advance, but no! The Lord God of Israel in his mighty power brought them through the waters that other nations feared. No power on earth or in heaven could stop the advance of this people whose God is the Lord. Jesus said, ‘I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it’ (Mat 16:18).

This short psalm is remarkable for its vivid language and personification. Its theme is seen in verse 7 and the words, ‘Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord’. It is made up of four stanzas, but for our purposes we will note three subheadings: ‘People of God’, Power of God’, and ‘Presence of God’.

**1.People of God**

Despite the sin of Adam and Eve, and their being cut off from the garden and from God, God promised that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). In time, and after Noah’s flood, God spoke to Abraham, promising that through him all the nations would be blessed (Gen 12:3). But Abraham’s descendants through Sarah ended up in Egypt as slaves. It was there that God, according to his eternal purpose, formed the nation or people through whom he would bring blessing to all the families of the earth. They were a nation of slaves, despised and rejected by the world, but God heard their cry and came down to deliver them.

The nation of slaves became a holy nation and a kingdom of priests (Exod 19:5,6). They became the special treasure of God, a people like no other because God had chosen them and had come to dwell among them (Deut 7:6). They were God’s special people and the focus of his favour, but they must never become proud, thinking that they were somehow worthy of God’s love (Deut 7:6-8). They were chosen and delivered by grace alone. Psalm 115 reminded them that all glory and praise belonged to God because of his mercy or covenant love, and his faithfulness.

This is the background to this people group becoming the people of God. God set his love upon them and made a covenant with them. But the focus of this psalm is on the power of God, the mighty power of God displayed in bringing them out of Egypt and into the land of Canaan- what is called the Exodus. These people must never forget the Exodus and neither must we, even though it pointed forward to the greater and ultimate deliverance from sin and death through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We who belong to Jesus are now the ‘chosen generation, a royal priesthood, His own special people’ (1Peter 2:9). As we sing this palm today, we keep in mind the history and the fulfilment as displays of the mighty power of our God. Let us be reading about the Exodus and teaching our children this their history, if we truly are the people of God.

These verses remind us of two things. Firstly, that Israel or Jacob went out of Egypt, out ‘from a people of a strange language’ (114:1). Israel and Jacob are synonyms; Isaac named his son ‘Jacob’ meaning ‘clutcher or grabber’. God gave him a new name ‘Isarel’ meaning ‘struggled with men and God and has prevailed’ (Gen 25:26, 32:28). When the Lord took Isarel down to Egypt they settled in the land of Goshen and did not mix with the Egyptians, who spoke a different language and worshipped different gods. When a new Pharaoh came to power and started persecuting the Israelites, God heard their cry and sent Moses to rescue them.

This psalm speaks of God making his sanctuary within Judah, and having dominion over Isarel (114:2). The nation later split into two kingdoms, but before this Judah, as the largest tribe, was sometimes set apart. God came and dwelt among this people and was their king or ruler. God dwelling among his people is pictured in the cloud and fire that led them, and later in the Tent of Meeting in the desert. God’s presence and rule was associated with the people he chose rather than the land which he was giving them. Hindus associate their gods with the physical land of India, and some Christians think of a physical land and kingdom over which God will rule.

**2.Power of God**

Poetry was not my favourite subject at school, but I now see the beauty and understand the benefits of poetry. Although the psalms are songs or prayers written in Hebrew, our English translation is still beautiful poetry because the images and the personification survive translation. When we read, ‘the sea saw and fled’ and ‘the mountains skipped like rams’ we understand this as poetic language. We know from history that the sea ‘turned back’ or divided when Moses stretched out his hand over it (Exod 14:21). This demonstration of God’s awesome and almighty power was so well known in Isarel, and among the nations, that this psalm does not mention the name of the Lord until verse 7; apart from the ‘His’ in verse 2.

The focus is on the creation, God’s creation, responding to the command of God. The Exodus event is telescoped into the crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan River under the leadership of Moses and Joshua respectively. No man or man-made god has the power to perform what we call a miracle- apart from Jesus of course. Jesus showed the same power when he told the wind to stop and it did, and the sea became calm (Mark 4:39). The Lord does not change so he has the same power today. When the apostle Paul prayed during a storm at sea the Lord assured him that no lives would be lost (Acts 27:23,24). You may have read of, or even experienced, God answering your prayer related to weather events, although the dividing of the Red Sea remains unique in history.

This and the other Hallel psalms have no title and no named writer, although David cannot be ruled out. So to what do the words, ‘the mountains skipped like rams’ refer? (114:4). The context continues to be the Exodus. When the Israelites came to Mt Sinai and Moses went up the mountain, the earth shook and the people trembled in fear (Exod 19:18, 20:18). The writer to the Hebrews recalls this event when he reminds us that the Lord will once again shake the earth, as well as the heavens (Heb 12:18-27). With all the talk about climate change and disastrous weather events, little is said about volcanoes and earthquakes. But the Bible talks about mountains being shaken, and indeed, skipping like rams and lambs. This happened at Sinai and will happen with greater power as the world comes to an end with the coming of the Lord (Mat 24:7).

Rhetorical questions in verse 5 and 6 reinforce the response of the creation to the awesome power of almighty God. The people of this world live fear of the creation or think they are in control of the creation. The people of God fear the creator and recognise that God is in charge of his creation. Just as the disciples ‘strained at the oars’ (Mark 6:4), so the people of this world struggle against the ‘forces of nature’ or the ‘new god’ of climate change. Modern man thinks he can control this modern god while ignoring the almighty God of creation. Let us, like the disciples of Jesus, turn to him who alone can still the waves: ‘And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure and marvelled’ (Mark 6:51). Let us turn to Jesus to save us from more than the wind and the waves because Jesus is powerful to save us from sin and death. Let us remember the power of the resurrection.

**3.Presence of God**

In verse 7 we come to the climax and theme of this psalm. We move from the past to the present with wise words directed at the earth, or we might say at the world. We spoke of Jericho being fearful of the people whose God is the Lord: ‘What great nation is there that has God so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon him?’ (Deut 4:7). The Lord God came to dwell among his chosen people, and he continues to dwell among his chosen people, as in new covenant people who confess their sin and believe in Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul knew the power of God not only to deliver him from shipwreck and from prison, but to deliver all who call upon the Lord for salvation from sin and death. ‘If God is for us, who can be against us’ he writes in Romans 8:31. Nothing is all creation, not trouble, not persecution or the sword, not the devil, and not even death, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:39). Satan or the devil was defeated at the cross. In the power of Jesus, you can say ‘no’ to Satan and he will flee from you (Ja 4:7).

The kingdom of God is the kingdom that will prevail; all other kingdoms and their kings will pass away. It is the church that will prevail, the true church, in which God’s word is preached and in which God dwells by his Spirit. It is for us to believe and be assured that God is dwelling in us both individually and as the church (1Cor 6:19, 3:16,17). It is for us to be living in the victory we have in Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, ‘be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord’ (1Cor 15:58).

Psalm 114 closes with the assurance that God cares for his covenant people. The same power by which he divided the sea and the river, is seen in God providing water from the rock when his people were thirsty (Exod 17:7, Numb 20:11). Despite their grumbling, God is his great love and great power took care of his people and brought them into the promised land. The Lord God continues to care for his people today. ‘Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, because He cares for you’ (1Peter 5:6,7). He will never leave us of forsake us but will protect us and provide for us until he brings us into our heavenly home and into his glorious presence.