



Psalm 75 - Thanksgiving for God's Wondrous Deeds

To the leader: Do Not Destroy. A Psalm of Asaph. A Song.

Introduction

This is a hymn of praise, thanking God for the wondrous deeds he has done for Israel, and celebrating the fact that he is the judge of all the earth and will, in his own time, put down the wicked and lift up the faithful. There is no indication of a specific occasion for which someone wrote this psalm or the congregation sang it, but this is not surprising; its lesson of faith - God's sovereign rule that this psalm celebrates is often invisible - is needful at all times.

Psalm 75:1 - O God, We Recount Your Wondrous Deeds.

The subject 'we' is Israel: they are the ones to whom God's name is near, they are the people on whose account God has done his wondrous deeds. In the Psalms, deeds that are 'wondrous,' 'mighty,' 'awesome,' etc., are the great acts God has done to guide and guard his people so that they can flourish in true piety; e.g. the plagues of Egypt, the crossing of the Jordan River, defeating enemies.

- 1 We give thanks to you, O God;
we give thanks; your name is near.
People tell of your wondrous deeds.

Psalm 75:1

We give thanks. Asaph wrote this from the perspective of the congregation; they together say we give thanks to you, O God, and the thought is repeated for emphasis. The people of God gladly give thanks unto their God. Charles Spurgeon

said, “We should praise God again and again. Stinted gratitude is ingratitude. For infinite goodness there should be measureless thanks.”

Your name is near. People tell of your wondrous deeds. Their gratitude toward God had a basis, a reason. They gave thanks to God not only for his wondrous works, but for what those works proclaimed: that God, in all his character and attributes, i.e. your name, was near to his people: <<*The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth*>> (Psalm 145:18).

Christians are grateful for God’s great works among them but not only for the works themselves. They are constant reminders of the love, goodness, mercy and wisdom of God toward and among his people. It is a wonderful thing to know and experience that his name is near. The reason for rejoicing lies in the manifest presence of God proclaimed and celebrated in the stories of God’s mighty acts. In remembrance and retelling of the history of salvation lies the comforting affirmation of God’s closeness to his people.

Spurgeon quoted Venema, “The name of God is said to be near, because it had come into public notice, and was in every mind and every tongue – opposed to what is unknown and obscure, which is said to be far remote.” God’s name is part of his self-giving: a revelation of who he is and an invitation to call upon him: <<*Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*>> (Joel 2:32a).

Psalm 75:2-5 - God Declares that He Will Judge the Earth with Equity.

In this section God speaks, promising that he will work his perfect judgement over the earth. This judgement will be with equity, preserving the stability of God’s creation order. Specifically, he will rebuke the boastful and the wicked - the identity given for people who do not know God and who are preeminent for their unbelief. The psalm does not make clear whether this set time is the time of the final judgement for all the earth, or any time in which God chooses to make his justice visible. The words fit both senses.

- ² At the set time that I appoint
I will judge with equity.
- ³ When the earth totters, with all its inhabitants,
it is I who keep its pillars steady. Selah

Psalm 75:2-3

At the set time that I appoint I will judge with equity. The previous lines of the psalm were spoken from the perspective of God’s people. These are spoken from the perspective of God himself. God declares that he will judge and that he will

judge with equity. As Abraham understood: <<*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?*>> (Genesis 18:25b).

In his judgements God reserves the right to set the proper time. People often feel that they know the proper time for God's judgements and they are often troubled because God does not seem to share their perspective. The believer should have a humble trust in the perfection of God's judgements and the set time of them: <<*He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority'*>> (Acts 1:7).

When the earth totters, with all its inhabitants. God declared the great power of his judgements: <<*The earth is utterly broken, the earth is torn asunder, the earth is violently shaken*>> (Isaiah 24:19). At his judgements people and things are either dissolved or they are established firmly. The rightness, the timing and the power of God's judgements are all worthy of deep consideration.

Selah, used 71 times in the Book of Psalms and three times in Habakkuk, has never been fully understood because the Hebrew root word is undefined. Many take it to be an instruction related to either the music, such as an interlude, or the cadence of the song, e.g. stop and reflect.

- ⁴ I say to the boastful, 'Do not boast',
and to the wicked, 'Do not lift up your horn;
⁵ do not lift up your horn on high,
or speak with insolent neck.'

Psalm 75:4-5

I say to the boastful, 'Do not boast.' From the previous lines of the psalm it is best to regard this as Asaph recording God's words from his own perspective. In light of his great judgements, God warned the proud, i.e. the boastful, to no longer boast and exalt their own strength, that is, do not lift up your horn.

Do not lift up your horn. The horn is a symbol of power: <<*Zedekiah son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron, and he said, 'Thus says the Lord: With these you shall gore the Aramæans until they are destroyed'*>> (1 Kings 22:11), <<*And I looked up and saw four horns. I asked the angel who talked with me, 'What are these?' And he answered me, 'These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.'* Then the Lord showed me four blacksmiths. And I asked, 'What are they coming to do?' He answered, 'These are the horns that scattered Judah, so that no head could be raised; but these have come to terrify them, to strike down the horns of the nations that lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter its people'>> (Zechariah 1:18-21), and thus to lift it up or 'exalt' it is to make a public assertion of power.

God warns the ungodly not to lift up their horn and promises that he will lift up the horn of the faithful. The term 'lift up' recurs throughout the psalm. To 'cut off' the horns (v.10) is to render powerless and to humiliate.

Or speak with insolent neck. The figure of the insolent or stiff neck was taken from the world of agriculture, where ox or cattle might resist the yoke for ploughing and other work. God cautioned the proud and wicked to not resist him in the same way. Again, Spurgeon comments, "Impudence before God is madness. The out-stretched neck of insolent pride is sure to provoke his axe. Those who carry their heads high shall find that they will be lifted yet higher, as Haman was upon the gallows which he had prepared for the righteous man."

Psalm 75:6-8 - It Is God Who Lifts Up and Puts Down.

This section takes up the idea of lifting up from vv.4-5 and makes it clear that ultimately it is God who executes judgement, putting down one and lifting up another. The 'lifting up' here is the display of authority; those whom God 'puts down' are the boastful wicked (v.4) and the time is his act of judgement, whenever that might be, and however it relates to the final judgement. The congregation that sings this is taking the stance of faith; certainly there are many times when God's faithful people must simply await his timing and not give in to despair.

- 6 For not from the east or from the west
and not from the wilderness comes lifting up;
- 7 but it is God who executes judgement,
putting down one and lifting up another.
- 8 For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup
with foaming wine, well mixed;
he will pour a draught from it,
and all the wicked of the earth
shall drain it down to the dregs.

Psalm 75:6-8

For not from the east or from the west and not from the wilderness comes lifting up. Asaph hoped to teach the proud ones warned in their previous lines. They should first know that their exaltation, their success and standing did not come from earth and human initiative. They should stop their proud confidence in self and turn to God.

But it is God who executes judgement. Every successful person, everyone exalted in some way, should humbly look to God with gratitude. It is God who puts down one and exalts another. A humble mind and heart is the proper response, instead of boastful words, the celebration of one's own strength and resistance against God. This is not to say that hard work, preparation, good habits and other human aspects do not contribute to success - they clearly do. Yet even those things are gifts and abilities from God and should be regarded with humility and gratitude towards him.

Spurgeon comments further, "Empires rise and fall at his bidding. A dungeon here, and there a throne, his will assigns. Assyria yields to Babylon, and Babylon, to the Medes. Kings are but puppets in his hand; they serve his purpose when they rise and when they fall."

For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup. Asaph here used the cup as a figure of God's judgement. The idea is that God forces his judgement upon the wicked and they are forced to drink the bitter cup down to the dregs.

The metaphor of v.8, in which judgement is represented as a cup of foaming wine, which God puts to the lips of the nations, receives great expansion in the prophets, especially in Jeremiah and recurs in the Apocalypse. There is a grim contrast between the images of festivity and hospitality called up by the picture of a host presenting the wine cup to his guests and the stern compulsion which makes the 'wicked' gulp down the nauseous draught held by God to their reluctant lips.

The Christian reader could also reflect on the cup of God's wrath that Jesus was to drink on behalf of humanity: <<*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done*>> (Luke 22:42). opens the way for the redemption of all peoples through the new covenant relationship with God, which was promised to the people of Israel: <<*The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah*>> (Jeremiah 31:31), and: <<*No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord', because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more*>> (Jeremiah 31:34).

This cup is also a metaphor for Jesus' future suffering. Consider this verse: <<*You don't know what you are asking, Jesus said to them. Can you drink the cup I am going to drink? We can, they answered. Jesus said to them, You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father*>> (Matthew 20:22-23), and virtually repeated in Mark 10:38-39. It is clear from the OT that the taking of the cup denotes that Jesus took upon

himself the wrath of God so that he died for the sake of, and instead of, his people. This is confirmed in Isaiah 51:17 <<Awake, awake! Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes men stagger>>, in Isaiah 51:22 <<This is what your Sovereign Lord says, your God, who defends his people: See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again>>, in Jeremiah 25:15 <<This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it>>, in Jeremiah 25:17 <<So I took the cup from the Lord's hand and made all the nations to whom he sent me drink it>>, in Jeremiah 25:28 <<But if they refuse to take the cup from your hand and drink, tell them, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: You must drink it!>>, in Jeremiah 49:12 <<This is what the Lord says: If those who do not deserve to drink the cup must drink it, why should you go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, but must drink it>>, in Lamentations 4:21 <<Rejoice and be glad, O Daughter of Edom, you who live in the land of Uz. But to you also the cup will be passed; you will be drunk and stripped naked>>, in Ezekiel 23:31-33 <<You have gone the way of your sister; so I will put her cup into your hand. This is what the Sovereign Lord says: You will drink your sister's cup, a cup large and deep; it will bring scorn and derision, for it holds so much. You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, the cup of ruin and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria>>, in Habakkuk 2:16 <<You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink and be exposed! The cup from the Lord's right hand is coming round to you, and disgrace will cover your glory>>, and in Zechariah 12:2 <<I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem>>.

The cup is a metaphor for the wrath of God, which would pour out on sinners in righteous judgement. Since Jesus satisfies God's wrath by becoming a propitiation for sin, the continued passing of the cup to the disciples: <<You will drink the cup I drink>> (Mark 10:39), turns judgement on Jesus into purification for them. The cup given to Jesus is from the Father and hence, Jesus is prepared to drink it. Some scholars have argued that the word propitiation should be translated expiation, i.e. the wiping away of sin but the word cannot be restricted to wiping away of sin as it also refers to the satisfaction or appeasement of God's wrath, turning it to favour. God's righteous anger needed to be appeased before sin could be forgiven and God, in his mercy and his love for the whole human race, sent his Son who offered himself willingly to satisfy God's holy anger against all our sin.

Psalm 75:9-10 - I Will Always Sing God's Praises.

Each member of the congregation pledges himself to the life of faith that this psalm fosters. It is possible that I in v.10 is speaking in the name of Israel, the agent of God's judgement; but in view of vv.2-8 it seems that God is the speaker.

⁹ But I will rejoice for ever;

I will sing praises to the God of Jacob.

¹⁰ All the horns of the wicked I will cut off,
but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted.

Psalm 75:9-10

I will sing praises to the God of Jacob. In contrast to the wicked of the earth (v.8), Asaph spoke for the people of God who declare and rejoice in the judgements of God.

All the horns of the wicked I will cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted. God work of judgement is not only against the proud and wicked; it is also for the righteous. As surely as he will cut off the arrogant pride of the wicked, he will also exalt the strength of the righteous: <<***But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox; you have poured over me fresh oil***>> (Psalm 92:10).