

Unit Theme: Non-Davidic Psalms

July 28, 2024 (Lesson 9)

THE TRANSCENDENT AND SOVEREIGN GOD

1. **The Power of the Almighty** (Psalm 50:1-6)
2. **Fear the Almighty** (Psalm 50:7-15)
3. **Glorify the Almighty** (Psalm 50:16-23)

Central Truth: Almighty God is sovereign, transcendent, and worthy of all glory and praise.

Focus: Acknowledge God's preeminence and praise Him for His greatness.

Evangelism Emphasis: Christians should proclaim God's greatness, love, and mercy displayed in Jesus Christ.

Golden Text: "The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof" (Psalm 50:1).

In 1985, songwriter Julie Gold wrote a song titled "From a Distance." A few years later, the song was recorded by Bette Midler during the time of the Gulf War. The song won a Grammy for "Song of the Year" in 1991. The message of the song lies in the words of the refrain: "God is watching us from a distance." Although the song is a beautiful tune, its theology of a distant God who watches over the affairs of the earth is not Biblical.

God is *transcendent*; that is, He exists apart from the created universe. God is *uncreated* and *self-existent*—the great "I AM THAT I AM" (Ex. 3:14). The uncreated God is Creator of all that exists. God created the material universe by *divine speech*; that is, He spoke the world into being (Gen. 1). God is *sovereign*—all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere present, and as such He rules over all things. It is impossible for the everywhere-present God to be distant. The sovereign God is *active*; that is, He is personally involved in the affairs of creation. Just as God created the world by calling all things into existence, He likewise governs the world through divine speech.

Psalm 50 is a prophetic psalm ascribed to Asaph, and resembles the language of the prophets more than that of the other psalmists. It is likely this psalm was recited by a priest/prophet during

a worship service in which God was prophesying against the injustice and sinfulness of His people. God's ruling activity is manifested in His acts of judgment. God is not distant; He is near, and we should fear Him.

1. THE POWER OF THE ALMIGHTY

A. God Summons the Earth (Psalm 50:1-3)

1 The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. 2 Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. 3 Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.

There is no doubt who is speaking. There are three divine names in verse 1. The Hebrew terms are *Elohim*, *El*, and *Yahweh*. They are respectively translated into English as “The Mighty One, God, the Lord” (NIV). *Elohim* speaks to God as Creator. *El* is a generic term for God used throughout the ancient world of the Bible. *Yahweh* is the covenantal name of God who redeemed Israel from Egyptian bondage (Ex. 3:14). By using all three divine names, the psalmist is saying the Creator-God and the Redeemer-God is one God (Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*).

The ancient creed of Israel declares, “The Lord our God is one Lord” (Deut. 6:4). Throughout most translations of the Bible, when “Lord” or “God” appears in all capitalized letters, it is a translation for *Yahweh*. In older English tradition, the name of God has been translated as “Jehovah,” following the Latin version. The God who was revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai is now being revealed to the people in the Jerusalem Temple through these spoken words: *Yahweh is the Mighty One!*

Yahweh speaks and demands the attention of all the people of the earth. Yahweh's dominion is not limited to the boundaries of Israel, but extends to all nations—everywhere the light of the

sun touches (Ps. 50:1). God's spoken word is life-generating. All creatures have their beginnings in God's creative word. The nation of Israel began in God's call to Abram of Ur (Gen. 12:1ff). God's covenant with the children of Abraham was established in the Ten Commandments spoken to Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex. 20:1ff). Israel's disobedience to the covenantal law is the occasion for God's summons. God is bringing a legal suit against all the peoples of the earth. The Temple is taking on the role of a divine court of law. God's summons includes an indictment against the people and a call to repentance.

God's glory shines from "Zion" (Ps. 50:2). *Zion* is an ancient name for Jerusalem, the Temple mount, the Temple itself, and even for the people of Israel. *Zion* is a metaphor for the center of the created world—the place from where God was revealed to all the nations (Mic. 4:2). The innermost sanctuary of the Temple was the Holy of Holies, where the glory of God dwelt. Just as the sun shines over all the earth, God's glory fills the earth beginning from Zion. Habakkuk declared, "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (2:14). Zion was "the perfection of beauty" not because the Temple was architecturally beautiful, but because of the splendor of God's glory (Ps. 50:2). Throughout the Old Testament, glory and holiness speak to the beauty of God. The psalmist David declared, "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (29:2; cf. Isa. 4:2; 28:5).

The psalmist has declared God's summons, and now declares God is coming (50:3). Again, there is no suggestion God is distant, or separated, from creation. The transcendent and almighty God is coming as a consuming and tempestuous fire to execute judgment on the earth. In Exodus 19, Yahweh appeared on Mount Sinai as a descending fire enveloped by "thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud," and "the whole mount quaked greatly" (vv. 16, 18). Sinai took on

the appearance of an erupting volcano. The creation cannot contain the glory and power of Yahweh. The presence of the Lord causes the earth and all its peoples to tremble in fear before Him (Ps. 77:18; Isa. 64:2). When God comes, He will not remain silent. His divine word will “shake the heavens and the earth” and “shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms” (Hag. 2:21-22 NIV).

In Zion, God became flesh and dwelt among us in the person of Jesus Christ. In Zion, Christ was crucified as the Lamb of God, was raised from the dead, and ascended to Heaven. In Zion, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost; out of Zion, the apostles proclaimed the Gospel to all nations of the earth.

§ *Compare the message of Psalm 50:3 with Hebrews 12:28-29.*

B. The Heavens Declare God’s Righteousness (Psalm 50:4-6)

4 He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people. 5 Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. 6 And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah.

God’s summons extends to the heavens and throughout the earth. God’s covenant people are to gather at the Temple. The words of this psalm are to be read to the assembled congregation. They are to prepare themselves for God’s judgment. At some point in the worship service, sacrifices will be offered. Likely, this psalm was recited during an annual holy day, so this would be a call of renewed consecration.

A similar occasion is the church gathered to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. The Apostle Paul said when we gather to receive the Lord’s Supper, we should carefully examine ourselves lest we partake of the supper in an unworthy manner and suffer the judgment of God (1 Cor. 11:27-32).

The ultimate purpose of God’s summons is not judgment unto destruction, but judgment that leads to salvation.

The phrase “the heavens shall declare his righteousness” (Ps. 50:3) is sometimes misunderstood. Throughout the Psalms, “righteousness” (Hebrew, *sedeq*) is more than morality; it speaks to right order. The heavens declare the righteousness of God in that God as Creator has rightly ordered all things (Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*). The purpose of God’s judgment is to deconstruct and rightly order a world that has been disordered by human disobedience.

Called to Court

The courtroom is a place of sober respect. To receive a summons to appear before a judge for any reason is a serious matter. Attendance is mandatory. All personal or professional responsibilities must be put aside. Failure to appear as summoned may result in arrest, fines, or even imprisonment. Those who answer the summons to appear must also abide by court etiquette. All distractions, such as cell phones, must be silenced. The presiding judge controls all proceedings and must be properly respected.

2. FEAR THE ALMIGHTY

A. Everything Belongs to God (Psalm 50:7-13)

7 Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God. 8 I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me. 9 I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds. 10 For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. 11 I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. 12 If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. 13 Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?

God is wholly other—beyond compare of anything we can know or understand. He is awesome. This quality of God provokes anguish, dismay, trembling, terror, and dread (Ex. 15:14-16).

God's acts of speech are accompanied with a command for God's people to hear and respond (Deut. 5:1; 6:4). In Psalm 50:7, God is judge and prosecutor in that He testifies against His people. In His testimony, God reminds us that He is utterly transcendent and utterly independent from creation. As Creator, all things that breathe belong to Him—every animal, every bird, and even the insects (vv. 10-11). The world, and all it contains, belongs to God (v. 12b). God has no need of ritual sacrifices, no need of bulls and goats, no need of tithes and offerings (v. 13). As the self-existent One, God is self-sustaining. He is not dependent on creation; God does not need food (v. 12a). On the other hand, all creation is sustained by God's presence, power, and word (Ps. 119:116, 175; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3).

In His testimony against His people, God reminds us that we are utterly dependent on Him. Throughout the Psalms, we learn we awake each day “because the Lord sustains [us]” (3:5 NIV); we are given strength because of God's presence (18:35; 54:4); when we are in despair, God's presence renews us (55:22; 146:9). Through the prophet Isaiah, God has cried out:

“Listen to me, you descendants of Jacob, all the remnant of the people of Israel, you whom I have upheld since your birth, and have carried since you were born. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you; I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you” (Isa. 46:3-4 NIV).

Overwhelmed by God

On the mountaintop we are overwhelmed by God's presence. In the wilderness we are overwhelmed by His absence. Both places should bring us to our knees; the one, in utter awe; the other, in utter dependence.—Dave Dravecky

B. Thank God and Call on Him (Psalm 50:14-15)

14 Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: 15 And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.

If God does not need ritual sacrifice, worship, or tithes and offerings, why did He command His people to offer sacrifices, tithes and offerings, and worship? Because rituals, worship, and tithes and offerings are demonstrations of our need for God and gratitude for His love toward us. God has invited us—even in our sinfulness, even as He testifies against us—to call on Him in our trouble. God's call for repentance in Psalm 50 is answered by Psalm 51:1-2 by David's plea, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."

God promises the repentant, "I will deliver thee" (50:15). In response to God's saving work, we glorify and honor Him. "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28-29 NIV). We worship God because we need Him, and through worship we are nourished by Him. Worship is an opportunity to "be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit . . . always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:18-20 NIV).

§ *If God does not need our worship, why does He command us to worship Him?*

3. GLORIFY THE ALMIGHTY

A. Warning to the Wicked (Psalm 50:16-21)

16 But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? 17 Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. 18 When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. 19 Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. 20 Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. 21 These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.

The words of these verses are directed to the wicked—those who refuse to hear God’s call to repentance. The wicked refuse to acknowledge their dependence on God.

God specifically addresses the hypocrisy of the wicked. How dare they speak of God’s Law, or claim fidelity to His covenant? The words of God mean nothing to the wicked. God’s first accusation against them is that they hate instruction (v. 17). This is a common accusation against the wicked and foolish in the Psalms and Proverbs. King Solomon wrote, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov. 1:7). The word *instruction* here refers to God’s Law. To turn our heart from the Law leads to a life of wickedness and ultimate destruction (cf. vv. 10-19). “They that forsake the law praise the wicked” (28:4). The wicked and foolish discard the words of the Law as if they are irrelevant trash. The phrase “castest my words behind thee” (Ps. 50:17) speaks to the total rejection of God (cf. 1 Kings 14:9; Ezek. 23:35). To reject God is the act of a fool (Ps. 14:1). The result of forgetting the Law of God is people become complicit in thievery, adultery, and bearing false witness (50:18-20).

Verse 21 says God had exercised extreme patience with His sinful people and withheld words of judgment. The people interpreted God's silence as divine ambivalence at the least, or at worst as divine amorality. In other words, they have misunderstood God's patience for lack of concern for justice (cf. Mal. 2:17; 3:14-15). They had come to believe God is as unprincipled as they were. But God's time of patience had come to an end. He would no longer remain silent.

Centuries later, the Apostle Paul rebuked the Jews for hypocrisy and warned that their stubborn ways and unrepentant hearts were "storing up wrath against [themselves] for the day of God's wrath" (Rom. 2:5 NIV). When God executes judgment, the wicked will cry out to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:16-17). God's justice will prevail.

A Secret Atheist?

The hypocrite, certainly, is a secret atheist; for if he did not believe there was a God, he would not be so bold as to deceive Him to His face.—Thomas Adams

B. Call to Repentance (Psalm 50:22-23)

22 Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver. 23 Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.

God's threat of judgment is an expression of divine violence against the wicked: "I will tear you apart" (v. 22 CSB). God is a merciless warrior against the wicked. The language reflects the imagery of a lion or bear devouring its prey. The wicked will find none who can deliver them from the wrath of God. The Apostle Paul asked, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). The psalmist warned, in essence, "If God is against us, who can be for us?" Only

Yahweh is omnipotent. The gods of the ancient world were powerless to prevail against the people of God. Just as Yahweh's omnipotence ensures the righteous that He is all-powerful to save, His omnipotence warns the wicked that He is all-powerful to destroy.

In Psalm 50:23, God again demonstrates mercy and patience. In His rebuke of the wicked, God extends a call to repentance. Even though the people have forgotten God, He has not forgotten His people. God's words to Solomon remain pertinent in any age: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14).

§ *Why do so many people "forget God" (Ps. 50:22)?*

THE LAST WORD

Imagine a Sunday morning worship service in which the pastor does not preach a sermon. Instead, the pastor reads the words of Psalm 50 as the message to the congregation. The message declares God's Word goes forth, and He rules over all human affairs. We hear we will be called to account for how we respond to the words of God.

Some in the congregation will hear prophetic words of promise and salvation. Others will hear a call to sanctification. Still others will respond in anger because their sinfulness has been called out. Some will rush to the altar to repent; others will ignore God's warning of judgment and walk out the door. But in the end, God will have the last word. God's Word will save those who hear, but it will judge those who refuse to hear.

We don't like to think of the church as a place of judgment, but we should be reminded of Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to the Holy Spirit and were struck dead (Acts 5:1-11). Also, Paul told the Corinthians some of them were weak and ill, while others had died because they ate the

Lord's Supper without properly examining their lives (1 Cor. 11:30). The point is God will judge those who refuse to repent. Some will be judged in this age, but all will be judged in the age to come. Jesus declared, "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matt. 16:27).

Daily Devotions

- M. God the Creator (Genesis 1:1-2, 31)
- T. The Glory of God Displayed (Exodus 24:16-18)
- W. God Praised for His Greatness (1 Chronicles 29:11-13)
- T. God's Sovereignty and Transcendence Proclaimed (Acts 17:24-28)
- F. God's Unsearchable Wisdom and Knowledge (Romans 11:33-36)
- S. The Grandeur of God's Throne (Revelation 4:1-6)