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Psalm 47

When I was in Seminary, a professor once made the observation that there were three traditional “festival” days in the Christian church- the three most important worship services in the church year. Naturally, these three days are typically the most well-attended services of the year- everyone comes to church on these three Sundays. He then said with a smirk, “Christmas, Easter, and Mother’s Day.” That’s a joke- really, the third “Festival Sunday” is Ascension, and most people likely have no idea. There is no Ascension season, no Ascension hallmark cards, no Ascension meals, no Ascension deals at JCPenney, it’s just something that we go to on Thursday if we have time. But throughout the history of Christianity, God’s people have realized just how important Jesus’ ascension into Heaven actually is. In fact, I’d go as far as to say that without the ascension, his birth, life, death, and resurrection lose much of their power and meaning. Ascension answers the question: everything that Jesus did- he did in the past- *what about now?* And that brings us to this Psalm, likely written about 900 years before Jesus actually ascended into Heaven, Psalm 47 celebrates the truth of Jesus’ ascension into Heaven: “**Our God Has Gone Up.**” And that means that **1. Jesus conquered for us, and 2. Jesus gathers through us.**

1. **Jesus conquered for us.** If you are familiar with the book of Psalms, you may know it’s the hymnal and prayer book of God’s Old Testament people. The Psalms that we have in the Bible were meant to be sung and prayed in worship, and many Psalms have an event that sparked its writing. For instance, Psalm 51, the psalm that says “Have mercy on me, o God,” was written by David after he was confronted by the prophet Nathan after his disturbing sin with Bathsheba. Psalm 47 was written by a group of men from the tribe of Levi called the Sons of Korah, who were chosen and appointed by David to be the chief musicians in the tabernacle and eventually the temple, and the question that many people ask when they see Psalm 47 is this: why did the Sons of Korah write this psalm? It seems like there was some military victory or great event that sparked this psalm. Some say it’s when the Ark of the Covenant was taken to Jerusalem in 2 Samuel in David’s reign, or about 100 years later, when king Jehoshaphat won this great victory over a huge army, and the Sons of Korah were present and led the army in singing before the battle. Regardless, whether this Psalm was written and sung in response to some military victory, it doesn’t take long to realize that the Holy Spirit inspired the Sons of Korah to think about much, much more than military conquest for Israel.

What this psalm is describing is God coming down from Heaven and fighting for his people in a great battle, and then going back up when they win, but here’s where it gets strange. Israel isn’t the only one who is celebrating! *Everyone is clapping.* Everyone is celebrating. Everyone is filled with joy. God isn’t just king in Israel, but over the entire earth! This was a completely radical idea in the Old Testament period. It’s not that the Egyptians, Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, and other nations didn’t think God existed, but that he was really only in charge in his territory- in Israel. But this psalm is claiming that God isn’t simply king in Israel, but over every other nation, over every other god, and all people ultimately belong to him. He is not simply a god, but *the God.. And he’s good.* You’d expect that God dominating

everyone and winning this victory over everyone and flexing his muscles over everyone and subduing all nations under “our” feet would cause people to groan and be sad, but the Sons of Korah invite all people to celebrate God’s rule. Why? Why is this such a beautiful, powerful, wonderful thing that would cause all people to clap their hands and celebrate?

Because this God is a different kind of God with a different kind of kingdom, and he conquered in a different kind of way. This God came down to earth and became a human being, weak and impoverished and lived among his people as one of his people. He served, he loved, he was good, and yet he was humiliated, crushed, and punished, and people clapped their hands at him, not in joy, but in humiliation. They placed a crown on his head, not to honor him, but scar him. They placed a royal purple robe on him, not to honor him, but to humiliate him. And above his head, as he bled out naked, it said “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” and everyone who walked by had no idea: while he was being tortured, the king over all the earth was winning his ultimate victory: *us*. And when he rose from the grave, he proved that everything he said was true, and then, he ascended into heaven and, as we say in our creed, he sits at the right hand of the Father. Do you know what that means? That doesn’t mean that there’s a physical chair next to God the Father and that’s where Jesus sits. It means that Jesus, true God, and yet a real, physical human being, the one who died with you on his mind, the one who loves and cherishes and comforts you, is in charge of everything. *Everything*. He rules the universe and conquers everything and therefore, *you* have conquered everything. Because you belong to him, because you are connected to and chosen by him, you have won, you have conquered, all things have been subdued under *your* feet. And, *he* is the one who chooses that inheritance. He is the one who decides what that victory looks like. He is the one who gives Jacob, another way of saying “Israel,” “God’s people,” “His nation,” “his church,” us, our glory. We have our glory. We have our victory, and that may look different than we expect. This is what that means: This church may grow, become financially stable, and prosper as our pews are filled and more and more people come to believe in Jesus here in Whitewater, and Jesus be praised- he sits on the throne. This church also may shrink, run out of money, and have to consolidate with another, and Jesus be praised because he sits on the throne and no matter what, he wins, and we win. Christianity, real Bible-believing, Gospel centered Christianity may thrive in our country- and Jesus be praised if it does. It may also be illegalized and Christians who hold to the scriptures may have to face jail time or worse, and we may have to meet in secret- and Jesus be praised, he still wins, and so do we. Some of you may live long, happy, comfortable lives, some of you may suffer with mental illness, loneliness, sickness, loss, poverty, and rejection, and even though that is painful and we don’t pretend it isn’t, Jesus is still on the throne and he is conquering for you, even through your pain, and he has won, which means you have won. Jesus has gone up and conquers all things for you.

2. Jesus gathers through us. As we read through this Psalm, I hope you notice something. Christianity is emotional. The Psalms are emotional. Christians are invited to celebrate and feel strong positive emotion- they are invited to clap their hands, shout for joy, make beautiful music, and enjoy what God is doing. Of course this applies to everything Jesus has done! Of course we celebrate Jesus’

birth and his death and resurrection, but there's something unique about Jesus' Ascension that we are also called to celebrate with a special kind of joy and vigor. *It's not simply that Jesus conquers for us, but that he also decides to conquer by gathering- and he decides to gather through us.* Let's just dig through verse 9 here.

The word for "nobles" here in verse nine can certainly mean "nobles" in the sense of a prince or a high class ruler, but the general meaning for that word has the connotation that the person being described is actually noble in the sense that they are honorable, willing to help, kind, and generous- similar to our word for "noble." A person can be noble without being a "nobleman" or "high class" person. The Sons of Korah are saying that there is going to be a group of people from all nations, all over the world, and they are going to gather themselves as the people of the God of Abraham. Think about what he's referring to. In Genesis 15, in 2000 BC, God appeared to Abraham and promised him that although he and his barren wife Sarah were way beyond child-bearing age, he would have a son, and that son would have a son, and eventually an entire nation, a people, would come from him- and Abraham believed God. He trusted him, and God credited *that* to him as righteousness. Do you know what that means? God declared Abraham to be absolutely perfect, forgiven, holy, he declared Abraham to be his, he saved him from hell, not because of anything that Abraham did, but only because Abraham believed God's promise. God also promised that through one of his descendants, all nations in the world would be blessed. Eventually, the children of Abraham turned into a nation, and that nation Israel, and they were God people, and the terms "God's people," and "Abraham's children" became synonymous. You needed to be a child of Abraham to be a part of God's people and be saved. But what this Psalm is saying is something absolutely, radically ahead of its time- there will be a time when believing, willing, noble people from all nations are going to gather themselves as Abraham's true descendants, not by sharing his blood, but by sharing his faith. God is going to save people not by what they do, but through trusting in his promise- he's going to save them for free, just like Abraham, and it's going to be for *all* people.

Well, how is he going to do that? How is he going to make his salvation known to all people and fulfill this beautiful prophecy? The word "kings" in verse 9 isn't a great translation of the Hebrew. The reason the NIV translates the word "kings" is because the Septuagint, the Greek translation of this Psalm, as the word "krataioi," which means "rulers." But the original Hebrew word is the word "magen:" "shield." So why did the ancient translators translate it into "rulers." The idea is that the rulers and governors of the earth are, in a sense, God's "shields" that he uses to protect and bless his people. So let's put this verse all together: Noble, believing, willing people are going to be saved through faith in God and therefore be a part of God's chosen people along with Abraham and God is going to do it through his "shields," through those who he sends to bless people on the earth. Let's say that in a shorter way: *God saves people through you.* Think about this- before Jesus left his disciples, Matthew records that Jesus said, "All power has been given to me, therefore, *go*. Go make disciples, baptize, bring them into my family, and teach them about me." The Ascension means that Jesus, if he wanted to, could send an army of angels to each unbeliever and tell them about himself that way, or show up in a dream, or do some

great, crazy miracle in order to convince people to put their trust in him so they can be saved. *But he would rather use you.* You are his shield that he is going to use to bring someone into his family, because he has redeemed, conquered for you, and continues to work all things out for your good as he reigns on his throne in Heaven. Can you fit all that on a Hallmark card? No. But it's still worth celebrating. Amen.