

Sermon: Psalm 68:1-6
HE IS "OVER" THE EARTH !

*Let God arise. Let His enemies be scattered; let those also who hate Him flee before Him!
 As smoke is driven away, so drive them away.
 As wax melts before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.*

*But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God!
 Yes, let them rejoice exceedingly. Sing to God. Sing praises to His name!
 Extol Him who rides on the clouds; [extol Him] by His name YAH; and rejoice before Him!*

*A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation.
 God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those, who are bound, into prosperity.*

But the rebellious dwell in a dry land.

The words "resurrection" and "ascension" are sometimes confused. More than one confirmation student, and likely adults too, have thought that when we speak of Jesus "ascending" we mean His "rising up" from the grave. Not so! It's an easy mistake to make. "Resurrect" means "to get up again." "Ascend" means "to go up." Jesus' "Resurrection" refers to His "rising up again from death / the grave on Easter." His "Ascension" refers to His visibly "going up, returning, to heaven" on the fortieth day after Easter. (This past Thursday was the 40th day after Easter—Ascension Day!)

Today's text, from the Old Testament, was not written in direct reference to Jesus' Ascension, but the thoughts are similar, actually the same. *Let God arise.* Let God go up, over all the world and over all evil. This Psalm was written by King David. It has thirty-five verses; we are looking at the first six. The background of the Psalm is not given, but it appears to have been written after a victory by King David against one of his many foes. King David's enemies were the enemies of God and God's people. Let God take charge. It's a Psalm of praise and thanks for victories of the past, and a statement of strong confidence for the future.

Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered; let those also who hate Him flee before Him! Can you see the picture in David's mind's eye? Often the enemy forces could have, and should have, overwhelmed David and his forces. But God arose, God stepped in; and the enemies were scattered before God. Remember David and Goliath? Remember David being pursued by King Saul? *Let God arise.* It's as if wolf pups were playing outside the den and intruders arrived to do them harm. But the "BIG DOG," the iron-strong sire-wolf arises and intervenes. The intruders, as bold as they were, are scattered in short order. Or change the example to any protective father and his dear children. Think of the Children of Israel pursued by Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea. God arose and Pharaoh's army drowned in the Red Sea. Think of the Israelites at the fortified city of Jericho. God arose, and the walls of Jericho tumbled down.

Let those also who hate Him flee before Him! As smoke is driven away, so drive them away. Smoke does not stand its ground very well. The slightest breeze blows it away. Consider yesterday and the smoke that blew in, from the fires hundreds of miles away! When I was working in Watertown, the factory right next to ours caught fire. Heavy black smoke poured from the building, but because a strong wind was in our favor, none of it came our way. Buildings on the other side were layered with soot and smoke smell. *As wax melts before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.* Wax doesn't stand its ground very well either. Body heat can make wax pliable. Fire turns it to liquid.

Let the wicked perish at the presence of God. Do you wonder about these words,? Is this a prayer asking God to harm the wicked? I thought Jesus said, "Pray for your enemies, for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." He did. Jesus was talking to us about your enemies, our enemies—be they believers or unbelievers. We do pray for them. However, the Psalm is talking about God's enemies. God's enemies are described here with the terms *the wicked* and *those who hate Him*. We do not pray for the success of those who hate God and deliberately rebel against Him, who seek to destroy His people and the Church. We do not pray for their success in their current state. We pray for their defeat.

Rightly, there is joy when the wicked haters of God and His Church are defeated. *Let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God! Yes, let them rejoice exceedingly.* Do you notice the increasing intensity: 1) Be glad, 2) Rejoice, 3) Rejoice exceedingly! It's like cheering for the high school basketball team which wins a game, then wins the district championship, and then wins the state championship! Remember how Moses and the Israelites rejoiced when Pharaoh's army was drowned in the Red Sea (*Exodus 14-15*). Years later, when wicked Queen Athaliah of Jerusalem was put to death, the people of the land rejoiced (*2 Kings 11*).

The same is true in Christ for us! Rejoice to know that through the crucified and risen Jesus, Satan's clutches on you have been broken and dispersed like smoke before the wind and wax before the fire. Through Christ's sacrifice of Himself on the cross in your behalf, God showers His forgiveness, love, and life upon you—like the life-giving spring and summer rains on your pastures and fields. In Jesus you have life now and even after the grave—eternal life, with no evil or suffering. The risen and victorious Jesus has “gone up,” ascended to His throne in heaven—Mission Accomplished! Cling to Jesus by faith. Give thanks for the past, and walk into the future with confidence. Jesus has ascended!

The Psalm says, *Sing to God. Sing praises to His name!* “To His Name” does not mean to His “identity labels,” such as God, Lord, Almighty, Jesus, Christ, Holy Spirit, Holy Ghost; but to His “name” in the widest sense is His “good name,” His reputation. He has saved the “foolish fallen” and has gone up to His throne. Praise and honor His Name for all that He has done for you. In the Lord's prayer, we say, *Hallowed by Thy Name*. “May Your Name—Reputation—be honored, held in high regard, hallowed, regarded as sacred and special, in our hearts and lives each day.”

Praise Him, *who rides on the clouds*. Here, our text parallels Ascension Day. In King David's day, God arose against His enemies and Israel's enemies, and dispersed them like smoke and wax. He let them know that He was in charge, riding *upon the clouds*, “over” the earth. Jesus with His victory over the tomb that followed the cross, has dispersed Your foes—the devil, sin, death, and hell. His Resurrection from death-for-your-sin declares you to be safe in His blood, forgiven, and an heir of heaven! Rejoice! Rejoice! It's the world championship! For the next forty days, Jesus appeared to His disciples at various times and places; then He returned, ascended, to heaven. He visibly went up, until a *cloud* covered Him from their sight. He “rides” the clouds and is “over” this earth, both in the sense of “above / higher than” the earth, and in the sense of “above/ in charge of” this earth. *Extol Him who rides on the clouds!*

Extol Him / praise Him *by His name YAH; and rejoice before Him!* “Yah” or “Jah” is short for “Jehovah / Yahweh,” which means “HE IS.” Our Triune God is the “HE IS.” He identified Himself to Moses at the burning bush as the “I AM.” He is the he One WHO IS—without beginning and without end. He, the One WHO IS—genuine reality and truth; there are no untruths or lies in Him which lead only to failure and death. He is the One WHO IS—there is no one above Him forcing Him to do anything. He makes a promise—to save you in Jesus—and did so, and does so—because He “wills to / wants to.” He doesn't “have to.” HE IS. Your ascended Jesus is the I AM and the Truth. *“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes to the Father except by Me (John 14:6).*

The ascended Jesus, your Savior, has promised to come back and receive you to Himself (John 14:1-3). And He will; it is certain; He is Truth. He will raise up all the dead—believers and unbelievers (John 5:28-29)—and take the raised-up believers, the Christians, to Himself in the clouds, and then the *still-living* believers/Christians, to be with Him forever (I Thessalonians 4:15-17). We shall dwell in the “mansions”—literally the “staying places”—of heaven forever (John 14:1-3). Therefore we sing! *On Christ's Ascension I now build the hope of my ascension!* (TLH 216).

He, your Lord, the HE IS, is *father of the fatherless, and defender of widows, in His holy habitation*. Your God and Savior, Jesus the God-man, cares for you in every dire and helpless situation that there could be. Is a child fatherless? Is a wife and mother a widow? Do not fear! Jesus has ascended to the realms of heaven. *Let God arise. He rides on the clouds*. He is in control and “above” all. *He sets the solitary in families. He brings out, into prosperity, those who are bound.* From heaven Jesus helps the lonely to function and gives them the family of Christians to be there for them. Those who are bound, confined, by dire circumstances, He sets free and “prosper” them with peace of heart and soul—even against the worst of foes. The risen Christ has gone up to His throne in heaven, and is “over” you to your own benefit! Rejoice in the victory, and in the victories, of the past. Go forward in confidence into the future, in Jesus, for this life and the life to come.

But stay close to Jesus. Without Him you are lost. The final words of the text remind: *But the rebellious dwell in a dry land*. No love or blessings from God there. Don't go there. Cling by faith to Jesus, your resurrected and ascended Savior, who is “over” all!

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach--