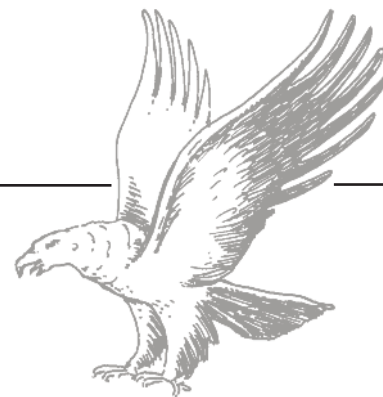


# Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”  
Isaiah 40:31*



November 22, 2015

## Why Give Thanks?

In a world scarred by sin and suffering, it's hard to see the hand of God in any of it.

But His hand *is* at work, if we will open our eyes to see it. We have much to be grateful for.

*“Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. . . . Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!” (Psa. 107:1, 8).*



Skeptics mock the very idea of God because of the presence of evil in the world. Surely, they argue, if there was a God, He would not allow all the suffering we see around us.

We will set aside for the moment the question of why the atheist thinks that evil and suffering are “bad,” rather than morally neutral outcomes in a universe governed by “pitiless indifference” (Richard Dawkins). Instead, let's examine what this Psalm says about God's active role in minimizing the effects of suffering.

The Psalmist argues that God is far from indifferent about our problems, and actively intervenes in our behalf. He gives four examples of divine deliverance: travelers lost in a wilderness (v. 4-9); prisoners doomed to hard labor (v. 10-16); the sick and diseased (v. 17-

22); and mariners encountering dangerous storms on the high seas (v. 23-32). With two of these groups (the prisoners and the sick), the suffering may even be the result of their own foolish mistakes (v. 11, 17). But regardless of the factors leading to their pain, all four groups are desperate for help and “cry out to the Lord in their trouble.” God hears their cries, and “delivers them out of their distresses” (v. 6, 13, 19, 28).

But this seems too simplistic. We can cite many examples of people in such circumstances for whom deliverance never comes, who perish in their sorrow. Why would God act to save some and not others? (Side note: Job struggled with this question, too.)

The short answer is, it's not our place to know why God acts as He does. God has a much more complex plan in motion than we could possibly comprehend, and we have to trust Him to know what He's doing.

But this Psalm dares to go deeper. The closing verses describe a broad pattern of judgment and restoration that recurs throughout history. God “turns a

fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of those who dwell in it” (v. 33-34), and “pours contempt on princes” (v. 40). Yet He also restores the land that it might yield its bounty (v. 35-38), and “sets the poor on high, far from affliction” (v. 41). Look at the vast panorama of history and you'll see this pattern play out again and again. The wicked eventually get what's coming to them, followed by a relative degree of peace and harmony. This pattern offers no guarantees for specific individuals, of course, but it does give assurance that good will always win out in the end.

The certainty of that divine template should cause us to “give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men” (v. 8, 15, 21, 31). We must look beyond the minor irritations of our own selfish affairs to the grand sweep of human history, and realize that God truly is good. This world is not perfect, but neither is it hell, and we have God to thank for that.

“Whoever is wise will observe these things, and they will understand the lovingkindness of the Lord” (v. 43).

– David King