

# EVERY EARTH YOU SHAKE I'LL BE WATCHING YOU

PSALM 77:16-20 MAY 16, 2018

Let's finish Psalm 77 this evening. We'll begin at verse 16 and I'd like to read it for us here at the front so we can have these dramatic images in mind throughout the study.

## Psalm 77:16-20

- 16 **The waters saw You, O God;  
The waters saw You, they were afraid;  
The depths also trembled.**
- 17 **The clouds poured out water;  
The skies sent out a sound;  
Your arrows also flashed about.**
- 18 **The voice of Your thunder was in the whirlwind;  
The lightnings lit up the world;  
The earth trembled and shook.**
- 19 **Your way was in the sea,  
Your path in the great waters,  
And Your footsteps were not known.**
- 20 **You led Your people like a flock  
By the hand of Moses and Aaron.**

Back in November of last year, as tensions rose on the Korean peninsula, and as Kim Jong Un became more brazen in his threats toward other nations and ongoing missile tests, the United States decided to make a show of strength on North Korea's doorstep. A large, multi-ship strike group including super carriers, cruisers, destroyers, submarines and over 200 combat aircraft sailed together and performed exercises,<sup>1</sup> reminding Pyongyang of the capabilities of the US military. The amount of strength represented there is intense. I'm sure that for the average North Korean soldier those were unnerving days to say the least.

Through the course of this Psalm, Asaph has once again become confident in the strength of God. And not just His strength, generally, but how God uses that strength on behalf of His people. Here, in the closing stanza, he reminds us of a great show of Divine strength. But it wasn't just a drill. It wasn't ceremonial. It was one of the great, earth-shaking moments of history, when God brought His people across the Red Sea on dry land. Asaph uses vivid imagery and detail in order to put us *in* that scene that we might focus on the astonishing power of God. And we *should* focus on Him, because a major theme in these verses is *watching God*. Watching Him move, watching Him lead. Watching His ways.

So let's take a look together. We begin in verse 16.

**Psalm 77:16 - 16The waters saw You, O God; The waters saw You, they were afraid; The depths also trembled.**

When we look at what Asaph writes in verse 20 about Moses and Aaron and when we harmonize other descriptions of the Red Sea crossing in the Old Testament, it's clear that *this* is the story which Asaph is referencing. That long night when God held back the bloodthirsty army of Pharaoh and

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Ce011sZcq0>

took the Children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground, so that they might be forever free from Egypt's tyranny and bondage.

As Asaph begins telling the tale, he talks about how the waters saw the Lord on the move and they were trembling with fear.

It's interesting, the Bible frequently portrays creation as *watching* God. Think of when Jesus said, "Hey, if the people don't praise, the rocks themselves will cry out, because they're paying attention to what's happening here." We think of the Revelation, where we're told that Heaven and Earth flee away from the face of Jesus Christ on His great white throne, but no place will be found for them. We think of Paul writing to the Romans, talking about all of creation *groaning*, waiting for the work of God to be complete.

Now let's take a moment to be impressed with *just how powerful God is*. The vast, immeasurable capacity He has. As a starting point, think of the incredible power of nature. The surging strength of the oceans. Remember the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that killed more than 200,000 people. Unimaginable power. And yet, Asaph says that when the waters saw the Lord, they trembled. The power of nature vs. the presence of God. And, in this case, the sea was *in the way* of God's plan for His people. It *better* tremble! Of course, what seemed hopeless for man was no problem for God. The Red Sea was no obstacle. With a word God spoke it into existence. With a word Jesus commands the wind and the waves.

That 2004 tsunami, which impacted 14 countries, left millions homeless, one of the worst tragedies in human history, it was generated by a magnitude 9.1 earthquake. One source I consulted said that's the equivalent energy of detonating 23,000 atomic bombs.<sup>2</sup> 23,000! And that's just *one* earthquake. All that power is *nothing* in comparison to the strength of our God, who showed up that day and said to the Red Sea, "Move." And God's people went free.

**Psalm 77:17 - <sup>17</sup>The clouds poured out water; The skies sent out a sound; Your arrows also flashed about.**

In verse 16, nature is presented as an *obstacle* easily overcome, here, nature becomes a *tool* in God's hand. We see Him as a God at war, slinging arrows at His enemies. And notice how it describes the His ownership: *Your* arrows. We'll see it again in verse 18, *Your* thunder. God is not only *stronger* than nature, He can direct it for His exact purposes.

We're told the skies sent out a sound. The heavens were *resounding* with the work of God. It reminds us that God announces His comings. Angels came to resound on the night of Christ's birth. There will be a great trumpet when He returns for us. We're seeing on Sunday mornings when God's presence would come to be with His people in the wilderness it was accompanied by smoke and thunderings and shaking. The Lord wants this world to know that He's been here and He wants the world to know He's coming back. No invisible return of Christ or secret rapture as the Jehovah's Witnesses teach. He comes with the sounds of triumph.

**Psalm 77:18 - <sup>18</sup>The voice of Your thunder was in the whirlwind; The lightnings lit up the world; The earth trembled and shook.**

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.seeker.com/top-20-reasons-were-not-as-powerful-as-we-think-1767232537.html>

Not just a *sound*, but a *voice*. When God works, He is also *communicating* to those watching or hearing of what happened. So here we have this incredible image of wind and water and lightning and thunder, whirlwinds and terror. And in the song there's a global aspect to it: "The lightnings lit up the world." We can't help but be reminded of the Great Tribulation and the kind of cataclysms that are going to fall all over the earth, as mankind is exposed to the judgment of God.

On a specific note, we know that, in the future, God will once again defend His people with a whirlwind.

**Zechariah 9:14 - <sup>14</sup> Then the Lord will be seen over them, And His arrow will go forth like lightning. The Lord God will blow the trumpet, And go with whirlwinds from the south.**

Like that night on the shore of the Red Sea, but to a much greater degree, the earth will again be shaken, mountains leveled, the cosmic heavens torn apart when the Lord comes back a second time to once and for all deliver Israel.

**Psalm 77:19 - <sup>19</sup>Your way was in the sea, Your path in the great waters, And Your footsteps were not known.**

As the Children of Israel stood pressed against the shore of the Red Sea, there seemed to be no hope, no way of escape. They cried out in fear and defeat. But here's how God responded: "Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward." "...go forward where? There's no way for us to go." But there *was* a way. A way impossible with man, but possible with God. The New Living Translation puts it this way: "Your road led through the sea...a pathway no one knew was there!" The reference to footsteps in verse 19 give us the subtle impression that God had already walked the road Himself. He goes before us and leads a way. His way is often completely unpredictable because His ways are not our ways, but we know His plan is perfect and that He goes before us, He will be with us and that He will never fail us, He'll forsake us. He walks with us hand in hand.

**Psalm 77:20 - <sup>20</sup>You led Your people like a flock By the hand of Moses and Aaron.**

This God of infinite power is also a God of tender care and concern for His people. In His eyes, we don't only need to be rescued, we also need to be *shepherded*. He made us, and we are His; we are His people, the sheep of His pasture.

To lead His people, God used Aaron and Moses. These two men who kept their eyes on the Lord, watching His leading and His direction. They certainly didn't do so perfectly, but what a great encouragement for us to see what amazing things God can do, even through imperfect vessels. God doesn't only want to use Moses and Aaron, He wants to use you and I to accomplish His work as well. And the requirements are pretty simple: Watch the Lord, listen to Him, obey Him, walk by faith.

It did make me think though: Couldn't God have just teleported the people across the sea? We know God *has* that power. Philip was caught away to another town after he baptized the Ethiopian. Once, when the disciples were in a storm on the sea of Galilee, when Jesus was received into the boat they were transported *immediately* to the far shore. So why not here? Why did they have to walk *through*?

Well, first of all, being teleported miraculously doesn't require faith. It's not that God never does this, but we're called to a faith relationship with the Lord. And without faith it is impossible to please God. So, life is going to be full of opportunities to exercise real, trusting faith in God.

Second, if Israel had just been teleported to the other side, the Egyptian army could have remained as a threat. Yes, the immediate danger would be gone, but clearly Pharaoh was intent on destroying God's people. With his horses and chariots against Israel's slow-moving caravan on foot, Pharaoh would've been able to catch up with them in the wilderness and Israel would've been cornered again.

No, it was *through* the Red Sea, on dry ground, that accomplished all of God's purposes. Showing that nothing can stand in the way of His plan for His people and it accomplished multiple things. This was the best plan on many levels.

What a great comfort to Asaph in difficult days. He had started this Psalm searching for signs of God's work and, by the end, he's overwhelmed with thoughts of the active power of God, moving on behalf of the people He loves. The same God who told the Red Sea to pile up is leading His people still, with tender mercy and loving kindness. Still He is redeeming and declaring His strength.

We should watch the Lord, as Asaph did and as creation does. Watching God is what pulled Asaph out of his deep despair. How do we watch? Well, the Bible explains that we watch for His coming and we watch for His leading.

First, His coming. Jesus Christ is coming back to earth. He said in Revelation 16, "I am coming... blessed is he who watches." There are two parts to this: He's coming not only to rescue us but also to judge His enemies. And, because we know that, we can call out to those who are lost and help bring them into the fold. We understand the kind of power God is going to unleash on the earth: Wrath that will make this Red Sea scene seem trivial in comparison. He's coming to war against His enemies and nothing will stop Him. The only hope for those outside the family of God is to find salvation in Jesus Christ. And so we watch for the Lord, because we love His coming, it's our blessed hope and we watch for His coming to keep us urgent about the business of evangelism. There are not many days left for us to pull people from the sinking ship. I remember reading last year when all the North Korea stuff was heating up about how, if they launched a missile at Guam, the residents there would have just 15, maybe 17 minutes of warning before impact.<sup>3</sup> That's not much time to get the word out, so all the more reason to have that alert system working and working well in order to save as many lives as possible.

But we don't only watch the Lord for His *coming*, we also watch for His *leading*. The Lord is on the move and He tells us to *follow* Him. He leads us, He doesn't leave us. And, as we live out our Christian life, God is often going to lead us in ways that we could not have planned or predicted ourselves, down pathways no one knew was there. So, to know the way, we have to watch the Lord so that we can stay in step with Him. He is our Good Shepherd, leading us to great, green pastures, along a perfect route where He will show Himself strong for us and in us, because He cares for us. A God whose infinite strength is matched by His infinite love. An active love, strong in power, given to us that we might enjoy Him and be used by Him.

Finally, just watch the Lord by thinking about His power and His grace and His love. That's what Asaph did. It's a real comfort to just think about how powerful God is and to remember His promise: I'll never leave you or forsake you. Watching God with trusting faith is what pull Asaph out of his despair and it can give us great strength as well. Watch the Lord. Watch for His coming, watch for His leading, watch how He operates and be built up in your faith.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/world/asia/guam-north-korean-missile-test-warning.html>

