

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

January 3, 2010 Our God and Guide for 2010

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Dear Radio Friends,

At the beginning of this new year, 2010, I want to look with you at Psalm 48:14, where we read, "For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death."

The change of the year is a time for us to stop and think about time and the events of time. It is like a signpost. We ought to reflect on what is past and look forward to what is to come. Sometimes we do not want to do that. There is too much pain in the past and we want to forget it and get a fresh start and look ahead. Or sometimes we would rather not think about the future—there are fears about tomorrow that we would rather not think about. We want only to look back on good memories.

From a merely humanistic and earthly point of view, that seems to make sense. If our life is only about the here-and-now, about the days we spend on earth, then of course you want to forget the bad things and focus on the good ones. Without God, the pains and the fears of life cannot be explained.

But the believer's perspective, which is also the perspective of the psalmist, is quite different. He looks at the past and the future with God on his mind. Or, better, he looks at God as he remembers the past and contemplates the future. In Psalm 48, the psalmist looks back also at the troubles of the past, and he sees the goodness and faithfulness of God. He looks ahead, also at the fears of tomorrow, even death, and he has confidence in the power and the presence and the permanence of God. And that should be our perspective as believers as we contemplate the year 2010 and all the years that are ahead of us.

Notice first in this verse how the psalmist identifies and distinguishes his God. He says, "This God." That word "this" should be highlighted. It is not accidental. It is not just an extra. It is there for a reason—to distinguish the only true God as exclusive and definite—to identify the one true deity of the Bible as the only true God—to distinguish Him from all false gods that men have invented and in which they put their trust.

We live in an age and in a world in which there is much talk about God, and people seem to be very religious. But when they are pressed to identify their God, when they are more closely questioned, it will be found that they have nothing certain or settled in their mind about God. Which God? Is it the god of the Muslims or the god of the Hindus or the god of some other religion? And they say, "Well, does it matter? Don't we all believe the same God?" And they want everybody to get along under the umbrella of one religion.

And that is really the way it was in the Old Testament when the psalmist wrote this Psalm. Every nation had its god. And they said to Israel, "It's OK that you have your God. We'll have our

gods, too. Just don't be exclusive in your religion." But the psalmist says, "This God, this God, our God, the God of the Bible, the God of Christianity. He alone. This is God and there is none other God."

That is the foundation of the Christian faith. Only those who trust *this* God have certainty and hope for the future. In Isaiah 25:9: "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." It is as though the faithful are saying, "We don't want an uncertain God. Our God is not a fuzzy, unknown, distant being. He's the One of whom we have a true and solid knowledge. And because of that, we have confidence."

That is in contrast to the instability of those who do not believe the God of the Bible exclusively. You remember when Elijah came to Israel on Mount Carmel, he came with a question: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; and if Baal, follow him." They were unstable. James in chapter 1:6 says, "Let [a man] ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed." We can have confidence as we ask in prayer. We can have confidence as we seek God —because *this* God is our God, the God of the Bible, the God of the Christian faith. This is the foundation of our faith. Our future is founded on the certainty of the God who has revealed Himself in the Bible.

Now, who is this God? Back in verse 1 the psalmist says, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised." The word there is "Jehovah." He has in mind there the *power* of God.

Where do we see the power of God? Well, God's power is displayed in many different ways. You see God's power, first of all, in the realm of creation and what we see around us. God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. He made the world. He formed and fashioned the universe. He set the stars in their place and the planets in their course. He made every creature and the perfect pattern and place of everything. In Psalm 89:11ff.: "The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fullness thereof, thou hast founded them. The north and the south thou hast created them..... Thou hast a mighty arm; strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand." God created everything by the word of His power. He commanded and they stood fast.

You see God's power also in His great work of providence. He upholds all things by the word of His power. He is in absolute control. He sends the snow and the rain. He gives man and animal his food. He controls the seasons. He controls the courses of the planets. He controls all the natural disasters that come in this world.

You see God's power also in His government of all things— also of evil men and their deeds. In Acts 17:26 Paul says that He made all men and He determines the time and sets the bounds of their habitation. According to the book of Daniel, none can stay His hand or say unto Him, "What doest Thou?"

And so, in the realm of creation we see the mighty display of the power of God. That is something that is also seen by the unbeliever. In Romans 1:20: "the invisible things of him [that is, of God] from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are

made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."

Great is the Lord! This God is our God!

But when the psalmist speaks of the greatness and power of God, he has something else in mind. As you read the Psalm, you see that it is a Psalm of God's work in the salvation of His people and His church—a song of rejoicing over the safety of the church. "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised," says the psalmist in verse 1. Where? "In the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness." In verse 3: "God is known in her palaces for a refuge." In verse 9, "We have thought of thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple." This is what the psalmist is saying. If we are really going to understand and confess and trust in the power of this God, we have to look at the church and the people of God and God's work in saving His people in this world.

You see, Jerusalem and the history of Jerusalem in the Old Testament are pictures of God's work in and for His church today. The psalmist speaks of Zion and Jerusalem. He is not referring to the geographical place. Zion is a name for the people of God in every age. And God is the refuge of His people. God defends the church against her enemies (vv. 4-6). In verses 12, 13 the psalmist tells us to go about the church and look at her safety, look at what God has done for her. Jerusalem was a strong city on a high hill—almost an impenetrable fortress. And the few times it was taken, people were amazed and shocked. And the psalmist is saying, "This is God's care for His church.

That is where we should see the power of God as we begin the year 2010. This God, the God who protects and defends the church, this God is our God.

You can see that on a small scale in the history of your own life or your own church. If you look back, maybe you see some pain in the past. You see enemies of God that have come against you and against the church. You experience these things in your own life in persecutions and afflictions. But in all of it, God has been good. He has been faithful. He has not changed in His love.

On an even larger scale, we can see what God has done for the church. This is what history is all about. In eternity, God chose the church to be His people in Christ. He determined the total number of His elect people. He determined who each one of those would be and their place in time in the body of Christ. He gave to them His Son to be a Savior and the husband to His church. He sent His Son to redeem them, to pay the price at the cross for them.

The psalmist has these things in mind as well. He says, "We have thought on thy lovingkindness. Thy right hand is full of righteousness." What are those things? Well, the lovingkindness of God is His steadfast, covenant love, His promise of Christ. And the right hand of God's righteousness should make us think about the cross. God's right hand is His hand of power. And that hand would destroy us, except that God put that right hand of righteousness on His Son on the cross. There is the judgment of sin and the payment for sin. There the enemy of sin is overcome, the shackles of Satan's power are broken, and the enemy is driven away in fear.

God gathers the church today by His word and Spirit. He gives faithful preaching in the church to expose and uncover our need and to bring us to the cross. He opens the hearts of His people by His Spirit in His sovereign work of regeneration. And He preserves the church. Jesus says in John 10: "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." This is the power and the greatness and the immutability of God.

This God. The psalmist is telling us to look at the safety of the church, but ultimately to look at God and salvation in Christ. This God is our God.

The psalmist goes on to tell us what He is for us. He is our God and our guide. That is a confession. This God of great power, the God of salvation, the God of the church, is my God.

That is a remarkable and a bold confession. How can one claim God as his own God? As you look back in your life over the past year, there is not much, if anything, to be proud of. We are all unprofitable servants. We cannot say, "Well, God made a good choice when He chose us to be His people." That would be pride. In our lives, we make ourselves unworthy of being called the children of God, of being His possession. And some, looking at that, would say, "Well, we shouldn't be so bold as to call the God of the Bible our God. Yes, we can recognize His power in creation and in the earth, but don't say of that God, 'He's our God.'" But the psalmist does. He takes us, in this confession, beyond the power of God and the work of God to something very personal. That is my God.

How can we say that? Well, again, we have to see God in this, not us. This is the greatness of God's lovingkindness. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

So it is a marvelous confession. But it is also very personal. It expresses a personal relationship to God. The child of God does not say, "Well, He's the God of Christianity." Or, "Well, I'm an elect and I'm saved, so I don't need to think about God. No matter what I do, I'll be saved." The child of God cannot and does not speak that way. There is a very personal relationship expressed here.

And there are two layers here. First, the child of God expresses his place in the body, in the church. He says, "This God is *our* God." He does not speak simply as an individual. Our personal relationship with God begins not with us as individuals. God is not just *my* God. He is *our* God. He is God because He saves the church. And through the church and in the church and through the means of grace, my personal faith comes to expression and is fed. This God is *our* God.

But, at the same time, this is very personal. The one who says "our God" also says "my God." He realizes that he stands before God himself from day to day. God is *his* friend. He walks with God as Enoch of old did. If He is *my* God, I walk with Him. I read His word. I come to Him in prayer. And He will be the Rock in my life every day to come.

Then the psalmist says that, because He is my God, He will also be my guide. That is a very

comforting thought as we face the future. That brings God very close to me. It brings God down into my life. If I say He is my God, that sounds a little remote. We are creatures and He is God. We are little and He is infinite. So the psalmist speaks of the presence of God. He will be our guide.

What is a guide and why do you need a guide? A guide is someone who is there to lead you through something that you could not possibly traverse on your own. He is there to show you the way. He is there to help you to avoid the dangers. I have seen pictures before of someone who went hundreds of miles on a boat up the Amazon River. And, of course, that had to be a guided tour. You need a guide in a situation like that because there are natives and there are crocodiles and you do not know what is safe to eat and the river is shallow in places and treacherous. So you need a guide. And that is true of life, too, especially from a spiritual point of view. The way of life is narrow and treacherous. And there are many dangers along the way. There are many temptations. Life is a battle. There are our great enemies of the world and the flesh and the devil seeking to devour us. Does anyone dare to go that way alone? We could not. We need a guide. And this is what God is. He is the best and the only guide. Job says that He knows the path that he takes. He not only created and governs all things, but He has planned out our lives to the minutest detail.

And as our guide, He guides the events of our life to serve His eternal purpose of love for us. The psalmist says in Psalm 73, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me into glory." God has determined every step of the way of our life. He guides us through this life by His word: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light upon my path." It is the roadmap for the believer. It warns us of the dangers that we face. It tells us that there are going to be rough places to travel. But, in all of it, the Bible says, we are being led to glory. So God is our guide for 2010.

And the psalmist speaks of when God will be our guide. From the text we can confidently say that He will always be our guide. He reflects on the goodness of God in the past, in the history of the church. God was always the guide of His people in the past. That means that He is our guide in the present, too. Whatever hardships you face in the present, whatever difficulties you have in your life right now, God will be your guide. He has determined all the things that come to you in your life. He will lead you through them. He will keep you. And you should not be afraid.

In Isaiah 43: "Now thus saith the Lord that created thee.....and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee..... When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flames kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior." God will be with us.

And He will be with us also in the future. That is the emphasis in the text. "This God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death." Think about those words. Our God for ever and ever! You cannot say that about anything else that you have—your earthly things, your health, your body. You cannot say, "That's mine for ever and ever." We are creatures of time. And the passing of time tells us that too. Time is like a stream that carries us all along. But God is ours for ever and ever.

The psalmist says, "even unto death." That does not mean that God will guide you all through life and then abandon you at death. More literally, He will be our guide over death or through death. The idea is that when you face the last enemy of death, you will not have to face it alone as a child of God. God will be there with you as your God and guide. Some of you, perhaps, face death in old age and disease. God will not abandon you in death. In Christ, God has already conquered death. Death is the servant of God. Christ Himself has been through death. He was crucified, dead, and buried. He lay in the grave. But now He is risen! That is the glorious message of Scripture. This God, this God who has vanquished death, will guide us through death into His eternal rest, into glory everlasting.

As believers, we can be assured of this as we look ahead. We must not think that life is going to be easy; that we will not have any troubles and trials in life. We will. Jesus said, "In this life ye shall have tribulation." But this is our confidence: This God, the God of the Bible, is our God for ever and ever. He will be our guide, even unto and through death to bring us to glory.

Let us pray.

Our Father in heaven, we give Thee great thanks for the confidence that is ours, not founded in ourselves, but founded on Thee—who Thou art, Thy greatness, Thy faithfulness, what Thou hast done, and the promises of the Scriptures that are founded on Thee. Give us, Lord, confidence as we go forward as Thy people. We pray it for Jesus' sake, Amen.