

Reflections by the Pond

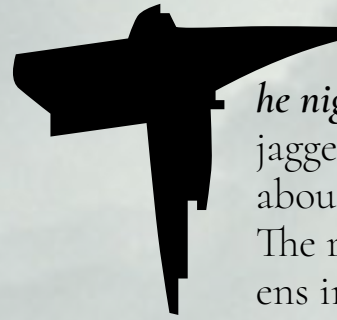
THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL

Storms

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, both His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools...

Romans 1:18-22

Under Assault



he night skies blaze and churn like a cauldron of ink cleaved by jagged white knives. The tempest swirls about, throwing aged trees about as toys. Windows clatter and whistle with the wind's rage. The rain begins silent, whispers against wood and glass, then quickens into anger, pounding in sheets, seeking out any crack that will let it in.

The back stiffens against the assault, but the heart races: Will the walls withstand the wind, will the windows hold? Will the rain finds its way inside? Will the roof hold? Will the storm win?

Lights flicker, and static crackles from the radio tuned for warning. Will the wind take shape? Will it form into a funnel of wrath and destruction and take aim for the dwelling perched helpless and vulnerable atop the hill?

My heart is in anguish within me,
And the terrors of death have fallen upon me.
Fear and trembling come upon me,
And horror has covered me.
I said, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest.
"Behold, I would wander far away,
I would lodge in the wilderness. Selah.
"I would hasten to my place of refuge
From the stormy wind and tempest."

Psalms 55:4–8

Every person has his or her demons, and it is often in the unhappy consequence of knowing God that their assaults become even more vicious than before, battering against His child without mercy. Challenge and strife can assault from many quarters, but the son or daughter of God never stands alone.

As for me, I shall call upon God,
And Yahweh will save me.
Evening and morning and at noon, I will bring my complaint and moan,
And He will hear my voice.
He will redeem my soul in peace from the battle which is against me,
For they are many who strive with me.
God will hear and answer them—
Even the one who sits enthroned from of old— Selah.
Because they do not change,
And do not fear God.

Psalms 55:16–19

For the child of God, the storm may win its small battle, but it will never win the war.

Connected to the Soil

We keep having nasty storms, here around the pond. After a turbulent spring I had finally gotten the property picked up of all the branches that had been brought down by the earlier storms. Finally I could mow without crunching the blade on some camouflaged chunk of oak every few feet.

Then, this week, a new storm hit—the worst yet. Within an hour the property was freshly strewn with broken branches from the trees that encircle the house. Shortly after the storm I emerged to head out to the barn. Looking up the drive I saw what I took to be a substantial limb sitting smack in the gravel.

But closer inspection revealed that it wasn't a limb at all, but an entire apple tree. During the storm, the tree, loaded with brand new fruit, had been ripped from the ground and blown down into the driveway. And there it rested on its side, covered with green leaves and tiny green apples, the end of the trunk shredded.

Before the day was over, those leaves had begun to curl into themselves. In less than three days, the leaves were completely withered and brown, thoroughly dead. Separated from the soil, the tree hadn't sufficient life within its trunk and branches to sustain it for more than a few hours.

That's about what it feels like to Linda and me whenever we must leave our home and go in among them in the big city. Detached from our property, we feel as if the life is quickly flowing out of us, and not being replenished. We can only go so long before we must return to the life-giving soil, and the peace God gives us here.

It's also what it feels like for the Christian to be detached for too long from the word of God. Time spent away from His life-giving word is time in which our spirit is not being replenished, time in which we are running on our own steam.

And our own steam never lasts long. Like that apple tree now sadly lying on its side, withering into firewood, when we go too long on our own, without the nutrients found in God's word, we begin to wither, and our fruit begins to shrink into hard little stones. Though we may still remain standing for a while, without that firm, healthy connection to the soil, our life becomes empty, stale, and easily blown over in a storm.

Remember the word to Your slave,
In which You have made me wait.
This is my comfort in my affliction,
That Your word has revived me.

Psalms 119:49–50

Passing Through the Storm

W

e needed the rain, so I was pleased to be awakened early in the dark hours of the morning by distant rumblings and the white eruptions of far off lightning. What also awakened me, however, were the insistent gusts of a powerful wind blowing against the open windows.

Years ago I began an issue of *Aspects*, my monthly devotional journal at the time, stating that we live “out here in God’s country, perched atop a low hill in a piece of the world where apparently all storm systems meet.” On this morning I was reminded that that description still holds true. Most of our weather comes out of the west, blowing down out of the Rockies and gathering speed as it moves across the Nebraskan plains. And it’s not uncommon for life-giving rain to be preceded by strong winds.

There is something unnerving about lying in bed watching forty-year-old oak trees swaying side to side, lashing their branches about like a small boy warding off a bully’s blows. It’s an old cliché from pulp novels, but it’s true that the wind can actually seem angry as it shoves and strains against a house, doing its best to pop out window screens, spinning bird feeders like merry-go-rounds from hell. A bizarre clattering drew me to the bathroom where the wind was making the clock dance against the wall like the lid on a boiling kettle.

At its worst, it feels as if the top floor of the house is about to lift off its hinges and be blown into the next county. But soon the rain arrives, and with it the wind subsides. The trees give up their frightening dance and the window screens quit straining to break free of their frames. Once again we’ve survived the advance shock troops, and can settle in for the more gentle onslaught of the rain.

But Yahweh gives forth His voice before His
military force;
Surely His camp is very numerous,
For mighty is he who does His word.
The day of Yahweh is indeed great
and very awesome,
And who can endure it?

Joel 2:11

“Yet even now,” declares Yahweh,
“Return to Me with all your heart
And with fasting, weeping, and wailing;
And tear your heart and not your garments.”
Now return to Yahweh your God,
For He is gracious and compassionate,
Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness,
And relenting concerning evil.
Who knows whether He will not turn and relent
And leave a blessing behind Him,
Even a grain offering and a drink offering
For Yahweh your God?

Joel 2:13–14

For many, the morning’s storm was a reminder of the caprice and strength of nature—and how impotent we can be against its force. But for me, the storm was a reminder of the all-powerful God who holds that nature in His hands. His power is more awesome and terrible than even the strongest wind, yet this same omnipotent God says, *You need not see My wrath. Come to Me so that I may extend My grace, and send the rain.*

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden,
and I will give you rest.”

Matthew 11:28

His Fierce Majesty



ast night the sky was alive with electricity. Like the inhabitants of a fragile, inadequate rowboat caught in the mountainous concussions of an angry sea, we lay in our beds surrounded by the rolling, booming ferocity of a midnight electrical storm.

We've been dry—bone dry—for a month. Huge cracks have opened up in soil that not so long ago was squishy from plentiful spring rains. The ground is hard, like a brown metal spewed from the furnace. The grass has stopped growing, and the gardens depend on our pitiful waterings just to stay alive.

So we welcomed the approaching flashes of light coming from out of the west, praying that they wouldn't—as they had before—pass us by. The storm had a slow beginning, and we wondered if we would once again be cheated. But soon the rain was pelting down, running in sheets off the roof of the house.

And like the grand finale of an Independence Day fireworks performance, the sky was alive with nonstop concussions and streams and explosions of white brilliance. Wishing to sleep, I couldn't close my eyes to the breathtaking display. The black air was supercharged with the destructive current of the heavens, turned white and silver, illuminated by its brilliance. One after the other, overlapping and stacked upon each other like nervous ferrets escaping a cage, the explosions beat against the air, beat against the house, beat against our fragile sense of safety within its walls.

Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of Yahweh before the new court, and he said, "O Yahweh, the God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens? And are You not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can take their stand against You."

2 Chronicles 20:5–6



One is never so small as when confronted by the power of heaven. A night sky exploding with super-heated bolts of lightning is sufficient to reduce the largest ego to insignificance. No mere human can stand against these forces.

Yet, for the believer, this is not a moment to be feared, but a moment of praise and awe for a God who rises so high above His people. He is magnificence and might; He is unlimited power and majesty, and no one can stand against Him.

The believer takes comfort in the knowledge that this incredible, majestic God is also—at the same time—his loving, merciful Father, in whom he has been granted security and peace. ♦



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