

SERMONS FROM THE PSALMS

EXEGETICAL AND PRACTICAL SERMONS
FROM ALL 150 BIBLICAL PSALMS
BY JEFF S. SMITH

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Psalm 1: The Leaf That Withers Not

Introduction

We study today the six verses that make up the very first psalm, which in many ways presents the theme of the entire collection of psalms. We cannot know the author nor the circumstances under which he wrote this piece, but we can know the great principle he communicates: “that a righteous life will be attended with prosperity and happiness, and that the life of the wicked will be followed by sorrow and ruin” (Albert Barnes). As we are about to begin a new year, it is good for us to study about prosperity through the word of God and begin a new expedition in search of real wealth and joy. [Read Psalm 1:1-6.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. His Character (1-3)

1. stated in the negative in verse one—what he is not
 - a. although his steps may occasionally be poor choices and he stumbles into sin, when he finds himself upon the wrong path, he moves swiftly off of it and back onto the Lord’s path of righteousness
 1. not that he never sins, but he does not practice, continue or walk in sin
 2. life is a journey and his travels are not in same paths that sinners select (Psalm 15 and Ephesians 5:1-10)
 - b. happy is the man who chooses not even to stand in the path of sinners and consider its merit for its merit is already esteemed so empty
 - c. blessed is he that never occupies the seat of the scornful, those who scoff at virtue and godliness (Ephesians 5:11-18)
 2. then stated positively in verse 2
 - a. happy is the man that delights in the law of the Lord
 1. most in the world hate the law of the Lord when they learn it and even some brethren confess that they hate considering the New Testament as law
 2. but here is a man happy because he knows what God expects of him and considers it an honor and a pleasure to submit
 3. no moaning about its difficulty or consequences; simply joy
 4. “I delight in the law of God according to the inward man” (Romans 7:22).
 5. New Testament is the perfect law of liberty (see James 1:25), the law of Christ (see Romans 8:2)
 - b. this blessed man is happy and prosperous because he devotes himself to studying the law of the Lord day and night
 1. do you read and pray each day?
 2. can you commit yourself to praying morning and evening, to studying God’s law for a set period each day?
 3. you cannot know the law unless you study it and ignorance of the law is never an excuse for failure when the book is always available
 4. take your Bible on vacation with you, have it ready to read when your hands and mind are free, on breaks at work or school
 5. God’s richest blessings are tucked away in that book in your hands, just waiting to be yours if you will but seek them

B. Like Chaff Which The Wind Drives Away (4-5)

1. this is a process of separation that was practiced in ancient Oriental agriculture—a great wind or breeze produced by a winnowing fan was used to blow away the chaff, leaving the wheat (Matthew 3:7-12)
2. compared with the righteous who are lush and fruitful and thus anchored, the wicked are tossed about and ultimately lost in the poverty of damnation (Matthew 13:24-30)

C. The Way of the Righteous (6)

1. God understands the character of his friends and finds it simple to separate them from his enemies (Second Timothy 2:19 and Hebrews 4:12-13)
 - a. though men make pretense to righteousness, fool the elders and preacher, even the whole world, God is not mocked, nor deceived
 - b. though a man occupy the office of elder or deacon or labor in the word as an evangelist, and yet walks hypocritically, God is not mocked
2. the Lord knows the way of the righteous for he designed it and watches it

II. Some Applications

A. His Resulting Prosperity

1. if a man molds his character after this example, prosperity will follow
 - a. perhaps material prosperity and perhaps not, that is not the point
 - b. sometimes godliness will reward you materially and sometimes it will cause loss
 - c. true lasting prosperity has nothing to do with temporal and material wealth
2. the blessed man is like a tree planted by waters of life (Psalm 23)
3. he is always fruitful and alive (First Timothy 4:7-8 and Matthew 6:19-21, 24-34)
4. godliness is a means to great gain; understand what gain is and esteem it properly

B. No Standing

1. after all have bowed before Christ in the Judgment Day, and all figuratively stand to receive their sentence, the wicked will not be acquitted and share the reward of the just
2. the impenitent will find no place among the people of God
3. if you want to know what real prosperity is, we have found it in this passage
4. it is not material wealth, but rather eternal spiritual wealth, a home in God's refreshing presence and ignorance of the torment of hell, the payoff for a life of profligacy (Luke 16:19-31)

C. The Way of the Ungodly Shall Perish

1. the way of life of the ungodly will always tend to ultimate ruin
 - a. no matter what deal is made with the tempter
 1. whether it be the focused and unrivaled pursuit of earth's riches
 2. or a life split between professed piety and convenient hypocrisy
 3. the devil doesn't care how he gets your soul or what he has to offer to attain it; he'll let you go to church as often as you want if you'll just serve him the rest of the time
 4. either way, he wins your soul in the end
 - b. the path of the ungodly may lead to unparalleled prosperity in human terms but poverty like this old earth has never seen when the Judge settles accounts
2. the only way to self-fulfillment is by self-sacrifice (Mark 8:34-38)

Conclusion

We all should seek prosperity in the new year. Our ultimate pursuit should be of spiritual prosperity and that by living godly. Walk not in the counsel of the ungodly; don't even consider the path of sin; don't scorn or mock God's righteousness; take pleasure in obeying your Lord; meditate in God's law each day. If you do these things with diligence, you will be like a tree planted by the river, bringing forth fruit and showing life and true prosperity forever.

Psalm 2: Triumph of the Anointed

Introduction

The second psalm is a statement of purpose from God and notice to all sovereigns and peoples of the world that absolutely nothing will prevent him from success. The invitation is extended to all to become God's allies or prepare to meet his wrath. External evidence leads us to believe that David penned this psalm by inspiration of the Holy Spirit as a prophecy concerning the spiritual ascension to his throne by Christ Jesus. [Read Psalm 2:1-12.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Resisting Jesus is Defying God (1-3)

1. prophecies of the Messiah's birth were several and famous by the time it occurred (see Isaiah 7:14, Micah 5:2)
2. the governing powers of that day recognized the threat to their authority that Jesus posed
 - a. one was Herod (Matthew 2:1-7, 12, 16)
 - b. the Pharisees (lawyers) and scribes and chief priests of the Jewish economy had become so corrupted by now that they cared more for their position than the coming of the King
 - c. Pontius Pilate, a regional governor, refused to stand up for Christ and gave the execution order
 - d. Jewish rulers and Roman Caesars, by means of persecution and threat continued to oppose and annihilate anyone seeking to worship Christ and him only; papacies, through the Jacobins, commenced the Inquisition to quell a revolt against the Catholic apostasy
3. the nations raged and the people plotted against the Lord and his anointed

B. Omnipotence (4-9)

1. we see God there upon his heavenly throne, smiling carelessly at these plots of men to overcome his eternal plan
 - b. he is not concerned but moves calmly along his plan at his pace
 - c. his plans are carried on in spite of them and often with their unintended assistance brought about by their foolishness
2. his indifference does not last forever
 - a. when the time to accomplish his purpose comes, these gnats feel his wrath most resoundingly
 - b. the announcement is always made in some way that rebellious men have failed and God has succeeded

C. Wise Rulers Recognize His Higher Sovereignty (10-12)

1. we are told to pray for them (First Timothy 2:1-2)
2. we are told to respect them in First Peter 2:17
3. true, we are under their authority; *they* must realize we are all under the highest authority
4. wise kings rule with a merciful scepter and in accordance with the will of God; wise judges make just rulings and uphold the weak and the victimized
5. they serve the Lord with respect and fear and rejoice with awe that they are not above bowing in that great day

II. Some Applications

A. The Resistance Continues Today

1. the few remaining Communist governments legislate against Christianity while emerging democracies strictly limit preaching
2. in America, zealous religious people are insulted by their leaders and threatened by legislation and judiciaries
3. we are pushed into a corner and told not to speak in his name or risk losing our freedom and our possessions
4. individuals also rage against God by refusing to submit to him on his terms

- a. they label the Bible as antiquated or Puritanical and endeavor to update and amend it for him and then gladly offer to submit to their new version of truth
- b. many more just turn to worship idols and reject God altogether
- 5. the anti-religious in America have been complaining for years that intolerance is this nation's greatest ill
 - a. they have finally succeeded in making it so
 - b. their intolerance of Christians and the exercise of faith is truly America's greatest ill

B. They Plot a Vain Thing

- 1. in the first century, the enemies of Christ were many and powerful
 - a. from his birth on, they sought to eliminate him
 - b. kings and governors, lawyers, judges, priests, teachers: all plotting to eclipse his influence
 - c. and all their plots were vain, utter failures, as 2000 years of preaching and discipleship will attest
- 2. the efforts of the irreligious will fail now, too
 - a. like Peter and the apostles who refused to stop speaking the name of Christ, the saints of today will not stop publishing and broadcasting the good news
 - b. Bibles will find their way into China and the old Warsaw Pact
 - c. America will never be rid of God
- 3. all plots are rebellion and vain
 - a. all rebellion is the devil's work and destined for doom (Matthew 16:18)
 - b. that good news cannot be extinguished (First Peter 1:24-25)

C. Jesus Will Reign

- 1. in David's day, God intended to make Jesus a King and set him upon a throne over that realm
 - a. Daniel mapped future of the world for Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2:36-45
 - 1. the eternal kingdom God intended here and in Psalm 2 was to be established in the day of another empire
 - 2. all things point to the establishment of that kingdom in the first century when Rome ruled the world
 - b. this was when Psalm 2:6 was accomplished
 - 2. Jesus reigns as God promised he would (First Timothy 6:15, Colossians 1:13)

D. Begotten Today

- 1. not *a* son of God, but *the* Son of God
- 2. this is a conferred distinction, making him superior to all those never called such—angels and priests and men
- 3. but when was this begetting accomplished?
 - a. Paul referred to this passage in Acts 13:32-35 and showed when Jesus was begotten: when God raised him from the dead and set him on the throne of his kingdom, the church
 - b. Jesus was not begotten as a created being, nor in earthly birth, but as the first one to be resurrected, never to die again

E. Wise People Do Likewise

- 1. a simple axiom states that the faithful servant will be blessed
- 2. he will not fall along the way if he continues to trust and be guided by Jesus and he will not be scorched by God's wrath
- 3. the blessing adds assurance and removes doubt (Philippians 2:12)

Conclusion

Are you a citizen in the kingdom of Christ this day? Will you bow before his throne of mercy and become a servant of the king? Will you be baptized today in submission to him?

Psalm 3: The Lord is My Shield

Introduction

Psalm 3 is the first psalm to identify its author and the circumstances behind its creation. David writes, we are told, as he flees from the revolution his son Absalom was leading. Psalm 3 is not primarily, though, a psalm about the failed familial relationship. It is about surviving when evil is all around and closing in fast. It is about security behind the shield of God. [Read Psalm 3:1-8.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. How They Have Increased (1-2)

1. David and his son Absalom had been at odds but the father had just forgiven him when Second Samuel 15 and the son's wicked rebellion begin (Second Samuel 15:1-4)

a. if nothing else, Absalom is some campaigner (and you thought the dirty tricks unit was a relatively new invention, not at all!)

b. Absalom begins with one follower and eventually builds up quite a crowd of adherents, proving that it is always easier to say what you will do when you have the luxury of not doing it any time soon

2. his following becomes so strong King David is forced to flee the city (Second Samuel 15:5-6, 14)

a. David's group is by far smaller than the revolutionists

b. but David is far wiser, he seeks a shield not made with hands (Second Samuel 15:30-32b)

3. this is David as we listen to his psalm's beginning

a. that small group of dissenters that any ruler is troubled with had subtly become an army and overthrown him

b. never mind the fact that it was his own son who turned traitor

B. When We Weep (3-4)

1. there is no worse feeling, I suppose, than to cry and cry alone

a. there is no better feeling for the child than to look up when crying and see his mother there, ready to comfort him

b. no better feeling than to put your head on a friend's shoulder and release pangs

2. here is God, always prepared to hear our cries

a. he listens to the downtrodden and the victimized

b. he hears the widow and orphan especially when they are distressed

c. he hears every one of his little children when they are overcome by terror or sorrow

3. God is a shield and that's about all we need most of the time, something to shield us from the undeserved scorn of others

1. when our head droops, we need someone to lift us up and God steps in (Ephesians 6:14-16)

2. David carried that shield with him as he had when he destroyed Goliath years before; it is an invisible shield which the faithless neither see nor respect to their own doom

3. with the shield of faith, we quench those flaming arrows the adversary aims in our direction with skill and confidence

C. Peaceful Sleep (5-6)

1. ever watch a little baby sleep?

a. the most peaceful thing you will ever see

b. on the night David fled Jerusalem, he surely could have thought that no night would ever be like that for him again

c. but David took his worry to Jehovah (Psalm 55:16-17, 22)

2. those carrying the weight of worldliness like materialism enjoy few nights like this

3. nor do Christians who keep their problems secret from God and brother

a. it has been said that there is safety in numbers

b. that is not always true but there is safety in the number two: me plus the Lord

4. David was surrounded and seemingly doomed to assassination

- a. hear his confidence in verse 6
- b. the same confidence Paul wants us to imitate (Romans 8:31-39 and John 10:27-29)

D. Blessing Upon His People (7-8)

1. David knew God's track record throughout history
 - a. his enemies might seem to have the upper hand and God's servants might seem to be finished
 - b. but in the end, God's servants always find victory
 - c. even those who were martyred for the truth find ultimate victory in judgment
2. David knows where to go and whom to implore: "Save me, O my God."
 - a. understand these are words spoken when death was calling
 - b. David knew salvation belonged to the Lord and that blessing was for his people

II. Some Applications

A. Sadly Familiar State For God's Servants

1. it is nothing new for God's servants to feel lonely and that the world numbers strong against them
 - a. think of Lot amidst Sodom and Gomorrah
 - b. think of Habakkuk in apostate Jerusalem
 - c. think of Elijah (First Kings 19:9-10, 15, 18)
2. when things seem bleakest and it appears our strength and the forces of good are dwindling, remember Elijah and God's response to him and then look around and see it is always true
3. the apostle John speaks to us as Christians (First John 3:7-13)
 - a. the context shows that Christians often make non-saints uncomfortable and even hateful
 - b. understand that darkness hates light; it cannot survive in light for when light strikes darkness, darkness is swallowed up or must flee so to speak
 - c. it is just so for the Christian in today's world

B. Those Who Trouble Us

1. many of our young are bothered by peer pressure
 - a. pressure to engage in "adult behavior" like smoking, drinking, cursing, fornicating
 - b. remember that adults who do these things are not even babes in kingdom of Christ
 - c. the most adult thing that you can do is to stand up to these "friends" and refuse to be pushed around and intimidated
2. this pressure often intimidates young people from becoming Christians
 - a. it is considered uncool to be religious
 - b. I faced this when I became a Christian; taunted every time I walked to the meeting house by a boy younger than I was even!
 - c. whatever, the most rebellious thing a young person can do these days is to become a Christian; the majority engage in immoral behavior; the minority wait to be cool for eternity
3. we must also deal with the temptation and influence of our entertainment
 - a. video games that depict women in a demeaning way as sexual objects
 - b. television that extols the awesome wonders of homosexuality and fornication and adultery while belittling religion and old-fashioned morality
4. we are surrounded always by a godless society
 - a. if this is a Christian nation, I would hate to see paganism
 - b. to walk the streets of Austin and see men with men and women with women, doing that which is unnatural is sickening
 - c. but it also is discouraging; it leaves you shaking your head
5. ours is largely an atheistic society, build around Darwinism and Humanism
 - a. our schools are permitted to teach no other religion than self-worship
 - b. it is not surprising that morality began to fail when God was expelled from the classroom in the 1960s by Murray-O'Hair and her intolerant bunch

C. Save Me, O My God

1. requires a prayerful yearning (Luke 18:9-14)
2. requires obedience (Acts 2:36-42)
3. then we are God's people and must act like it (First Peter 2:9-12)
4. heirs of great promises (First Peter 1:6-10)

D. David's Resolution

1. Absalom's revolt was turned back and its leader killed (David wept bitterly)
2. the king was returned to the throne

Conclusion

Think of David when you are beaten down and resolve to do right, look upward and obey your Father in heaven.

Psalm 4: Gladness in My Heart

Introduction

We recently studied the third psalm in which you will recall David wept and prayed over the rebellion that his son Absalom had begun in Jerusalem. King David fled the city with his small band of followers and rested one night in a hill of sorrow as he put his trust in God. Psalm 4 is considered a companion to the third, a night time psalm following the morning nature of its predecessor. Here we find David expressing the fruit of prayer and faith. [Read Psalm 4:1-8.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Hear Me When I Call (1)

1. David knew the power of prayer and was not shy about taking full advantage of it
2. prayer may be the last refuge of a scoundrel but it is first for a servant of God
3. when David spoke, he was certain that God was listening
 - a. the faithless ask how God can hear so many prayers at once
 - b. by faith I answer that God can do whatever he pleases and I am just thankful for it
 - c. I remember praying after my grandfather died when I was seven years old; that is my oldest memory of prayer; I recall the certainty that I had that God heard me

B. Sons of the World Love Darkness (2)

1. mankind struggled for millennia to escape darkness in the world, first harnessing fire and then inventing the incandescent light
2. spiritually, man sought a deeper light and found it in Christ Jesus
3. still some hate the light, for sin is intoxicating and addictive but that is no excuse
4. the overthrow of all that is right is the aim of many
 - a. modern nihilism: the rejection of an objective standard of truth, right and wrong
 - b. homosexuals, abortionists and pornographers are good; Christians are terrible

C. God Protects His People (3)

1. when righteous people are surrounded by wicked as David was this night, sometimes the only relief is the knowledge that God is watching
 - a. we try to blur all moral distinctions and redefine good and evil, but God can sort it all out correctly and he will
 - b. God knows how to deliver his people out of trials, know
 - c. "What persecutions I endured. And out of them all, the Lord delivered me" (Second Timothy 3:11)
2. with this confidence, we can boldly approach throne of grace and find help (see Hebrews 4:16)

D. Pause and Reflect and Turn (4-8)

1. the basis of the opening of verse 4 is that all this power of God on David's side should disturb them greatly and cause them to react frightfully and passionately
2. they make themselves God's adversary when they attempt to thwart righteousness
3. David implores them to pause and reflect on what their hands have accomplished
 - a. he prays them to go into a private place, free of the evil influences of other men, the counsel of the ungodly and meditate upon what they know to be true and right
 - b. they should reflect on their knowledge that all the servant of God has said is true
4. when they come to a good conclusion, David implores them to turn to God
 - a. men do not always obey the Lord's invitation the first moment they hear it
 - b. they need time to sort it out for themselves and that is fine
 1. it becomes perilous, though, when we promise to give it more thought and fail
 2. we get no closer to making a decision and if you choose not to decide you still have made a choice

II. Some Applications

A. The Quest of Mankind

1. it is peace of mind, a gladness in the heart
 - a. it is sought in fleshly and spiritual venues that are artificial
 1. fleshly: sex, wealth, power, indulgence
 2. spiritual: eastern religions, Scientology, Confucianism
 - b. in the bottom of man's heart, though, is the need for the favor and affection of God
 1. when it is attained, peace reigns in the heart of man
 2. finding that peace and gladness one day is like the clouds breaking up on a stormy day to reveal a brilliant sunshine
2. walk in the light, not darkness (Ephesians 5:1-11)
3. we "walk in the light as he is in the light" (First John 1:7)

B. God Is Righteous

1. David's purpose in life was God's; his cause was the cause of God
2. like David, our prayer must be proper to be answered and glorify God
 - a. James rebuked saints who pray that their lusts might be fulfilled
 1. the degradation of modern entertainment often portrays sinful people praying for a night of fornication and gambling winnings
 2. James calls these "friends of the world" and "enemies of God" (James 4:3-4)
 - b. James also rebuked prayer that was infected with doubting (James 1:5-7)
 1. that fire of faith has to be burning in the petitioner's heart because that fire is faith and confidence and trust
 2. one who asks of God without believing that he can deliver has made his doubt a self-fulfilling prophecy: his petition is doomed not by God's impotence but his own
 - c. further James notes that prayer must be fervent to accomplish much (James 5:16)
 1. nothing is more stirring than to hear someone pray with feeling in his voice
 2. you can tell that he is really and truly talking to God, not going through the motions or playacting, but really speaking to God just like David
 3. no shame in weeping in prayer if it comes from the heart
3. God will sort things out (Second Peter 2:4-9)

C. Gratitude

1. Paul wrote the Thessalonians, telling them to "pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (First Thessalonians 5:17-18)
2. the kind of gratitude David expressed in Second Samuel 7:18: "Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far?"
3. we must never be so intent upon the present and future that we neglect the foundation of providence upon which we stand now (Second Corinthians 11:24-28)
4. Americans are generally an ungrateful people, with a "What have you done for me lately?" attitude in everything

D. Joy

1. in Christ is a joy that exceeds expression as Peter said
2. David tries: his joy exceeds the pleasure of a bountiful harvest in the fields and vineyards
3. we find that joy beyond grain and wine in the body and blood of our Redeemer
4. we grow with the milk and meat of the word

E. I Know Whom I Have Believed

1. we find David at peace again as he was this in Psalm 3
2. he is at peace
 - a. not with his enemies for they seek his crown and life
 - b. but with God where peace must be made
 - c. Matthew 5:9 says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God"
 1. so many today will say that means we should compromise and tend an ecumenical and tolerant spirit with false religions and sinful people

2. David knew his cause was in God's service and he did not compromise with Absalom nor should we compromise with the sons of the world

3. we will never have peace with God if we seek perfect peace with men first and at any cost

3. "For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to him until that day" (Second Timothy 1:12)

a. that is true and natural peace

b. neither found in a bottle nor a pill

Conclusion

Psalm 4 closes with David in God's bosom and oh, that we might ever be there with him each night as we recline on our beds. We can be if we will pray, walk in the light and seek gladness in the Lord.

Psalm 5: The Voice of My Cry

Introduction

This Psalm is a prayer, a solemn address to God at a time when the psalmist was brought into distress by malice of his enemies. The specific time and circumstances of its composition is uncertain, though it may have been written immediately before Absalom's revolt, the apparent subject of the last two psalms before it. The writer is certainly also surrounded by enemies, but then again, that is a common predicament that God's righteous servants face. The psalm is striking because of its abundance of confidence in Jehovah. [Read Psalm 5:1-12.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. God Answers Prayer Today (1-3)

1. in these verses David prays to God who has heard the prayers of his people ever since men began to call upon him; he stands ever ready to hear the pleas of his children

2. David calls him "My King and my God"

a. we sing *I Am Not Ashamed to Own My Lord*

b. not that we own and command God, but we own up to the fact we are in his service

c. Jehovah is my king; I don't serve another and that makes our communication special

d. he is my God; my Creator and Sustainer; where else would I turn in trial?

e. Jehovah is no stranger to David and we are not strangers; he is our Father and we his

children

B. God Hates Sin (4-6)

1. how can a God of love, mercy and salvation hate anything or punish anyone?

a. how can he not be the better question

b. God's justice demands that he hate wickedness if he truly loves righteousness

c. God's promise to the downtrodden demands that he repay the guilty

d. how many otherwise pious men have gone to eternal torment demanding God to contradict himself and shatter justice

2. we are the righteous, his children and he stands ready to hear our petitions

3. but if we ask amiss or are given over to wickedness, we should not expect that he will give ear to our wishes (see Psalm 66:18)

C. Coming Into Jehovah's House of Mercy (7-10)

1. David seeks guidance because he is surrounded by those who seek his death

2. we are constantly bombarded by one who seeks our death, although our physical death is not always what he seeks

a. the devil is our adversary, just as real as David's but far more powerful because he was the force behind Absalom's rebellion and is the source behind those who disturb our faith

b. we are endangered and troubled anytime we seem to be the lone Christian in the midst of many who show little respect for Christ

1. danger in going along with unrighteousness to avoid trouble with them

2. danger in hiding beliefs to avoid mocking or being overcome by mocking and giving

in

3. danger in gradually being won by the devil

3. Peter informs us of a strategy to overcome (First Peter 5:5-11)

D. Shield of Trust Around The Righteous (11-12)

1. people don't draw lines David's way anymore because someone always ends up on the wrong side

a. we avoid drawing lines so that false teachers we like personally can stay on our side and then we don't have to withdraw from anybody that we like either

b. it is true that when we do so the false teacher and the sinful brother are on the same side of the line as we are: it is just that we have switched sides and are no longer on God's side

2. the line is drawn not by elders or preachers or churches but by the individual himself

- a. he chooses to serve God or self; heaven or hell; salvation or reputation
- b. he chooses to have fellowship with light or darkness; all we can do is recognize it

II. Some Applications

A. This Day Begins With Prayer

1. we have been assured that God will hear us when we pray; this assurance should be enough to convince us to live and die with God's name on our lips and in our hearts
2. a morning prayer is one that anticipates and makes plans (Matthew 6:5-13)
 - a. it anticipates the temptations of the coming day and petitions guidance
 - b. it anticipates the impending joys and offers thanksgiving
 - c. it anticipates the daily presence of God and casts out distraction for meditation

B. Prayer is Accompanied By Patience

1. after praying, David patiently waited for an answer (Philippians 4:6-7)
2. an answer may come in one of three packages
 - a. God may grant our request as he rescued Jonah from the fish's belly when the prophet prayed for salvation
 - b. God may deny our request as he showed Paul that sometimes the most helpful thing God can do is deny what we ask (Second Corinthians 12:8-9)
 - c. and then, the answer may be delayed (Luke 18:1-7)

C. A God of Love Must Hate That Which Preys On Love

1. truly, God abhors the doers of iniquity; they shall not stand before him (Psalm 1:4-6)
2. those who sow discord among brethren and evil doctrines alongside the gospel seed
3. those who trouble the innocent, the widows and orphans

D. Crooked Way

1. the people of whom David speaks were rebellious against God; they oppose him and will not repent, and therefore David could clearly foresee their ruin
2. David prays for God's justice, not man's sinful lust for vengeance but God's right to sort out the just from the unjust
3. Isaiah describes men dragging iniquity with cords of falsehood (Isaiah 5:18-23)
 - a. we see men harnessed in the falsehoods of their idolatry and misconceptions of Jehovah, dragging their sins after them like heavily loaded wagons
 - b. their entanglement in sin and iniquity has made them slaves and woe is pronounced upon them
4. Jesus taught us in the New Testament economy to pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48)
5. people of God put trust in him, assured of his power and pinning their hopes on his promises (Ephesians 6:14-17)

Conclusion

Have you found that shield yet?

Psalm 6: Troubled Bones

Introduction

The background for the sixth Psalm is as it was for the preceding few psalms. David is in the midst of his son Absalom's rebellion and conspiracy. David has fled Jerusalem as his son's cohort pursues him with regicide on its agenda. David's tack has been to approach the throne of God for guidance and so he continues in Psalm 6. Psalm 6 is a prayer about the chastening of the Lord, about a suffering mind and finally, about relief and growth from both. [Read Psalm 6:1-10.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Chastening of the Lord (1-2)

1. in the midst of his woe, David wonders why he is suffering so at the hands of evil men
2. suffering causes men to consider why it must be
3. he perceives that God is reproving him for some sin he has committed
4. David prays for God's mercy, an end to this trial and then for healing
 - a. he is burdened down inside by the weight upon his shoulders
 - b. the hand that slew Goliath is now rendered feeble
 - c. the complaint of "troubled" or "vexed" bones indicates in Hebrew that David is suffering from extreme mental anguish and is asking great physician to treat his troubled spirit

B. An Anguished Spirit (2-7)

1. often, a troubled heart and a wearied mind can bring on bodily symptoms that are certainly real
2. David was in deep sorrow and anxiety, as many find themselves today
 - a. David says that he is troubled inside and that his tears soak his pillow at night
 - b. is there anyone among us that has not suffered a night such as this one, whether caused by a loved one's death or our own troubles?
 - c. David is going through a grief now that is eating away at his heart
 1. his eye is wasting away, that is to say, he is wasting away from anxiety and sorrow
 2. he feels aged or as though his time of departure is coming on too soon
3. David depended on God to heal him, as we must also

C. Dawn Breaks Over The Sea of Despair (8-10)

1. God repaired David's spirit and the psalmist begins to see with clear eyes now
2. the enemies that had him discouraged before are now cut down to size
 - a. as he cut Goliath down to size with a sling and a sword, now he cuts Absalom's party down to size with prayer; he fought both battles with an invincible faith
 - b. he sees them as opponents of God and as such, doomed to defeat in the end
3. God heard his prayer; David knew this because God always hears his people when they speak to him

II. Some Applications

A. Why Do the Righteous Suffer?

1. I am asked often why good people, especially innocent children, have to suffer
2. that is a vexing problem, but the answer is, blame the devil
 - a. crime, disease, and suffering are all results of his insidious work in the Garden and ever since, to corrupt mankind and poison his mind
 - b. I hear so many argue that God took their child away or caused some great tragedy (acts of God, they are mistakenly termed)
 - c. no, the devil causes evil, because man empowered him to do so in Eden
 - d. God stands by, suffers it, that man might learn to need him and righteousness and God stands by to heal (James 1:16-17)
3. in Jesus's day, people thought that God punished people or their children for sins by creating them with a physical infirmity (John 9:1-3)
 - a. Jesus says, no

- b. life is not marred by the potter but by the clay (the devil or man) and “The way of the transgressor is hard” (Proverbs 13:15)
 - 1. man who sins against his body may have to live in pain and disease
 - 2. man who robs or steals may have to live in prison for the rest of his life
 - 3. this is not God’s fault, but the transgressor’s
- 4. there are times that the righteous fall into tests (James 1:2-4)
 - a. these thorns in the flesh do us good because they prove our faith and toughen it
 - b. they are tests from an adversarial devil God allows, because true wisdom and might only come from pain, learning and adversity (First Peter 1:6-9)
 - c. the chastening of the Lord is not to be despised, but accepted and used to grow
 - d. just as our fathers chastened us as children, so our heavenly Father chastens us, his children, now so that we might mature
 - e. remember that his grace is sufficient for us (Second Corinthians 12:7-10)

B. Emotional Pain Is Real

- 1. we hear the phrase, “it’s all in his head” used to dismiss suffering like David’s today
- 2. that really doesn’t help much: it doesn’t matter where the pain starts or even stays, the pain is still real and still debilitating and still in need of care
- 3. David seeks care from the right source, he goes to God
 - a. most reassuring thing I have ever read was spoken by your Master (Matthew 6:25-34)
 - b. not one member of this church will ever be homeless, hungry or destitute
 - c. God will see to that, even it is by the assistance of brother or the church
- 4. you have heard the phrase, “worried sick”
 - a. I worried myself sick enough times when I was a teenager to know how bad it is
 - b. it takes time, but once you begin to learn of Christ, you get better about anxiety and begin to trust in him
- 5. there is a shame attached to deep emotional pain that is not attached to physical illness and that really only makes it worse for anyone who suffers this way
 - a. there is nothing shameful about seeking help from God, from your brethren, your family, or even a physician for burdens you can’t carry yourself like stress, depression or deep sorrow
 - b. remember the scriptures and use them to work it out, though

C. Depart Workers of Iniquity

- 1. David’s strength is increased so that he looks at his enemies like gnats and swats them away with the powerful hand of Jehovah
- 2. his enemies will be ashamed, he prays, in time to save themselves by turning back
- 3. Jesus used this same phrase in Matthew 7:15-23
 - a. like the genesis of Absalom’s rebellion, spent enticing followers at the gate, these too are wolves in sheep’s clothing
 - b. like covert wickedness of David’s enemies, many of Christ’s enemies are disguised as teachers, prophets and leaders (purveyors of greater justice as Absalom contended)
 - c. they deceive men and still expect to reach heaven; Jesus commands them to depart

D. Dawn is Matchless

- 1. you can’t always just snap out of the sorrow that you feel, but eventually you will snap out of it
- 2. how wonderful it is to pray for dawn and see her break over a sea of despair
- 3. sorrow fades somewhat into trust in God and hope of eternal joy in salvation
- 4. the enemies that trouble us from human foes to mental woes all are erased in the return of Jesus and with a good word at his judgment of our works: “Well done, good and faithful servant ... enter into the joy of your Lord” (Matthew 25:23)
- 5. dawn will break a final time that glorious day for the servants of God for in heaven there will be no night, no tear-soaked pillows and no crippling anxiety

Conclusion

Where will you be on the first day of eternity? It is there you will be every moment thereafter.

Psalm 7: My Defense is of God

Introduction

The seventh psalm contains in its title the phrase, “A Meditation of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning the words of Cush, a Benjamite.” Just what was the occasion of Cush’s words, we know nothing. We do not even know who he was. The lesson we learn in Psalm seven concerns our reaction to abusive treatment and what Jesus would have us do under his law. [Read Psalm 7:1-17.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Charge and a Plea of Innocence (1-5)

1. for King David, his greatest trial in life came from the ceaseless persecution he endured
 - a. every ruler has his naysayers, but David’s trouble was multiplied because of his insistence on righteousness and his hatred of sin
 - b. he remarked that his enemy was like a lion, seeking to rend him to pieces, a metaphor used many times in the wisdom literature to describe the agents of unbelief
 1. wisdom used the image in Proverbs 19:12 and 20:2 to describe an angry king, ironically, and the better choice of seeking his favor
 2. in Proverbs 22:13 (and 26:13), “crying wolf” is the way we describe this laziness and insincerity or wickedness
 - c. but David was the king and he certainly was not lazy—the lion he described was an agent of Satan, seeking to topple the king from power and give God’s throne to another evil ruler
2. David’s fear was he would find himself in the lion’s den with no one to deliver him
 - a. another servant of God faced this literally—Daniel fell from favor with the Medes and Persians and the king was obligated under his own law to sentence the prophet to die in the lion’s den for praying to Jehovah (Daniel 6:16, 19-22)
 - b. this was in a figurative sense the prayer of David, to shut the vicious mouths of the ones persecuting him and accusing him

B. Divine Justice (6-13)

1. David confidently put his heart forward to be judged by God
2. he submitted his righteousness and integrity, as one who lived under law of Moses
3. that law was a schoolmaster to teach man that he needed a Savior because his own righteousness fell short of God’s glory (see Galatians 3:22-27 and Romans 3:21-26)

C. Falling into the Pit (14-17)

1. once in the jungle, a wicked man planned to trap and kill his enemy; he went out to a path that his enemy used and vigorously dug a deep hole from which no man could escape; the wicked man finished digging and lifted himself up by the rope he had tied around his waist before starting and then covered the hole with leaves to disguise it; he saw his enemy coming and dreamed of his demise, but just then his enemy spotted some game in the woods and left the path to pursue it; in his haste, the wicked man left his hiding place and ran after his enemy; then he fell into the very hole he had dug to kill another
2. working iniquity on our brother or neighbor or enemy always turns out this way
 - a. whether we scheme against him through gossip, slander, or by putting stumbling blocks in his way, the schemer always ends up in a worse condition
 - b. when we damage the person or soul of another, we do far more damage to our own soul in the eyes of the almighty Judge

II. Some Applications

A. The Accusation

1. apparently Cush accused David of bringing evil upon an ally or unduly harming an enemy
2. he raises his own hands as if to prove that they are not stained with the blood of any innocent man
 - a. the crime is doing evil to one with whom you are at peace
 - b. Edom did it to her brother nation Judah when Babylon invaded and Edom stood by and then plundered what remained (Obadiah 10-12)

3. Jesus instructs us how to handle situations when we are reviled (Matthew 5:43-48)

B. All The Evidence Freely Examined

1. in civil trials, often evidence is suppressed for one technicality or another and the guilty is set free
 - a. at the judgment bar on high, there will be no loopholes and not a single guilty soul will be released into the streets of heaven to repeat his wickedness, nor will any innocent man be punished
 - b. God's justice is infallible, merciful and terrible
2. we will all give account to God of how we used our breath and our potential in this life that he gave us (Hebrews 4:11-13)
3. you must be a doer of the word as well as a hearer (James 1:21-27; see also Romans 2:5-11)

C. A Fearful Thing

1. when we are reviled for whatever cause, we must remember that the devil is testing us, hoping that we will forget we are disciples of Christ and instead follow Satan's ploys
2. he hopes we will return evil for evil because he knows that two wrongs don't make a right, but rather make two wrongs and two souls in his grasp (First Peter 3:13-17)
3. better to remember the golden rule (Matthew 7:12, Romans 12:14-21)

Conclusion

God can be glorified in the darkest of conditions when one of his little children overcomes evil with good and leaves vengeance to him.

Psalm 8: Out of the Mouths of Babes

Introduction

We arrive in our long trek through the psalms in Psalm 8. Like the others so far, this work claims David as its author, but its context gives us little clue as to the occasion for its writing. Many have suggested possible events, ranging from military victories to the ark's journey. I won't hazard a guess, but from the verses of this beautiful poem, we can easily imagine King David lying on the ground beneath the stars one night, gazing at God's illuminating handiwork and marveling at his own place within it. The psalmist recognizes the vastness and the grandeur of the universe and his own relative smallness and insignificance. Still, God knows him, as he knows all his little children. [Read Psalm 8:1-9.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Hosanna, Lord Jesus (1-2)

1. as the king considers all God's hands have made, he cannot but help to praise his power and majesty
2. when we look to the sky at night, we can see constellations thousands of miles away and dream of walking on the moon or what might be on Mars and Jupiter
3. scientists have mapped the solar system all the way to Pluto, 4.5 billion miles away
4. but God has set his own glory far higher above the heavens

B. Creation (3-8)

1. *Lord, I Believe* by A. W. Dicus (1970) reflects David's understanding that God is the designer of all we touch and breathe and trample

*When we behold the wonders of creation, / The flowers that bloom, the raindrops as they fall;
The spacious skies and life's perpetuation, / We cannot doubt that God controlled it all.
Lord, I believe, yes, I believe, / I cannot doubt or be deceived;
The eye that sees each sparrow fall, / his unseen hand is in it all.*

2. Genesis says that in six days, God created the world and all that is in it (you know something, God was taking his time)
3. he created man last to tend to his work—a remarkable responsibility that requires us to be good stewards as we make use of God's gift
4. God teaches that man did not evolve from any lower species, though he was made a little lower than the angels
 - a. Darwin argues that life began as “primordial soup,” a gumbo of bacteria that acclimated and evolved into more and more complex species, jumping from the sea to land and the air
 - b. he says that the earth shows no design; that the human anatomy was pure chance
 - c. God says differently and the evidence weighs on his side
 1. evolution is a patchwork of guesses and stretched assumptions
 2. it is the only hypothesis I know of that is assumed to be fact by science, without conclusive evidence; it is a devilish conspiracy that has captured the hearts of atheists and many religionists
 - d. the world and human body shout the truth, for who can argue that the body is without design?

C. Excellent Name, Hosanna (9)

1. we are told when Jesus came to the earth in Mary's womb, he would be called “...Emmanuel,” which is translated, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23).
2. Isaiah spoke of this Savior in Isaiah 9:6: “And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”
3. this one would be God's savior of mankind

II. Some Applications

A. 'Do You Hear What They Are Saying?'

1. compared to the almighty God, David sees himself and his fellow man as mere children, as infants, and yet, that one who is a child of God, Jehovah recognizes and employs in magnifying his name among his enemies, in silencing the infidel and the doubter
2. in Matthew 21, Jesus is going to quote David's words
 - a. he had just cleansed the temple of its money changers and merchants when the blind and lame came to him there and Jesus healed them of whatever their infirmities (Matthew 21:15-16)
 - b. the priests and scribes were doubly disturbed—they could not deny his power but they would not confess it either
 - c. but it was the joyful shouting of the children that bothered them most
3. they cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David," a phrase echoing the psalmist's sentiment and meaning, "Save now"
 - a. these little ones recognized the power of God and Jesus as their Savior
 - b. the Jewish leaders were indignant (angry), Matthew tell us; they asked Jesus, 'Do you hear what these children are saying about you?'
4. Jesus replies, 'Yes. Have you never read the scriptures?'
 - a. the Lord says that God promised to perfect his power and praise with the worshipful cries of the innocent, of those who seem to be weak but possess a strength that age and prestige only steal
 - b. God is silencing the enemy with the shouts of mere children; not another word is here recorded of the anger of the priests and scribes

B. Of Such is the Kingdom of God

1. in Luke 18:15-17, Jesus met some children just like these
2. he said that men and women would have to receive the gospel of the kingdom as these children had come to him if they wanted to enter his kingdom
3. Matthew 18:1-4 tells us a little more
 - a. one must be converted from the impurity and sinfulness that mark adulthood to regain the innocence and purity of childhood
 - b. one must humble himself to enter God's kingdom, bowing before Jesus like David did in Psalm 8 and judging his own feeble place in the world compared to the mind of God
 - c. indeed, he must bow the knee before the Lord (Romans 14:11-12)
 - d. for some that entails giving up worship of idols or a religion that places man's doctrine alongside or above God's; it always means less of self and more of Thee

C. Teach The Children Well

1. you have five years to teach your children the truth about their origin before the school systems and media begin trying to turn it around on them
2. make the most of those precious years of innocence before the impurities and infidelity of other adults invades their thoughts
 - a. teach them that God made them in his image (Genesis 1:27), that they are children of his and not the monkeys at the zoo
 - b. teach them that they have an eternal spirit, that longs to return to the Creator who made it
 - c. teach them that God's word is truth, even when their teachers say it is not
 - d. teach them to pray to a God who is mindful of them and listens, to pray for their teachers and others who tell them that their God is dead
3. like the little children, we are blessed and in God's service, when we cry, Hosanna, "Save now"—it is a word of humility and its voice is not far from the kingdom

Conclusion

The psalmist recognizes the vastness and the grandeur of the universe and his own relative smallness and insignificance. Still, God knows him.

Psalm 9: Turned Into Sheol

Introduction

When we read and study the psalms, we are naturally trying to glean lessons from the history of men dealing with God. In each work, I am convinced we will learn something about serving in God's family. It is also important, however, to remember that the psalmists to a man lived under the law of Moses which is often different from the law of Christ under which we live. The Old Testament kingdom was earthly, physical, and civil. The New Testament kingdom is heavenly, spiritual and moral. David's army fought literal battles to the death to preserve and expand God's kingdom; we find figurative battles unto life to preserve and expand God's kingdom of souls, not soil. The ninth psalm is a celebratory song following a military conquest worked by David's hand and God's guide. We will learn lessons on national judgment and the existence of hell in it. [Read Psalm 9:1-20.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. National Judgment (1-16)

1. we find many instances of God's judgment on wicked nations in the Old Testament
 - a. in each case, the judgment is a physical calamity meant to avenge the oppressed
 - b. in each case, the righteous are led to a route of escape
 - c. in each case, the righteous are not deprived of eternal salvation because of national affiliation
2. Sodom and Gomorrah, Egypt, Nineveh, Assyria, Babylon, Judah and Israel
 - a. as God prepared to doom Sodom for the wickedness and corruption that infected her, he arranged to preserve the lone righteous family there, that of Lot (Genesis 19:1, 12-17, 24-25)
 - b. although, the entire city was judged, and the righteous faced the suffering of a hasty removal, their souls were not doomed for the sins of others
3. the individuals who had brought this judgment upon Sodom did face punishment upon their souls for their sin, though

B. Hell is Real (17-20)

1. in verse 17, David employs the Hebrew word "Sheol" which is translated, "Hades" in Greek and oftentimes "Hell" in English
 - a. the word does not refer to the place of eternal punishment, but to the place where the spirits of the dead go to await the day of judgment
 - b. both righteous and wicked dead go spiritually there
 - c. in fact, Jesus went there, when he gave up the ghost on the cross
 - d. from there, his spirit returned to his body to be resurrected from the tomb (Acts 2:25-28)
2. the souls of all those who have fallen asleep are there
 - a. those who sleep in Christ Jesus are in the same Paradise that the Lord promised the penitent thief on the cross beside him and where Lazarus rested in Abraham's bosom
 - b. those who reviled Jesus or rejected the gospel are across the great gulf fixed in torment as are the rich man and, by implication, the other thief on the cross

II. Some Applications

A. National Governments

1. God has ordained that nations on earth be ruled by governments, for anarchy is a root of evil and nothing good can come of it (Romans 13:1-7)
2. this does not mean that God is glorified by dictators like Hitler and Hussein, but that he has ordained the principle of government, though men corrupt it like all his codes
3. when the people are wicked, the government soon follows and vice versa
4. if God chooses to eliminate that government, the souls of its constituents are not necessarily doomed to eternal torment if they do justly themselves

B. Individual is Eternal

1. Calvinism foresees three judgments in the end

a. a national judgment—God will separate the Christian nations from the heathen nations in this first round, eliminating every citizen of the heathen nation no matter how he lived individually, but merely because he was unfortunate to be born on the wrong side of the border

b. salvation or condemnation—then there will be a judgment for salvation or condemnation, based on the individual's response to the gospel call—those who professed faith will go to heaven, regardless of what else they did and those who never got around to confessing Jesus will go to hell

c. level of heaven—round three will finally call a man's works into account, landing him in the section of heaven he has earned by his works, ranging from the wailing and resentful slum section of heaven to the king of the world, wall to wall carpeting section of the great reward

3. all truly refer to the one judgment that will follow death or the return of Jesus and will be based on one question—did you bow the knee before Jesus in life or not?

a. national judgment is based on the parable of sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-33)

1. Jesus will separate the sheep from the goats, but there is no hint that there is any kind of judgment left; rather the sheep go reward unconditionally and the goats to torment

2. if there are still two judgments left, the sheep will not all be going together to heaven or even a happy section of heaven, according to the theory

3. God will separate sheep from goats—just men from wicked men, for eternal judgment is individual not collective (Acts 10:34-35)

b. salvation or condemnation—this judgment is supposed to have nothing to do with works, but not according to the inspired letter (Romans 2:4-11)

1. eternal life or tribulation and anguish are at stake here and how does God judge

2. in the same sense, God is separating the sheep from the goats in every nation, according to whether or not they bowed the knee before Jesus morning, noon and night

c. finally, the theory admits judgment according to works, but now it assumes too much

1. it parrots the Roman system of salvation by meritorious works by promising the good heaven only to a small group, while destining rest to a sad and resentful part of heaven

2. but the Bible does not allow for parceling out heaven in such a way; heaven is blessed reward for all who people her streets of gold, there are no peon, no second class citizens, not beggars, tramps or orphans

3. all will wear a crown of glory and surround God's throne (see Second Timothy 4:8)

C. No Escape

1. there is no means to cross the Hadean gulf (Luke 16:19-31)

2. choose now which island you wish to inhabit—Paradise or Tartarus

3. he “will render to each one according to his deeds” (Second Corinthians 5:9-11)

4. when your days are finished there, Heaven or Hell await

Conclusion

The ninth psalm is a celebratory song following a military conquest worked by David's hand and God's guide. We will learn lessons on national judgment and the existence of hell in it.

Psalm 10: God Is In None of His Thoughts

Introduction

Many commentators feel that the tenth psalm is merely a continuation of the ninth; there are some similarities in theme. The ninth dealt with God's righteous judgment while the tenth calls for that judgment upon the wicked oppressors of the earth. Still, the tenth is melodically independent of its predecessor. The tenth psalm is a song that appeals to God's mercy on the troubled of his service. It gives us a stark insight into the mind of one who is an atheist, for all intents and purposes. The tenth psalm reminds us that God is always watching over his people. [Read Psalm 10:1-18.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Why Do The Wicked Prosper? (1-2)

1. when the righteous suffer, they can often be heard to wonder why it is so when the wicked obviously prosper
 - a. in reality, of course, not all wicked do prosper and not all righteous suffer so much
 - b. the fruits of sin in the world are also easily seen when criminals go to prison or execution, when addicts are broken financially and emotionally and when gossips and slanderers are caught in their schemes
2. the prosperity of the righteous cannot be measured in dollars and cents, though that is where we most often look
 - a. it cannot be measured in freedom from the world's trials
 - b. the prosperity of the righteous is measured by treasure in heaven
3. we would consider the affliction of Job and weep with him as all his earthly blessings are stolen away by the devil
 - a. we look upon him as the poorest among men then, but why do we fail to see the spiritual prosperity that sustained him through it all
 - b. truth is, Job was wealthy from chapter one to the conclusion

B. The Character of the Wicked (3-11)

1. verses 2-4 display the fact that this wicked oppressor is in reality an atheist, no matter what he may say about believing God
2. he is proud when he looks upon the poor in means and finds a victim to increase his own fortune
 - a. he plots to take from those who have little to lose
 - b. he cannot be touched with the sorrow or tears of the poor for pride and greed have seared his conscience
3. he is boastful about his wealth, forgetting that all gifts come from God
 - a. he is ungrateful and full of himself, displaying his wealth as if he were its god and creator
 - b. boastfulness like this denies God, embarrasses one who has less and reveals a covetous and nauseating greed
4. the psalmist says that you can see this character defect on his face
 - a. perhaps he looks down his nose at the rest of us or smirks when his scheme robs another unfortunate; perhaps he walks among his victims with a despicable aloofness
 - b. one thing is clear—God is in none of his thoughts
 - c. his practice proves he does not believe in his heart that God has the slightest power over him
5. it doesn't take a member of the Forbes 400 to follow after his wicked man
 - a. anyone who boasts in his things can fall into his path
 - b. anyone who forgets that God is the giver of all good is prone to deny him this way
 - c. even one like most of us with relatively meager possessions daily sees someone with less—do we look with pride upon them or flash our belongings in anticipation of sweet envy?

C. Appeal to God (12-18)

1. God hears and God heals

2. God has vowed to wait until the day of judgment to repay the wicked for every sin he has committed against heaven; so we must be willing to wait to see our oppressor repaid then too
3. God has promised to reward the righteous with wealth unparalleled in heaven for all eternity, where moth and rust cannot destroy—be patient for life is indeed short but eternity is eternal

II. Some Applications

A. A Complicated Matter

1. we really wonder why God blesses those of his creation that do not honor him while he allows the devil to afflict those that do
 - a. honestly, that is a complicated question
 - b. it involves how we perceive blessing and affliction—that material wealth is often the greatest faith-destroyer of all, that difficult affliction like illness, poverty or grief often are the greatest catalysts for a searcher
2. it is a fact of life, which we ordinarily accept, that God loves even the sinner
 - a. he created us all and has an equal desire that we all be happy and saved in heaven
 - b. he will bless all mankind physically and spiritually (Matthew 5:43-45)
3. but he will also judge all mankind, as Paul explained to Felix in Acts 24:15-16
 - a. then God will settle all accounts and eternally avenge his righteous of the oppression levied by those who denied him (Second Thessalonians 1:3-10)
 - b. God commands that we stay our human hands from vengeance, lest we doom ourselves to receiving his vengeance in that day (Romans 12:17-21)

B. Base and Immediate Gratification

1. verses 5-7 describe his base, almost animal desires, and his need to be fulfilled physically and instantly
2. the righteous servants of God have said that as long as we make our stand with God, we shall not be moved; this man makes his stand in his gold and silver and wicked imagination and fears no adversity (Ephesians 1:3-6)
3. would any among us ever dare to say, “I shall never be in adversity”?
 - a. most of us would be rightly scared to death to even think such a thing
 - b. but again, when you scratch the surface of the wicked man’s prosperity, you open wide the leprosy of spiritual adversity
4. this man thinks nothing of eternity, he spends his life in service of today and wastes his spirit forever
5. our own society is obsessed with instant gratification, mortgaging tomorrow to pay for today—we sell a lifetime of patience, selflessness, piety and eternity to borrow a moment of leisure and amusement

C. Untrustworthy

1. the wicked man cannot be trusted—when he is patting you on the back, he is reaching for a knife to insert there
2. he preys upon the helpless like a lion would stalk its quarry—he is the drug dealer, the child molester, the abusive husband, the carjacker
3. but he is also the gossip, the factious, the false teacher (First John 3:11-15)
4. all these latter ones try to murder the souls of the innocent

D. No Fear of God

1. I always wonder when I see a tee shirt that has the phrase, “No Fear” emblazoned
2. does that mean what it implies?—no fear of anything, including God?
3. having no fear of God is spiritual suicide: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7).
4. the wicked believes that God will betray the oppressed, that he will overlook evil, that he cannot identify every sinful act
 - a. God will not betray the oppressed, but will avenge them as we saw in Romans 12
 - b. God will not overlook evil, but calls all to repentance (see Acts 17:31)
 - c. God will call every thought, word and deed into accountability (Luke 12:1-5)
5. replace the “No Fear” tee shirts with “Fear him” attitudes

E. Patience Rewarded

1. the wicked are caught in their own traps (Proverbs 1:10-19)
2. but beware, lest you unwittingly join them, for covetousness is the root of their actions (First Timothy 6:6-10)
3. greed takes away the life of the coveter—it sucks him dry until his soul is forfeited

Conclusion

Be careful to make sure God is in all of your thoughts.

Psalm 11: If The Foundations Are Destroyed

Introduction

The eleventh psalm is ascribed to the inspired pen of David in its title and its tone would support that. However, the plot of this psalm lends us little insight into the event it records. Simply, the psalmist finds himself surrounded by his enemies and his friends are encouraging him to retreat in terror for his life. David refuses their counsel, saying that to flee would be tantamount to a vote of no confidence in God. Psalm 11 is a poem of encouragement when we feel surrounded and that surrender would be the simplest answer. [Read Psalm 11:1-7.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. When The Wicked Bend Their Bows (1-3)

1. as David writes, he sits amidst his friends—friends more concerned for his body’s safety than that of his soul because David’s life seems doomed, most likely, because of King Saul

a. Saul had disobeyed God by doing the work of a priest and Samuel had pronounced his removal from the throne

b. although David had been a valiant soldier and trusted confidante, Saul had lately begun to look at the ruddy youth as a rival for his crown

c. the people had taken up a lyric about the two after the defeat of the Philistines (First Samuel 18:6-9)

2. Samuel had anointed him to replace Saul, but when the two had first met, David had soothed Saul’s depression and distress by playing music for him

3. after David became a war hero, David’s music only distressed the jealous king even more, and he began to plot David’s murder (First Samuel 19:1-3, 8-10)

4. David’s friends suffered from a selfishness that overcomes us all at times

a. their greatest concern was keeping him around for their own benefit—Jonathan had become his best friend and hundreds of oppressed Israelites were now following him in hopes of freedom

b. their selfishness led them to offer bad advice, that David should forsake his trust in God and flee his pursuer, but David had always fought by faith and gained victory by trusting in the Lord

c. this is the young man, after all, who stood up to a giant and felled him with a single, smooth stone and although Saul towered over David, his faith had already been tried and proven and he was in no mind to give up that day

5. their advice was to flee like a bird into the mountains of Judea, with their caves and passes that made hiding easy

a. his friends saw David as a man with his neck already in the noose; the wicked were poised to kill him when he least expected it

b. David had had the chance to kill Saul secretly while he slept on more than one occasion, but recognizing it to be sin, refused, even when his friends encouraged him to do it anyway (First Samuel 24:1-7)

B. The Lord is In His Holy Temple (4-7)

1. to the insult of God by his friends, David magnifies God and his power

2. he claims that he has nothing to fear for God is in his temple and upon his throne

a. verse 4 calls to mind the later prophecy of Habakkuk, a man who taught that the just shall live by their faith

b. he too dealt with the same kind of wickedness that David’s followers hated—pride, lust, greed, oppression, violence, worldliness and idolatry

c. Habakkuk answered the din of unrighteousness, complaint, terror and lack of confidence in God: “But the LORD is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him” (Habakkuk 2:20).

II. Some Applications

A. How Can You Say That?

1. the advice of David’s counselors is tainted with a belief that God is powerless, and that the righteous cannot trust him

2. they ask, “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” and imply that David does not live in a society marked by righteous principles anymore and so he should not count on God to preserve him
 - a. when truth is no longer respected by men, when justice is perverted by money and prestige, when fraud and violence are the norm, when error marks the majority, when integrity and virtue are mocked and character doesn’t matter
 - b. if those foundations of civilization are wrecked, doesn’t the house stand to fall as well
 - c. and if that is so, how can the righteous trust in the character of God to sustain them?
4. David answered this complaint in verse one—“In the Lord I put my trust”—how can you even say such things to me?
 - a. sometimes that is the greatest form of peer pressure—not worldly friends actively trying to persuade you to do evil, but the pervasive influence of living in a carnal world day after day, a place where moral standards decline every time the sun goes down
 - b. that is what we are trying to resist (First Peter 4:1-5)
 - c. we are striving for to be transformed where the rest of the world is satisfied to be conformed to the status quo (Romans 12:1-2)

B. His Scepter of Authority

1. though God’s hand of creation has been idle since the dawn of time, his scepter of authority and justice thunders silently in the heavens at every moment
 - a. yes, his eyes behold everything; “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to him” (Second Chronicles 16:9).
 - b. the righteous are tried, that their faith might grow to the power and invincibility of David’s (First Peter 1:5-9)
 - c. the wicked are simply overcome and destined for destruction
2. David concludes his defense of his confidence in the Lord by remarking that God is righteous and he loves those who imitate him
 - a. those who are not overcome, even when society begins to break down and godly morality is cast aside
 - b. those who don’t surrender, even when the devil appears to be winning
 - c. those who don’t imitate evil, simply because everyone else is doing it (First Peter 1:13-21)
3. respecting God’s scepter of authority means a determination to know his will and to do it, even when it isn’t easy or popular (Ephesians 5:8-17)

C. If The Foundations Are Destroyed

1. the foundations are the principles of justice upon which Israel was founded—higher principles than self-interest and carnal satisfaction, principles like justice, mercy and faith
2. when the pillars are toppled and the foundation is wrecked, the entire structure must crumble and we witness this when any God-fearing community begins to soften its stance and indulge its weaker elements (see Ezekiel 30:4)
3. the wicked take shots in the dark and the righteous and their convictions are often victimized—what then can the righteous do; the wicked “have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken” (Psalm 82:5).
4. the righteous must be consistent, persistent and faithful, applying Christ’s golden rule and every other old-fashioned aspect of God’s will even when no one else does, “For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (First Corinthians 3:11).
5. even as our society’s foundation crumbles, the church can endure (Hebrews 10:32-39)

Conclusion

Be confident in the power of God to sustain his children.

Psalm 12: Who Is Lord Over Us?

Introduction

Psalm 12 is called another psalm of David in its title. Again we know nothing of the events behind its composition, save that it was a time of general depravity. Simply, David laments the fact that men cannot be taken at their word and the innocent are suffering from it. We will hear David's complaint, study God's promise to arise in protection and finally hear a timeless proverb. [Read Psalm 12:1-8.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Godly Man Ceases (1-2)

1. the faithful were clinging to that description while rejecting its force by the way they spoke and acted
2. they were guilty of idle words
 - a. making promises they had no intention of keeping
 - b. making guarantees they knew were fraudulent, just to seal a sale
 - c. taking oaths they knew were false and speaking just to conquer the silence
3. they used flattery to deceive people into believing lies, playing on pride and arrogance and compromising honor
4. they spoke every word from a double heart
 - a. have you seen the symbol for the stage, the masks depicting comedy and tragedy (one smiling, the other frowning)
 - b. that is the idea of a double heart, displaying whatever is most convenient and profitable for the moment

B. The Lord Arises (3-7)

1. listen to these formerly godly people now tempt God to destroy them
2. they did not become so arrogant overnight; it was gradual
 - a. one successful deception made the process look all the more attractive the next time
 - b. finally, deception and compromise are the tools of the trade and honesty is abandoned
 - c. a searing pride develops and anesthetizes this man from feeling any pricks of conscience or evidence of a faith now forlorn

C. Exalting Vileness (8)

1. "Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).
2. when sin is upheld by a nation, it is doomed
3. nations can survive economic collapse and bounce back, but never moral collapse (consider USA after Great Depression versus Rome after Caesar's debauchery)

II. Some Applications

A. Compromise

1. the art of compromise is one highly developed and esteemed in our country; from Henry Clay to George Mitchell, compromise is seen as the truest test of statesmanship, but God would never be called the Great Compromiser, for he stands rock solid and never even bends, let alone breaks; "For I the Lord do not change" (Malachi 3:6, ESV).
2. we live in an age of religious compromise, once sacred beliefs are now being cast onto the ash heap of narrow mindedness just so we can all get along
 - a. to get along with science, Pope John Paul II and New York's John Cardinal O'Connor ceded the argument over creation to the Darwinist hypothesis
 - b. to get along with modern life, Baylor University rescinded its ban on dancing and let the good times roll
 - c. to get along with intellectuals, the Jesus Seminar has stripped Jesus of his divine conception, his deity, his crucifixion, his resurrection, his ascension and even his very words
 - d. to get along with the plunging moral level of its target audience, Protestantism has amended the New Testament, canceling God's word on marriage, divorce, homosexuality and gambling

e. to reach that audience, many churches of Christ have taken up the mantra of tolerance for all these and many more and adopted the denominations' emotional appeals and influences

3. leave it to the devil to dishonor truth by perverting love and forbearance into apathy and the tolerance and approval of sin; James condemned this kind of hypocrisy (James 2:8-18)

4. in the face of religious diversity and surrender, it is up to us to stand fast (Philippians 1:27-30)

B. God Still Has His 7000

1. if we were transported to David's time, it might have sounded like a bad science fiction movie to us—almost one by one, the faithful and just were disappearing

a. oh, they were still around, but their faithfulness was missing and had been somehow snatched

b. as David searched the court each day, it seemed fewer and fewer of his counselors were men of noble minds

c. complaints of corruption in the marketplace were growing and the number of poor was increasing with every census

2. David begins to wonder, like Elijah, if he alone is left

a. after the prophet had executed all of wicked Jezebel's false prophets, she put a bounty on his head and made him a hunted fugitive (First Kings 19:4-10)

b. Elijah feels isolated and solitary while those who were once called faithful thunder headlong into sin (First Kings 19:11-18)

1. Elijah was moved by the strong wind of law breaking, terrified by the earthquake of irreverence, saddened by the fire of idolatrous murder

2. but until now, he did not appreciate the still small voice of God that promises all have not bowed to the devil; you are not alone at all

3. in spite of our relatively small numbers—when compared to the world or even to the creeds of Christendom—we are never alone or outnumbered when we are on God's side (Hebrews 13:5-6)

C. No Disapproval of Evil

1. perhaps we are not of the kind to compromise truth verbally

2. perhaps we find our security in silently letting evil win

a. in 1994, then Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders said in a Methodist church in Austin, "It is time for ministers to stop moralizing from the pulpit."

b. I think many already had—who preaches against the lottery (gambling), dancing (licentiousness), little white lies (falsehood), divorce without ground of adultery (fornication)?

3. if we find ourselves in a pit of iniquity, it is our own fault, for we never complained like David did

a. we never held anyone accountable for selling sin to our children

b. we never said a word to put the devil on the defensive (James 4:7-10)

4. compromise can be as simple and silent as refusing to object when evil threatens, refusing to rebuke when evil is winning, refusing to reflect when evil must be rolled back (Romans 14:20-23, Second John 7-11)

Conclusion

We may pray for truth, but a hypocritical double heart will betray us.

Psalm 13: How Long, O Lord?

Introduction

Psalm 13 is a poem from the hand of David to the heart of God which reveals the nature of deep despair and the way it is relieved in the Lord. In the span of 108 words, the psalmist goes from the nadir of depression to the zenith of renewal. David teaches us about enduring confidence in God, even as he learns the lesson himself. Though his salvation is primarily a temporal one as he writes, the eternal lesson rings clear to us today as well. [Read Psalm 13:1-6.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Will You Forget Me Forever (1-2)

1. David makes four complaints to the Lord
 - a. how long will you forget me?
 - b. how long will you hide your face from me?
 - c. how long must I search my own soul for answers?
 - d. how long will my enemy be exalted over me?
2. the questions to the Lord reveal just how low he has sunk
 - a. whatever his trial was, David's faith was shaken by it
 - b. this happens to just about everybody somewhere along the line, even a man after God's own heart is not invulnerable
3. David has borne with this adversity for some time now, expecting relief, but finding little
 - a. he begins to wonder if his prayers are dissolving into the air like incense
 - b. he is haunted by the past, fearful of the future and paralyzed by doubt in the present

B. Enlighten My Eyes (3-4)

1. David was undoubtedly concerned about persecutors taking his physical life; today men rarely face that threat
2. but what a truth concerning eternity
 - a. unless one's eyes are opened and the light of Christ shines in, all that remains is the restless sleep of eternal death
 - b. Jesus came to enlighten the world about the plan of redemption (John 1:4-9, 3:19-21)
3. this gospel light has the power to illuminate a change in people (Acts 26:17-19)
 - a. the light proves the separation of the righteous from the wicked
 - b. on one side is darkness, Satan, unbelief, condemnation
 - c. on the other is light, God, faith, and forgiveness
 - d. the light is shining here today, not by virtue of the sun which is turned away from us half the time, nor by the electric lights above that are subject to being extinguished, but by Jesus, the light of the world

C. I Will Sing to the Lord (5-6)

1. David has always followed God and we are now followers of Christ
2. we have faced many temptations and trials and our victories over them have always been effected by trust
3. at the heart of patience and perseverance is trust, an element of faith that is vital to it being proven genuine (Jeremiah 17:7-8)

II. Some Applications

A. The Answer

1. David had spent time searching the walls of his own soul for the answer, and not surprisingly, it was not there
2. though his patience had held so far, it was beginning to waver also
3. David is the picture of a man who is persevering, but feels like he is almost at the breaking point
4. so he cries out to the Lord for reinforcement

B. Dealing With Adversity

1. dealing with adversity can be taxing on both patience and trust
2. what the devil cannot accomplish immediately, he attempts to do with consistent pressure
 - a. few men could chop down a tree with one whack of an ax, but just about any tree can be broken with repeated blows
 - b. the devil may go for it all with a severe test, but with a Christian who perseveres, he will simply keep the pressure on, hoping to finally break the will of the saint
3. instead, we must learn to bear with trouble as good servants of Christ Jesus, even as slaves had to bear with wicked masters in New Testament times (First Peter 2:19-23)
 - a. we must learn not to complain in self-pity to the God who sacrificed his only son to buy us back to the slavery to sin which we entered willfully (see First Corinthians 10)
 - b. only through faith and patience is our reward attained (Hebrews 6:9-12)
4. self-reliance is folly (Jeremiah 10:23-24)

C. The Enemy

1. in the end, we have only one real enemy, the devil who lives in darkness, who entices men to step into his realm and gorge themselves on his enticements and become his slaves
2. his power hypnotizes men and women and dooms them to the restless sleep of death
3. amidst the stench of damnation, Satan crafts his wicked schemes and rejoices when another soul stumbles into his snare
4. of this we are forewarned, “lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices” (Second Corinthians 2:11)
 - a. the devil’s greatest ploy is to wear a Christian down over time, so expect that
 - b. you don’t have to give in today, as long as you are weakened a little before tomorrow
 - c. at this point, we witness David going to God in prayer; we learn the lesson of revival and renewal (Second Corinthians 4:16-18)

D. Salvation

1. we do not take a firm hand upon eternal salvation until the final day of judgment, hence we are only now heirs of that promise
 - a. heirs by the work of the cross in which we trust (Titus 3:4-7)
 - b. heirs by initial obedience to the gospel (Galatians 3:26-29)
2. still, being an heir of eternal life has blessing now, too (First Timothy 4:8-10)
3. count the blessings you have in this life and compare them to your woes
4. weigh eternal glory against momentary humiliation
5. renew your confidence in the Lord

Conclusion

When your burdens seem greatest, look to the Lord and the power of his light in your life and realize your blessedness.

Psalm 14: The Fool Has Said In His Heart, "There is No God"

Introduction

The fourteenth psalm was written by David in an unknown time. The text of this psalm could readily apply to most any era of mankind in reality. In it, God takes a close look at humanity as he did in Noah's day and finds it wanting for the most part. Psalm 14 attacks the notion of private, practical atheism. What is said on the lips does not always match what is uttered in the inner recesses of the heart. There, God alone sees and judges. [Read Psalm 14:1-7.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Practical Atheism—Religion of the World (1-3)

1. despite all the evidence, Jehovah God has always been doubted
 - a. Pharaoh doubted him and paid with the blood of his Egyptian children
 - b. Goliath doubted him and paid with his head
 - c. but, more importantly, Ananias and Sapphira doubted him and paid with their lives (Acts

5:1-11)

2. Pharaoh and Goliath were willing to utter the oath and lift their hands against Jehovah for they doubted him so completely

3. but Ananias and Sapphira were Christians who would never have said anything against the Lord, but nonetheless committed a crime against him that betrayed a faithless heart

B. Uneasy Life of the Atheist (4-6)

1. even the most avowed atheist can suffer from a pang of fear that perhaps he is mistaken
2. especially when he looks at the righteous, who though they suffer for their beliefs, possess a contentment that surpasses the comprehension of the atheist (Philippians 4:7-12)
3. the atheist must wonder how he can feel so empty inside while the Christian looks so filled (Ephesians 5:15-18)

C. Restoration (7)

1. an empty soul will never be filled by pseudo-science or a government initiative
2. the redeemer came to earth and led men to be converted and restored to blessing (Matthew 5:1-12, 18:1-4)
3. only by seeking restoration of the soul to God will the spirit of man be quickened (Acts 3:19-21)

II. Some Applications

A. The Lord's Gaze

1. in the Hebrew here is the idea that the Lord bent over to take a close look at humanity to discern its condition
2. what he saw was much like what he saw in Genesis 6:5-8
3. the world was filled with three types of people
 - a. godless, wicked complete atheists who troubled the innocent and shamelessly blasphemed the throne of their creator (atheists all the time)
 - b. people who would never utter a word against God who nonetheless chose to live almost completely without him (practical atheists most of the time)
 - c. his people, struggling to do right, but failing at times and falling into the same folly as the rest (practical atheists sometimes)
4. the Lord sees no one who is perfect, though he does see a man after his own heart, David, just as he had seen Noah, who found grace in his eyes

B. All Sin

1. it is an undisputed fact—all sin and need to be bought back from iniquity (Romans 3:21-26)
2. among men, there is no distinction to be made regarding sinlessness for all become guilty sooner or later
3. still, a distinction arises in how man handles the knowledge of his sin

4. the faithful, like Noah, seek God's mercy and to begin a life by faith while the rest resist (Romans 8:1-8)

C. Signs Gnaw at Him

1. God has filled the world with signs of his abiding presence, with reminders that at any moment he can part the clouds and peer through the heavens at his handiwork, even into the silent hearts of men

2. all creation sings a chorus of praise to its designer—the melodic tune of the robin whose flight defies humanity, the soft fragrance of the rose concealed amidst its delicate petals, the stately grandeur of the oak tree whose life is renewed each spring, the rushing of the river and the currents of the sea, the stars that flicker in the night sky, the sun that rules the day, from the mountains to the valleys, each sings his part and lends his voice in praise (Job 12:9-10)

a. when the atheist sees the great portrait of George Washington, he congratulates Gilbert Stuart on the masterpiece

b. when he views *The Thinker*, he is amazed at Rodin's precision

c. when he visits a home designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, he wonders at the bizarre machinations of such a mind

d. surely, when the atheist examines the human body or the methodical paths of the sea and space, he should search for their designer to praise as well

3. this gnaws at his soul because he resists the Holy Spirit who is convicting him of his unbelief (Romans 1:18-22)

4. professing to be scientists, they rejected fact for hypothesis and worshiped at its withered feet

5. just as sad is a Christian who does not live by faith, but falls into practical atheism

D. Signs of Practical Atheism

1. infrequent or heartless prayer (First Thessalonians 5:16-18)

2. sporadic assembling habits (Hebrews 10:24-26)

3. dusty Bibles and class books (First Timothy 4:12-14a)

4. lack of brotherly concern and deeds (Philippians 2:3-4)

5. false repentance as sins are repeated (First John 1:9)

6. seared conscience when rebuke is rejected (Ephesians 4:17-19)

7. unfocused worship habits as the mind drifts (First Corinthians 14:15)

E. Edification and Diligence

1. to that wayward Christian, Jesus calls to renewed commitment (Hebrews 12:14-17)

2. to begin to truly live by faith

Conclusion

Let us examine our own lives to ensure that we are living by faith and not acting like we do not believe, remembering the pilgrims who said they believed but behaved like they did not.

Psalm 15: Abiding In The Lord's House

Introduction

Once again, our psalmist is King David of Israel. Many of his earlier psalms were written in the depths of anguish and fear, but this one is a ray of sunlight instead. David asks the vital question to every man's eternity—Who may dwell with God? That is, who may have fellowship with him and be welcome in the Lord's presence? The answer shows us ten principles which divide the just from the unjust and the saved from the lost. [Read Psalm 15:1-5.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Fellowship With God (1)

1. the tabernacle was the temporary, mobile structure in which God was served in early Old Testament times
2. David wonders who may enter this place in which the presence of God is felt so keenly and warmly and who may actually take up abode with him
3. but the question has even greater bearing in our new covenant era

B. The Answer (2-5)

1. Jesus gave us the key to attaining fellowship with God in John 8:30-32
 - a. hear his words, believe them and abide in them
 - b. the truth of his preaching is that which frees one from the world and joins him to God
2. many in the world think that preaching obedience is at odds with preaching love
 - a. that idea, allowed to fester, leads to patent disobedience in the name of showing just how much one loves God; shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?
 - b. it breaks down the word of God until it is erased from memory
 - c. but nothing could be further from the truth (First John 2:3-6)
 - d. obedience to the Master is the purest sign of love and reverence while disobedience betrays a calloused, selfish heart
3. God's approval is founded upon this obedient love

II. Some Applications

A. Approved of By God

1. the basis of David's question is same as great New Testament query, "What must I do to be saved?"
2. it implies the same righteous desire to abide in the presence of God and be filled with his spirit
3. without such a hope, no man can be saved
4. but we still do not have the answer, for it is not within a man to direct his own steps
 - a. for several years after Jesus's ascension back into heaven, his gospel message was going almost exclusively to the Jews
 1. the apostles assumed that this was to be the case forever, until a man named Cornelius sent for Peter, who had just experienced a vision from God concerning the cleanness of all races
 2. when Peter and Cornelius met at the Gentile's home, it was not long at all before Peter recognized the answer to David's question (Acts 10:34-43)
 - b. God's approval is not predicated upon one's race or nationality or heredity, rather it is founded upon one's response to the power and edict of Jehovah—faith and obedience

B. Love of One's Fellow Man

1. David tells us further that only those who show kindness to their fellow man can be at home with God (Mark 12:28-34)
2. a man who loves his neighbor as himself will treat him as he would want to be treated himself;
 - a. he will not backbite his neighbor with his tongue
 1. one who uses slander, gossip and reproach to attack his neighbor behind his back is nothing but an unloving coward
 2. he lacks the courage and kindness to show the man his fault directly and privately so that it may be healed (Matthew 18:15)

3. instead he takes perverse pride in magnifying one's shame, uncovering it as Noah's
4. there is no seat in heaven for such a person
- b. he will do no evil to his neighbor (Romans 13:8-10)
 1. love should restrain us from all evil and incite us to do all good
 2. we should ever care for the interests of those around us
- c. he will not reproach his friend
 1. the rumor mill is constantly grinding, but it depends upon human hands to keep it spinning; malice of a rumor should be anathema to our hands and cause us to throw a stop to the works
 2. a true friend and neighbor does not help kindle the fire, but dampens it with love and respect; even if the rumor is true, the proper step is to help correct the fault, not humiliate him

C. Honor

1. the one whom God approves knows the difference between the wicked and the righteous and he honors the latter while making clear his displeasure in the former
2. in our society, we do just the opposite many times, heaping praise and treasure upon vile entertainers and celebrities while casting aspersion and scorn upon zealous Christians striving to protect their children and their nation from degeneracy
3. our attitude to evil should be avoidance and disdain (Ephesians 5:11-12, First Thessalonians 5:22)

D. Integrity

1. the man approved of God is true to his word, even when keeping a promise will damage him
 - a. the Jews had gotten into the habit of making oaths with no intention of keeping them, swearing by something they considered common and therefore non-binding
 - b. Paul taught that any promise is binding (Ephesians 4:25)
 - c. one's reputation is on the line and often, so is that of the faith if one of its own becomes known for prevarication (Colossians 4:5-6)
2. he is fair with those who seek his help, not exacting excessive interest on loans nor making judgments in favor of the highest bidder
3. the man whose head is not turned to evil or selfishness by personal convenience or gain is worthy to dwell on God's holy hill

E. Security

1. so often forgotten is the requirement that one abide in the faith that saved him and keep the word and grow in grace
2. if we depart from truth, we are no longer disciples indeed; we are apostates and we have no hope
3. an abiding obedient faith keeps hope alive (Second Peter 1:10-11)
4. if we keep ourselves in God's favor, God can keep us until the end (Jude 20-25)

Conclusion

We can have fellowship with God by faith and obedience which complete love.

Psalm 16: Preserve Me, O God

Introduction

Psalm 16 is identified in its heading as a *Michtam* of David. A *Michtam* is translated as a golden psalm or tablet. The sixteenth psalm has a special distinction, for it holds more promise for the life that is to come than for David's present distress. Psalm 16 is a song of thanksgiving to God that reaffirms David's complete trust in the Lord. The King's confidence is an inspiration to saints of all ages, but of special note are the messianic implications of the final part, of which both Paul and Peter quote to prove the power of Christ's death and the truth and lasting lesson of his resurrection. [Read Psalm 16:1-11.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Preserve Me (1-8)

1. that phrase has been on the dollar bill since its first printing to signify a general national confidence in the Creator
2. I am pleased that it appears on our money, but I find more solace in David's words, for they are the words of one individual soul, the largest group that will appear before God for a common judgment—one soul at a time
3. in fact, no country can make such a general boast and be certain that it will hold, but any man can make the decision to put life and soul in the hands of Jesus
 - a. as Hannah lent Samuel to the Lord, so must each man lend himself today
 - b. the commitment that we make in terms of life and destiny is more valuable than gold and must be deemed irrevocable

B. Raise Me (9-11)

1. David's hope was more than contentment in this life; it was for glory in the next and last life that is eternity
2. because of his confidence in God his heart could be glad, his glory joyous and his flesh secure
3. all because God was perceived to be reigning over his life at his right hand
4. what can we expect if God is with us?

II. Some Applications

A. Evil Companions

1. David had a good habit of surrounding himself with friends and family who revered God just as much as he did, who always considered Jehovah to be a higher authority than their king
2. for this reason was Nathan nearby when the king required stern, merciless rebuke instead of a "yes-man" who would have rubber stamped all the evil the king considered (Psalm 119:63)
 - a. when one man places his trust for preservation in the hands of Jesus, he should and will find courage in the association with those of like precious faith
 - b. this is fellowship, one of the most beautiful and smeared words in our language—it is a sharing of a spiritual sense of fraternity
 - c. when we choose to associate ourselves with like-minded saints, we give our faiths a gift of support and deny them the curse of stumbling blocks
 - d. rather than being unequally yoked with the unbelievers in the unfruitful works of darkness, we lift up the hands of the faithful (First Corinthians 15:33)

B. Blessings of Christ's Resurrection

1. this passage is Messianic, in that it prophesies of the Savior
 - a. were it not for the unfolding of the New Testament, this might be hard to comprehend, but the apostles clearly connect Jesus with these psalms and make it plain to us
 - b. though David writes, Jesus is the distant object of his pen
2. on the day of Pentecost, Peter preached to the men of Israel from this very text we are using today
 - a. he reminded his audience of the miracles that followed Jesus wherever he went and the startling fact that they had murdered this man
 - b. and in Acts 2:24 he introduces a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith (Acts 2:24-28)

- c. David was not writing about himself in particular, but clearly about the Messiah and as Peter reflected on Psalm 16, he saw the resurrection of Jesus foretold plainly and now made full
- d. furthermore, his resurrection placed him squarely on the throne of his kingdom (Acts 2:29-33)
- 3. Paul quotes the second and sixteenth psalm (Acts 13:26-41)
 - a. the preacher chastises those who read the psalm and yet cannot connect it with Jesus, whose tomb was discovered empty on the third day after his execution
 - b. the resurrection of this just man is the gospel—glad tidings that the promise made to the patriarchs concerning universal blessing was now fulfilled for their children
 - c. God had *begotten* Jesus, not *created* him, but *resurrected* him from the dead (Hebrews 1:1-5)

C. Through This Man

- 1. Paul told his audience in Antioch that through the resurrected Christ was God's grace now preached
- 2. that the blood of Jesus would do what the blood of bulls and goats could not—provide for the true remission of sins and justify man to stand in God's presence
- 3. salvation is through Christ Jesus (Mark 12:28-34 and Second Timothy 1:12)
- 4. is there any saint here that does not believe Jesus was raised from the dead?—let's read on; is there any outside Christ who does believe he was raised from the dead?—read on, too and be prepared to confess your faith in just a moment

D. The Resurrection of Souls

- 1. hear Paul once more (First Corinthians 15:1-8, 12)
 - a. it defies science to believe that any body can be raised from the dead and so many have trouble believing it
 - b. can Christianity and saving faith be made compatible with such a worldly perspective?—No!
 - c. rejecting Christ's resurrection is a lethal strike against faith (First Corinthians 15:16-19)
 - d. without the begetting of Christ, his resurrection to life, there is no extension of mercy and no forgiveness of sins
- 2. but we assert that Jesus did rise (First Corinthians 15:20, 50-57)
 - a. Christ was the first fruits of the resurrection, the first raised to never die again
 - b. we shall follow him in time and order when the last trumpet sounds and put on an incorruptible, immortal form, out of the icy grasp of death, which sting will be removed and strength will be completely atrophied
 - c. when the souls of the redeemed rise from their earthen tombs in that day, the final victory will have been won over Satan and victory will belong to the Lord and his saints
- 3. a final word (First Corinthians 15:58)

Conclusion

If there be a Christian here who doubted the resurrection of Jesus, I hope that the scriptures changed your mind. If not, surely your faith is shaken and you feel most pitiable today.

Psalm 17: Hear a Just Cause

Introduction

The title of Psalm 17 describes it as a prayer of David. We read as the king searches his heart and pleads his case before the highest court, that of God in heaven. David appears as the accused, the defendant, while Satan and his cohort stand ready to prosecute him, but David turns the tables and files a counter suit against the tempter. Psalm 17 is a picture of God's examination of his servants one by one and the need for regular self-examination. David appears as a righteous man but wisely prays for God's deliverance in the face of persecution and temptation. He waits until the final judgment is revealed for his ultimate deliverance. [Read Psalm 17:1-15.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Examination (1-5)

1. in school, examination time is the hardest and most hated week of the year
 - a. it requires so much preparation and concentration that other things must be given lower priority
 - b. but examinations are a necessary hardship, for they prove once and for all exactly how much the student knows and is capable of
 - c. it proves how much effort he has expended and how badly he really wants to pass
2. in like manner, Christianity is a religion that demands constant examination, because without preparation we will be doomed in the day of judgment

B. Nestled Under God's Wing (6-14)

1. David understands the world to be composed of two classes—the just and the unjust
2. he sees himself in the former and prays that God will protect him from the latter
3. by inspiration, he calls the just the apple of God's eye and hopes that the Lord would gather them under his wing and protect them
 - a. David is abbreviating a longer discourse on this hope from Deuteronomy 32:10-12
 - b. put more literally, the apple of one's eye is the tiny reflection of another person in the pupil of one's eye
 - c. and the pupil of the eye is among the most vulnerable and yet most wisely protected parts of the body
 - d. for this type of protection, David prays and hopes that God will hover around him and us

C. Wait (15)

1. after praying a Mosaic age prayer for vengeance, David speaks on our behalf again
2. he anticipates gladly a future day when complete and eternal relief will come
3. after suffering great loss and agony and being advised to curse God and die, Job thinks of what comes after death (Job 14:14)
 - a. come what may, we all must wait for that day when God calls and we must answer
 - b. until then, we patiently persevere and simply, wait

II. Some Applications

A. God's Examination

1. God has provided in this life a number of pop quizzes, to challenge our hearts and minds and bodies to prove if we are stable in our faith and not wavering toward the failure sought by our accuser
2. consider the inevitability of temptations and trials as taught by James (James 1:2-11)
 - a. the burning heat of hardship will beat down on every Christian's faith
 - b. to sustain one's confidence in times of trial, wisdom is required to overcome and choose the proper response
 - c. the man destined to overcome is he who approaches God and begs for that wisdom with no doubt that the Lord can provide it
 - d. as the devil intensifies the heat of the moment, God's wisdom works even harder in the breast of man and the flower of innocence is preserved in its sturdy roots

e. then the heat of the failed trial subsides and a new blossom has been added to the faith of that man—patience, the joyous product of a trial endured and the perfection and completeness of God’s examination (Romans 5:1-5)

B. Self-Examination

1. if the day of judgment is the very first time we ever think about our souls or as Christians, the first time we check to see if we are truly living the right way, we are in big trouble
2. Paul demands that each saint regularly examine his footing (Second Corinthians 13:5-6)
 - a. in any foot race, there is the danger of disqualification
 - b. the life of man is a foot race, a marathon, that necessitates each runner examine his steps along the way, lest he mistakenly take a false route and forfeit the crown at the tape
 - c. make sure you are staying on the right track, for as we grow older in the faith, we can sometimes change our perceptions of things gradually and be led astray
 - d. look for Jesus within you, not with a stethoscope, but the honest, searching, desperate eye of faith (First John 2:3-6)

C. We Likewise Trust Him

1. this confidence is a major part of seeking the wisdom that gets us through trial
2. without confidence like David’s, we are double-minded and are doomed to being tossed and rocked by every hardship that comes along
3. Peter says that, “the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment” (Second Peter 2:9)
 - a. when smart enough to seek God’s wisdom under trial, one can discover the route of escape (First Corinthians 10:12-13)
 1. if you think you are strong enough to go it on your own, you are doomed
 2. no temptation is new or exclusive to you and others have proven it can be overcome
 3. God will never allow there to be a temptation that cannot be resisted; there is no such thing as an irresistible enticement
 4. with each temptation is a corresponding means of escape
 - b. armed with this knowledge, we work a little harder to find it and persevere (Revelation 2:10)

D. Waiting

1. we wait like Job (James 5:1-11)
2. our change will come and it will be good if we have survived our periodic examinations and regularly tested ourselves to be sure (First John 3:2)

Conclusion

Test yourselves now. If you are not in the faith, come to Jesus to be baptized or to repent of taking the wrong road away from the cross.

Psalm 18: I Will Love You, O Lord

Introduction

The eighteenth psalm is yet another work of David. The heading, added in antiquity, says that he “spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.” This song is one issuing from a thankful heart, just as trial subsides and victory is certain. Its words reflect a definite Mosaic lifestyle in that the writer prays for the defeat of his enemies and is able to boast in his accomplishments. We can do neither of these things in our Christian age. We will focus on David’s description of his Lord in verses 1-3. [Read Psalm 18:1-50.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. David’s Condition (1-27)

A. Constant War and Rebellion

1. David’s rise to power and his entire reign were marked by constant battle, internal and external
2. truly there was no rest for this weary man as his physical torments from rival nations and men caused his heart much pain
3. we have a way of dismissing emotional suffering in others by saying, “it is all in his head”—but often it is not; there is some real reason for emotional tug-of-war

B. David’s Power (28-50)

1. David recognized early in life that if he were to be happy, God would have to be more than his co-pilot, but would have to pilot him all the way
2. in war or peace, joy or misery, courage or fear, David always sought out Jehovah
3. and when each trial was borne satisfactorily, he turned back to God to give thanks
4. these initial three verses set the tone for a song of gratitude from clay to potter

II. Some Applications

A. “I Will Love You, O Lord ...”

1. it would seem to be inevitable that we would love God and yet many religious people resent God more than they love him
 - a. God is considered by many to be the mean, restrictive parent who is just too hard on us
 - b. in that sense, we are much like children, unable to see all the good our Father does for us, just as kids cannot understand the benefits of rules and correction until they are parents themselves
2. but understand we will never be in God’s role, so we must come to comprehend the scope and intent of his law and correction now or miss him altogether
3. I believe that God is eminently lovable, though (Mark 12:28-34)
 - a. until I got off on my own, I did not understand my parent’s rules nor why they disciplined me as I refused to discipline myself
 - b. now I am older and see as an adult and have put away childish things and I comprehend why they did what they did
4. loving God means doing his will from sunup to sundown (Second John 4-6)
 - a. and we must be careful that our good deeds and words emanate from likewise good hearts and not from a self-serving, ostentatious attitude (Luke 12:37-42)
 - b. our obedience to the will of God should be like David’s, because we love him

B. The Lord, My Strength

1. no matter how strong you are physically, there is always somebody tougher
2. if we had to fight our way into heaven, few of us would make it
 - a. but in the body of Christ, the frailest little old lady can be the strongest in faith of all
 - b. because it is the Lord who grants his strength to his children (Colossians 1:9-14)
 1. by the power of God and according to study and knowledge and exhortation, we are strengthened
2. even in physical need, the Christian has power above the biggest man (Philippians 4:12-13)

3. even in temptation, the grace of God lends strength (Second Corinthians 12:7-10)

C. Rock, Fortress, Stronghold

1. when I was little, we liked to play cowboys and Indians up on the hillside of my town
 - a. the cowboys would set up a fort and the Indians would try to ambush it
 - b. invariably, the cowboys would fire down on the invaders and shoot them all dead
 - c. it was as much fun being an Indian as a cowboy!
2. the cowboys always won because they had a fort and were elevated above danger in a strongly held position
 - a. although the body of a Christian is often bludgeoned by life and his spirit can take many hits, that eternal soul is safe if it is kept in the stronghold of God's hand (John 10:27-29)
 - b. no one can snatch you from that stronghold, but like the lone coward at the Alamo, you can depart if you choose (Jude 20-21)

D. Shield and Horn of Salvation

1. God has provided the Christian soldier with a suit of armor, including a shield (Ephesians 6:16)
 - a. like those Indians, the devil and his minion are aiming trials and hardships right at us
 - b. but we are not defenseless; faith is a shield that causes those arrows to fall harmlessly to the ground when we choose to lift it before our hearts (First John 5:4)
2. by faith, we must resist our tempter, making a true effort to overcome (First Peter 5:8-9)
 - a. when you sense temptation, lift the shield by meditation and study
 - b. when you feel trial of sorrow, lift the shield by prayer
 - c. when you see persecution coming, lift the shield in labor

Conclusion

Our God is all the things David noted and more. In him, you can be saved and kept until your heavenly reward is gained.

Psalm 19: The Heavens Declare The Glory of God

Introduction

The heavens declare the glory of God, writes David in the nineteenth psalm. While the twenty-third is the most famous, the nineteenth is the best kept secret in the collection. From it has sprung one of our favorite hymns and an abiding fount of comfort and praise. The nineteenth psalm combines at once theology and poetic beauty as few other works can. We learn first of God's natural revelation that surrounds man all the time and compels him to glorify its maker. Then David points us deeper into the revelation of God in the Holy Scriptures before giving us his example in responding to the searching of the soul. [Read Psalm 19:1-14.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Creation's Symphony (1-6)

1. one of the terrible things about getting older is that you begin to take ubiquitous things for granted
 - a. children marvel at the stars and are excited when the moon rises before it gets completely dark; every trip to the zoo is the greatest thing ever
 - b. children marvel at the natural beauty all around us while we stick our noses in the newspaper and balance sheets
 - c. we don't listen like they do, when they hear the roar of an ocean wave for the first time or behold thunder and lightning
 - d. the lion's growl is not as loud to us, nor is the bird's song as melodic
2. when someone begins to doubt God, I wonder if it is in part because he has stopped listening and watching God's creation
 - a. God made all the little stars that twinkle, twinkle and the cow and the moon, though the former can't really leap over the latter
 - b. he made both the lion and lamb, who each symbolize our Savior
 - c. God made the sea and set its limits, planted the flowers and perfumed them and taught the birds to sing and to soar
3. and all this goes on under the sun every day, that strong man who runs his race from east to west and kisses the land with life
4. all creation is performing a symphony of praise roundabout us each day—the flowers provide the scent, the birds the melody, the rain and the waves provide the beat, the thunder adds the bass and the animals speak to us in four parts and more (Job 12:7-9)

B. Scriptural Revelation (7-11)

1. verses 7-9 introduce a series of concepts, each nearly synonymous
2. the law, testimony, statutes, commandment, fear and judgments of God are perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true and righteous
3. moreover they have great power to effect a beneficial change in a man

C. Responding to the Evidence (12-14)

1. to root out errors, secret faults and presumptuous sins
2. to cleanse away the blemishes of sin and inaugurate a reality of innocence before God

II. Some Applications

A. Sweetness of Truth

1. the psychologist's office is filled with people seeking peace who cannot find it and who would never think to look in the word of God
2. yet here is promised a sweetness of knowledge unparalleled by honey, a wealth unmatched by all the gold in Fort Knox
3. God's word is sweet but powerful
 - a. God's word can convert the soul (Second Corinthians 7:9-11, Acts 3:19-20)
 - b. it gives the simple wisdom (First Corinthians 1:18-25)
 - c. God's word brings joy to the heart (First Peter 1:3-9)

- d. it enlightens the eyes (First John 1:5-7, Ephesians 5:8-17)
- e. it endures forever (First Peter 1:22-25)

B. Acceptable Service

1. words and meditation—praise, exhortation, evangelism and prayer, study and contemplation of nobler things—are a pleasing aroma to God
2. all in all, our maker is our strength and means of redemption
3. and these rich nuggets of God’s grace bring us both warning and promise, for without the former we will lose the latter (Philippians 3:7-14)
4. God’s word empowers us to overcome our weaknesses (Romans 7:21-8:1)
5. and to participate in his justice (Romans 4:7-8, 23-25)

C. Take Time To Smell The Roses

1. if we take nature for granted, we are missing out on some of God’s best work
 - a. there is no sin in stopping to smell a rose, or to watch a butterfly or to feed the squirrels
 - b. when you find yourself removed from the hustle of the city and can meditate on a hillside or riverbank, always stop to remember who made them
 - c. the wonders of creation will bolster your faith and grant you a measure of that youthful exuberance and wonder (Matthew 18:1-5)
2. indeed, nature is such a great witness to the necessity of a designer, that all earth’s inhabitants are without excuse if they choose not to know God (Romans 1:18-20)
 - a. “what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them”
 - b. the invisible finger of God that made light out of darkness and breathed life into Adam is always clearly seen
 - c. to the atheist and the evolutionist (if there even be a distinction), there is no excuse for denying the presence of design and the need for a designer

Conclusion

Take the time to see all that God has done and then give your life and eternity into his hands.

Psalm 20: God Save The King

Introduction

The twentieth psalm was apparently composed as the king and his armies were about to go out to battle. No king of Israel would dream of entering battle without seeking God's approval first. The lesson learned at Ai was strong. In this psalm, David and the people pray that God will lead them into a righteous battle. Today, our country is not the theocracy that Israel was, but just a worldly kingdom. Still, Paul who lived under Roman rule, commanded that saints pray for their governors. This lesson will examine our responsibilities to our government. [Read Psalm 20:1-9.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Supplication for Kings (1-6)

1. David was just a temporary ruler over a temporary kingdom, one destined to failure until the throne be filled by the last anointed, Jesus himself

2. David ruled over a theocratic kingdom, one simultaneously based on moral and civil laws

- a. some Islamic countries function this way today based on their the Korah and sharia law; the Catholic church has even sought a one world state based upon the papacy and catechism
- b. but in the United States, our nation and our rulers are not theocratic ones
- c. our spiritual faith cannot rest in our president or other leaders, as the Israelites could trust that David was led by Jehovah

B. Ultimate Trust in God (7)

1. these Hebrew shepherds never cared much for people who rode in chariots or on horses (see Isaiah 31:1, Deuteronomy 17:16)

2. but their point is obviously true, nonetheless—the might of men is far less trustworthy than trusting in an infallible God

C. Obey Government (8-9)

1. the institution of civil government was established by God that there would not be anarchy and lawlessness in the nations of earth, but that their relative order might present an opportunity for the gospel to spread to people accustomed to submission to higher rule

2. but even when one becomes a Christian, he is not exempt from civil laws, but even more bound by them, for civil obedience forms opinions of the faith in the hearts of outsiders

3. we should be subject because we fear the king's wrath and because our Christian conscience is affected

a. whether they be traffic or tax laws or regulations with which we personally disagree, we are bound to submit to them

b. obeying our civil leaders should not put us at odds with submitting to God first and foremost

c. voting or holding elected office is not sinful and does not necessarily indicate an unhealthy trust in princes; consider Erastus, the city treasurer, from whom Paul sent greetings to Rome (see Romans 16:23)

II. Some Applications

A. Prayer for Our Leaders

1. Christians of every age have faced opposition from the government

- a. the Romans killed Jesus and persecuted his followers
- b. the governments of Europe allowed many dissidents to be tortured and killed in the Inquisitions
- c. those who opposed the church fled England to find religious freedom in America
- d. now governments might seek to impose limits on the right to pray and or to discourage any mention of the name of Christ in polite society

2. that is why Paul made a point of instructing Timothy to pray for these leaders, that they might leave the saints alone to worship as God directed and allow us a peaceable and quiet existence (First Timothy 2:1-2)

- a. some of our leaders follow the Bible more closely than others and are more spiritually-minded and this makes prayer and living easier—for this we should be thankful
- b. others mock the Bible and encourage ways of life that Christians find objectionable for scriptural reasons and this makes prayer more important but life more discouraging

B. For What Do We Pray?

1. Paul's interests show us how to pray in this regard—in the interest of a peaceful and quiet life, one of reverence and godliness
2. we pray simply that we might be able to carry out every part of our worship and work without interference or fear of imprisonment, lawsuit or fine (First Peter 2:13-17)
 - a. we don't have the full degree of this freedom anymore in America and so we need to be praying for it
 - b. still we have the most latitude of any country in the history of the world to worship as God commands and for that we should be grateful
 3. but in a society such as ours, our trust can never be implicitly in princes and kings
 4. the only new world order that will deliver lasting peace is when the righteous are raised to meet Jesus in the clouds and dwell in new heavens and earth eternally with God

C. Trust in God

1. trust not in physical things that benefit the body (First Timothy 4:6-11)
2. but in Jehovah, who hears his elect (Second Corinthians 1:8-11)
3. no king or president ever led a people to the promised land
 - a. neither did Moses and Aaron—it was God
 - b. David himself did not defeat Goliath because of a skillful slingshot, it was his faith in the almighty that lifted him above the giant
 - c. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13)

D. The Only Limit

1. the only limitation on the obedience is in the rare case when a civil law interferes with a religious one (Romans 13:1-7)
2. Peter and the other apostles did face this extreme case when religious leaders sought to deter them from preaching Jesus (Acts 5:25-29)

Conclusion

Prayer should be made for our leaders, that our lives might be led peacefully and reverently and that great battles not be necessary over such freedoms to worship as God chooses.

Psalm 21: An Answered Prayer

Introduction

In the previous psalm, King David solicited the favor of God before joining a battle with his enemies. His hope was concluded and summarized with these words, “Save, Lord! May the King answer us when we call.” Even King David recognized that he had a Lord and King above him. The twentieth psalm left off before the battle was waged and we learn of its outcome by reading the twenty-first psalm. Victory has been attained and all Israel stops to recognize the hand of Jehovah in their triumph, but even apart from the militaristic overtones, we learn a lesson in this psalm about the meaning of an answered prayer and the trustworthiness of our God. [Read Psalm 21:1-13.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Given His Heart’s Desire (1-7)

1. David prayed ultimately for victory which is typical of the prayer of the saints today; that is ultimate victory over the world and its taskmaster

2. this eternal salvation and triumph ought to be the subject of our prayer every day, for in the end, it is all that really matters anyway

a. at the judgment seat, it won’t matter whether we had a rainy spring or a dry one, whether you made the football team or got cut, whether you got that new car or had to settle for the old one another year

b. all that will matter is the evidence and witnesses assembled concerning your case before the Judge who holds the keys of hades and death

B. You Will Make Ready (8-12)

1. people in sports like to talk about momentum—once a team gets up a head of steam in the right direction, his confidence increases and his opponents become concerned; future victories become more likely because this momentum is forcing the team onward

2. the victory David experienced lent itself to this sense of momentum in Israel

a. it gave the Hebrew subjects and their ruler confidence that they could build upon this triumph the next time they were tried

b. the sentiment is that if God were for us this time, he surely will be the next time; if we were able to overcome this time, we should be able to next time as well

C. Sing and Praise (13)

1. the joy and salvation that began this psalm are reinforced in its end

2. the strong shoulder of God is able to support the cares of the humble, to answer prayer and provide comfort

3. such a benevolent king as ours deserves the loving obedience of his subjects

4. submission to Christ is knowing the truth than makes man free (see John 8:32)

II. Some Applications

A. Trust in God is Necessary

1. when David and his people bowed the knee before battle, they were displaying their trust in God, not for others to see, but to make the communication between man and maker

2. prayer has never been exceeded as the most infallible form of communication

3. a prayerful life is one that is set apart from the world, that directs the faithful along a better chosen path (Proverbs 3:5-6)

4. you see the prayer for victory must be accompanied by a true desire ruling the heart and a willingness to place one’s fate in the hands of another, to trust the Lord enough to turn over one’s existence to his guidance (First John 5:1-5)

5. we think of Simon Peter trying to walk on the water with Jesus, doing just fine until the waves and wind picked up, and then beginning to sink

a. do you have enough faith and trust to make that walk successfully?

b. not on water, but through the shifting circumstances of life, in the face of trial and temptation (James 1:2-8, 12)?

B. A Crown is Waiting

1. upon the head of the victor in David's psalm was placed a golden crown
2. this figure is employed of the redeemed in the New Testament
 - a. I have read of the Russian empresses who were compelled to wear special crowns for their coronations that weighed upwards of thirty pounds
 - b. they labored just to keep that heavy thing balanced on their heads, while their necks and backs were bending under the weight
3. few of us will ever experience wearing something so valuable upon our heads in this life, but God promises to crown us with eternal life if we are among the victorious (First Corinthians 9:24-25)
4. there are crowns enough for everyone who is saved, their weight is uplifting rather than debilitating, and they will not be removed (Second Timothy 4:6-8)
5. and while the enemy surrounds us in this earth, we pray like King David to God and labor to remain always faithful to our confession (see Revelation 2:10)

C. Confidence in the Future Built on the Past

1. when one first becomes a Christian, he is often uncertain of himself and if he can really possess the strength of character to deny the flesh and serve the spirit
2. but that first taste of victory or burst of growth provides a sense of momentum in the right direction
3. even the harshest of trials can provide the opportunity for growth
 - a. the apostle Paul was facing opposition to apostleship (Second Corinthians 11:22-12:10)
 - b. he told the Philippians he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him (4:10-13)
 - c. diligent effort and loyal faithfulness has given Paul victory over his enemies, gratitude for God's aid in the past and confidence in his assistance in the future

D. Finding A Small Victory

1. we have a promise of abiding help in hard times (First Corinthians 10:12-13)
2. the humble and vigilant will still face temptation, but will be trained to recognize the escape hatch God has built alongside the devil's enticement
3. it is never hard to find and one single victory is enough to build future success upon
 - a. such a God as ours deserves our worship and praise every day in all that we do
 - b. and each Lord's Day when the saints assemble to worship

Conclusion

This psalm reminds us of the power of God to answer prayer and lead us to victory. The real danger is that his soldiers may desert the cause.

Psalm 22: My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?

Introduction

We often wonder at the words of Jesus on the cross, crying out to his Father, “Why have you forsaken me?”. How had God forsaken his son and why? David gives us the answer in the twenty-second psalm. God is not a forsaker at all and the question of Jesus merely assures us of this. In this psalm, David is the downtrodden but his sense of humiliation hints at the sacrifice of Jesus before and upon the cross. [Read Psalm 22:1-31.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Why Are You So Far? (1-15)

1. David suggests that it seems as if God is not listening because there is no apparent answer to his prayer
2. we all have that weak feeling sometimes that our prayers are evaporating because we don't see them answered as we expect and we can never accept that occasionally God's most beneficent answer to our prayer is negative

B. The Bitterness of Calvary (16-18)

1. like the psalmist, Jesus went to the bitterness of the cross, dreading the agony but confident of its purpose and ultimate success
2. all these things came upon one who, unlike the psalmist, underwent them willingly

C. David's Cry (19-21a)

1. David cries out in a way Jesus never did, pleading for quick comfort
2. the Lord went to the cross meekly like a sheep to the slaughter

D. You Have Answered Me (21b-31)

1. David learns what Jesus knew all along—God does not forsake his servants
2. Jesus asked the question for the benefit of those who would hear him, that they might open their psalms like we are doing and discover more about what was happening that day

II. Some Applications

A. I Will Declare Your Name

1. the Hebrew writer quotes verse 22 concerning our high priest (Hebrews 2:9-18)
 - a. Jesus was preaching on that cross to his brethren, the Jews
 - b. David had declared him centuries earlier and now Jesus was calling upon him to testify, to get the attention of the Hebrews who revered David but hated Jesus
 - c. as God heard David, so he hears me
 - d. indeed Jesus is the preeminent among all the brotherhood of the redeemed; For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29).
2. when Jesus spoke to God, the Father did not forsake him, but heard every word and comforted him (Luke 22:39-44)

B. Turn and Obey

1. God will not forsake his children who are striving to serve him acceptably (Deuteronomy 4:29-31)
2. but if you forsake him, he will not force himself upon you; “The LORD is with you while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you” (Second Chronicles 15:1-2).
3. sometimes people in adversity feel God has forsaken them, but not Paul (Second Corinthians 4:8-9)
3. we consider Paul whose prayer was heard but denied (Second Corinthians 12:7-10)
 - a. sometimes a parent's kindest reply to his child's entreaty is no
 - b. sometimes God favors us by denying our wishes

4. but Jesus put himself upon that cross and was intent upon carrying through with his mission; his prayer was answered (John 12:23, 27-30)

C. God Isn't Going Anywhere

1. do you get the message from the cross?
 - a. Jesus could have escaped even before his arrest (Matthew 26:47, 52-54)
 - b. but he willingly he suffered the cruelty of the cross (Matthew 27:27-31, 35-43)
2. God hears his servants and never forsakes them; "Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved" (Psalm 55:22).

Conclusion

David is the downtrodden but his sense of humiliation hints at the sacrifice of Jesus before and upon the cross.

Psalm 23: The Lord is My Shepherd

Introduction

The twenty-third psalm is the most beloved and recited of the entire collection, and for good reason. I believe that brevity is the essence of clarity and in this little poetic song, David weaves for us the marvelous and special relationship between man and God, sheep and shepherd. David was himself a shepherd, but in the twenty-third psalm, he is evidently turning the rod and staff over to Jehovah to direct him in the safety of the fold. The promises and blessings that the Holy Spirit defines by David's pen speak across the centuries to you and me—security in times easy and difficult. [Read Psalm 23:1-6.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. I Shall Not Want (1-3)

1. in the opening verse, David establishes for us the sense of contentment and satisfaction that he felt with his leader and master, the Lord God of Israel
2. David knew well the responsibilities of a shepherd and was eminently qualified to judge one taking that occupation; he judged God to be perfect
3. "I shall not want" implies confidence in the shepherd's ability and concern for the sheep
 - a. when darkness fell and ravenous animals threatened, the shepherd would be there
 - b. when sustenance was at a premium, the shepherd would find a way to provide

B. The Valley of the Shadow of Death (4)

1. as darkness would begin to fall over Palestine, harm and the threat of death would lurk in the hills and valleys as the wolves and lions and thieves prepared to pounce upon the good sheep
2. but the wise and caring shepherd would lead his flock through these dangers into the fold
3. the sheep followed because they trusted the Shepherd

C. Dwelling in the House of the Lord Forever (5-6)

1. our Shepherd will embarrass our enemies by providing something for us that they will lack
 - a. they will witness the light of Christ reflected in our lives through blessing and peace and joy, but will not understand its source
 - b. our souls will be constantly fed, never famished while the materialist will fill his barn with riches but suffer his soul to starve as he withers off the earth in ignorance (see Luke 12:16-21)
2. when injured like a lamb caught in the briars, our Shepherd will be there to salve our wounds with oil
3. the New Testament promises that the Christian will be filled with the fruits of righteousness, with knowledge, comfort and joy; truly our cup runs over

II. Some Applications

A. Jesus, the Loving Shepherd

1. the New Testament employs this timeless imagery to direct our hearts to a shepherd sent from God unto man with the mission of taking charge of souls and directing them to the safety of the heavenly pasture of the church and ultimately the eternal temple of God in the skies
2. Jesus is our shepherd (John 10:11-16)
 - a. the shepherds of the Palestinian countryside might protect their sheep but rarely would they ever consent to die for them
 - b. Jesus, however, was sent specifically to die for his sheep that would hear his tender invitation to enter that blessed flock (Romans 5:6-11)
 - c. willingly we all wandered into the realm of the wolves—indulgence and sin—and the Shepherd came with courage to guide us back to safety (First Peter 2:21-25)

B. "He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters."

1. in the Old Testament, sometimes we see the figure of drought and famine depicting the desperation and calamity of Israel
2. but this figure shows the selfless care of our loving Shepherd
3. he locates for us green pastures that supply our need for strength and hope and life

a. our physical and spiritual needs are met so that we need not worry for our shepherd is trustworthy and dependable, even when the rest cry out in destitution (Matthew 6:31-34 and Ephesians 1:3)

b. but the worst kind of famine that can afflict the sheep fold of God is entirely self-inflicted, “not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11)

4. being led by the still waters reminds us that sometimes the life of a Christian is tempest-tossed by trial and tribulation

c. but our loving shepherd can still those waters and allow us to walk beside them through the power of his word (Matthew 8:23-27)

d. our Shepherd’s provision of encouragement and edification is transfused into us through the medium of that word; to roam away from it, even for a day, is to wander foolishly from the green pastures and still waters into the scorched earth and raging rapids of separation and peril and doom

C. “He restores my soul; He leads me in the path of righteousness For his name’s sake.”

1. do you remember that Peter said we are all like sheep, having gone astray?

a. the lure of the passing pleasures of sin called our name and for a moment, its voice was louder than the Shepherd’s

b. by folly, we abandoned the Shepherd’s care for the wolf’s empty promise that obscured such sharp teeth

2. but Jesus came into the world to be its light (John 1:7-9), to illuminate the one path that leads to glory and the relief of a soul restored (Psalm 119:105-107)

3. the Shepherd’s gospel permits us to be born anew, recreated as it were, to start afresh our lives, this time being led in right paths (Ephesians 4:20-24)

4. if your soul is blemished by sin this night, the Shepherd awaits

D. “I will fear no evil; For You are with me;”

1. the Hebrew word here is actually broader than just death, so that it includes any dark and frightening experience, any time of bitterness, sorrow or fear

2. you see, the devil is always lurking and he thrives upon the unfruitful works of darkness in which the world regularly operates (see Ephesians 5:11)

3. we err greatly when we enhance the darkness and his power by extinguishing the lamp of God’s word which we carry along our path

4. when we walk by the light of faith and trust in the Shepherd, the darkness is less frightening and the temptations more conquerable (Second Corinthians 4:16-5:8)

5. certainly David taught us this when he faced Goliath—one man with God for him is a powerful force (see First John 4:4)

E. “Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”

1. a shepherd carried a minimum of equipment including a rod and a staff

a. the rod was a club used primarily for defense against enemies or predators

b. the staff was a long pole crooked at the end to guide and direct

2. Jesus, our Shepherd, uses his rod like the shepherds of old, to protect and discipline

a. the sense of that power in our leader inspires confidence

b. when walking through the valley of hardship, the knowledge that a perfect Shepherd is leading the way encourages us to carry on

c. he uses that rod even to chastise us if we begin to wander away (Hebrews 12:3-11)

1. his word rebukes us (see First Corinthians 11:32, Second Timothy 3:16)

2. his other sheep serve also to restore us to the fold, when they warn and rebuke us concerning a danger which we cannot see clearly ourselves (James 5:19-20)

3. he uses his staff to direct our footsteps

a. if we begin to wander, that staff is comforting for it returns us to the right direction

b. our Shepherd cares so much for us that he will not permit even one of us to stray without applying his staff in an attempt to correct our missteps (Matthew 18:12-14)

F. Dwelling in God’s House Forever

1. the book of Revelation promised protection to those who dwelt in God’s house in the days of John (see Revelation 11:1-2)

2. God's household today is his church (see First Timothy 3:15), a family made up of his adopted children by faith
3. one day that house will convene en masse around his throne in heaven (Revelation 21:1-4)
4. then will be received the ultimate reward of the loyal sheep (Hebrews 13:20-21)

Conclusion

Will you come to the loving Shepherd and accept his rod and staff? Confess Jesus and obey him in baptism.

Psalm 24: The Earth is the Lord's

Introduction

The twenty-fourth psalm is ascribed to the prolific pen of King David and is thought to have been written when the ark of the covenant was brought into Jerusalem. Psalm 24 is a song of praise to a benevolent Creator who upholds the principle of holiness within and without. In this short psalm, we learn to appreciate our maker and the distinction he sees between righteousness and holiness. [Read Psalm 24:1-10.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Creation (1-2)

1. several psalms have touched upon the creation of the world, a vital subject in our secular world where even the pope of Rome does not believe in the Genesis account
2. David here eschews the idol of subjective science in favor of objective religion and reasonable theory—God is the founder and designer of this big blue marble

B. Who May Ascend? (3-6)

1. fellowship with God is not an automatic and irrevocable thing
2. just as surely as God can remove the candlestick of an apostate church, he can turn away from an apostate Christian who has fallen out of his grace

C. Lift Up Your Heads! (7-10)

1. these last four verses depict God as a conquering general
2. even the gates and doors are called to stand at attention and permit the King to walk through
3. the commander of a thousand angels is sovereign over this world and its affairs

II. Some Applications

A. Ownership

1. perhaps just as importantly, our writer reminds us that God is the owner of the world and that we are merely his stewards over it, tending it at his pleasure and by his permission
2. creation is not to be abused and thoughtlessly destroyed but used to improve man's lot and glorify its giver
3. from the time God set man in Eden, this has been his duty and blessing (Genesis 1:26-30, 2:15)
 - a. we do neither harm nor sin by subduing the animals, domesticating some and eating others
 - b. we do neither harm nor sin by developing parts of the earth and preserving others in their natural state
4. the Bible says that stewards must be found faithful and our use of the earth and its fullness is of great interest to God (see First Corinthians 4:2)
 - a. man will never be able to destroy the earth, not even by nuclear bomb, for that power is beyond even the means of a great destroyer
 - b. according to Second Peter 3, God will close earth's history himself by means of fire
 - c. still, we are obligated to avoid abusing his creation that future generations might enjoy them
5. no matter how big a tract of land you have deed to, ultimately it all belongs to God and is at his disposal, "For 'the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof'" (Second Corinthians 10:26).

B. A Practical Lesson

1. Paul the apostle used this phrase as an axiom to describe man's obligation to one another (First Corinthians 10:14-32)
 - a. if our God is in heaven and he alone created the world, and if he demands that we serve no other God, then we should flee from the very suggestion of idolatry (see First John 5:21)
 - b. if certain articles of material are made to represent a being due worship, we should be careful not to give the indication that we are its servants
2. our worship must belong only to the Savior (Titus 2:11-14)

- a. we know that an idol is nothing (that is, a statue is not really a god, nor is a carving a deity), but all do not share that knowledge and for their sake we must take extra caution
- b. we must never appear to be having fellowship with idols lest others become emboldened by misunderstanding to choose the false gods
- c. understanding that the earth belongs to our God, we should look out for the souls of our friend and even strangers, that we do not offend their consciences and cause them to stumble

C. Clean Hands Required

- 1. it takes clean hands and a pure heart to dwell in God's good pleasure and presence
 - a. this is twofold, getting at both our actions and our motivations
 - b. we must be doing the right things for the right reasons to be godly and justified
 - c. to do otherwise makes us double-minded—doing right things for selfish reasons or doing wrong things for good reasons; either way, the devil has something in us
- 2. James tells us to lament if we find ourselves in such a state (James 4:7-10)
 - a. becoming entangled in the bonds of sin and death after conversion will cause one to fall from God's mercy and have his hand of fellowship removed (Galatians 5:1-4)
 - b. falling into a pit from which we refuse to extricate ourselves by means of repentance will take away the fellowship of God (Hebrews 12:12-17)
 - c. if we refuse to acknowledge our sin and remain in it, God will remove himself from us (First John 1:5-10)
- 3. if we lift up our souls to an idol or lack inner integrity, we can't stand on God's holy hill
 - a. the most powerful and oft worshiped idol of any era of history has been worldly wealth and earthly gain (sometimes called greed, avarice, covetousness or materialism)
 - b. when the majority of our time is spent in service of self and objects rather than others and the soul, we have bowed at least one knee to the great and powerful, though dead and dumb, idol (see Colossians 3:5)
- 4. God suffered with a fleshly Israel who moaned and cried in the wilderness for 40 years, wanting to return to slavery rather than press on to liberty
 - a. the psalmist reminds us that we are now spiritual Israel, a nation with God's law written upon our hearts (Hebrews 8:7-13)
 - b. we can either be attuned to the new covenant or beg for the disregarded one

D. Victory

- 1. Jesus is our general who routed the devil and eliminated the power he wielded over death
- 2. by his resurrection, we possess the hope of rising again to live forever with God
- 3. in anticipating this victory, we beseech the Lord to come quickly
- 4. in the Revelation context, the first century saints begged him to come and vindicate their sacrifice; in that plea we find our own hopes echoing (Revelation 22:12-21)

Conclusion

In Christ and in faith, we have the ultimate victory.

Psalm 25: Waiting On The Lord

Introduction

One of the greatest trials of battle is the waiting. Now is not always the best time to strike; sometimes the company has to wait on its commander to give the sign to attack. And no matter how strongly the troops feel they should give in to their anxiousness, they must trust the general and wait on him. David was a general in the Lord's army and he was compelled to wait on the Lord. Not only does this mean suffering through an expanse of time, it also has to do with trust and confidence. As soldiers in the Lord's army, we must learn to wait on the Lord. In Psalm 25, we will learn that lesson, which includes grace and guidance. (Psalm 25 is written in the acrostic poetic form, wherein each verse begins with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet.) [Read Psalm 25:1-22.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. David's Enemies (1-7)

1. when Saul was still king, but jealous of David's fame, the king decided to kill the young hero and pursued him throughout Judea
2. David did not want to retaliate and so he fled (First Samuel 23:13-18)
 - a. God had anointed David to be king and that would happen; David would sit on the throne and rule, but in God's time, not David's
 - b. David could have grown weary of running and helped God out by killing Saul himself, but instead he decided to wait on the Lord

B. The Waiting Test (8-15)

1. when we read the prophet Habakkuk, we understand how impatient man can become
 - a. Habakkuk cries out, "How long, O Lord?"
 - b. God explains that he will have to wait, but that God has not forgotten
2. we hear the martyrs in Revelation ask how long until God avenges their deaths upon the Roman persecutors
3. King Saul failed it (First Samuel 13:5-14)
 - a. he knew the will of God but his own fear and desperation took control of him and he acted against God's command
 - b. all this revealed to God and Samuel was that their king did not truly have faith; he did not know how to wait on the Lord

C. When We Must Wait (16-22)

1. our timetable is often not God's, and we must wait for hardships to ease and sorrows to be comforted
2. how we would like to speed things up, but God has his reasons and ultimately they are for our own good
3. we might wonder how long the death of a loved one will hurt so much and pray that it would disappear, but quick comfort would make us feel guilty for not mourning
 - a. Abraham's faith was tested by God's command to sacrifice Isaac and the man learned that day just how much confidence he could have in himself and the Lord
 - b. if your faith is never tested, then it is never used and faith without works is dead

II. Some Applications

A. A Test of David's Faith

1. throughout the psalms, David has complained about the enemies that pursued him
2. and throughout the psalms, one thing has separated him from them—David truly and completely believes in the kind hand of God while his pursuers trust in their own evil will
3. we read of David reclining on a hillside as he flees his enemies, looking into the stars while would-be murderers track him and still his faith holds him like an anchor
 - a. in those moments before the climax of the pursuit, David is compelled to wait on his great commander in the skies

b. waiting can be the greatest test of faith; “For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness” (Galatians 5:5, ESV).

B. Passing the Waiting Test

1. but many more Bible characters became paragons of faith because they waited on the Lord, trusting that he would eventually deliver

a. Abraham and Sarah waited on the Lord for a son
b. Moses waited on the Lord through 40 years wandering in the wilderness
c. righteous Simeon was waiting for the Consolation of Israel when he saw the child Jesus in the temple

d. the apostles waited on the Lord in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit arrived on Pentecost

2. but it is the patience of Job which shows us how to pass the waiting test (James 5:10-11)

a. even in all his hardship, he was waiting on the Lord (Job 14:13-17)

b. and he tried to impart this patience to his friends who had none of it (Job 35:13-14)

3. we might wonder how long we must face a hard life or persecution, but without trial, our faith will never grow and we will never truly understand what faith is (James 1:2-4)

C. We Must Wait on the Lord for Salvation

1. we wait for the redemption from this earth, eagerly and with perseverance (Romans 8:24-25)

2. we wait for Jesus to emigrate us into heaven (Philippians 3:20-4:1)

3. we wait for Jesus to deliver us from the wrath of judgment upon the wicked (First Thessalonians 1:10)

4. we wait in the hope of salvation (Hebrews 9:27-28)

5. we do not doubt (James 5:7-8)

Conclusion

As soldiers in the Lord’s army, we must learn to wait on the Lord.

Psalm 26: Vindicate Me, O Lord

Introduction

Psalm 26 is the lament of King David who forces himself to examine his life and lay it open before his eyes and those of his Judge. David has confidence in his salvation, the type of confidence that some would call arrogance today, but in reality is the blessed assurance God wants us all to possess. David pins his heavenly hope upon the fact that he has coveted the presence of God on earth and disdained the company of sinners. So he praises his Redeemer. Psalm 26 gives us the example of a man putting his own life under the microscope to see if it measures up to God's will. The confidence that David wears is based upon the result of that test—he is truly a man living after God's heart. What shall we find if we examine our lives? [Read Psalm 26:1-12.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Examination (1-5)

1. David claims that he has walked in integrity, a word that has one main definition that is applied to a number of different things

- a. a structure with integrity is strong and sound and won't cave in on you
- b. a person with integrity is also strong and sound and doesn't cave in under pressure

2. with a noteworthy exception that may have come after this poem, David's life has been sound and marked by integrity

3. when Paul was questioned by the Corinthian church, he responded by commanding them to examine themselves to make certain they were faithful Christians (see Second Corinthians 13:5)

a. look at the big picture (have you turned away from the pressure to conform to the world in drinking, casual sex, loose morals, white lying and covetousness)

b. but then look at the little picture, too—the details that would escape the notice of most people—regular Bible study and prayer, faithful attendance, unassailable desire to do good

B. The Results (6-10)

1. do you remember Pilate telling the Jews that he was washing his hands of the crucifixion of Christ and that his blood was upon them?

- a. he couldn't really do that, for he was not innocent
- b. when David said his hands were clean, he meant it and was right

2. Pilate was not drawing near to God with his statement, but the devil who induced him to consider politics and stature before justice and mercy

3. if you want hands cleansed of sin, you must flee the tempter (see James 4:6-10)

C. Mercy (11-12)

1. despite David's sunny judgment about himself, he sees that the sins he does commit require a plea for God's mercy and redemption

2. not one among us is perfect, but we can all be perfected in Jesus (see Colossians 1:13-14)

II. Some Applications

A. Undivided Loyalty

1. David invited God to try and to prove his heart and mind for the king had confidence that his spiritual loyalty was undivided

2. there was no man and no thing on earth that meant more to him than God above

3. when you examine your heart and mind, what do you see?

a. if you can imagine all of the pressure brought to bear on King David, it becomes even more amazing that he remained throughout his life "a man after God's own heart"

b. Paul wept when he realized that some of his brethren had divided loyalty and had become the enemies of the cross by worshipping their own bellies (Philippians 3:17-21)

c. but there was no divided loyalty among the saints in Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13)

1. their works revealed a loyalty only to the Lord (everything done according to the pattern of sound words, no matter how insignificant it may have seemed to others)

- 2. no matter how little their strength might have been (small numbers, older membership, young membership, lack of public abilities), they used that little might to do God's will
- 3. in everything they strived to keep God's word, not concealed under a bushel, but on a lamp stand where it could shine into their own lives and lend illumination to their neighbors
- 4. and no matter the pressure, they did not deny their Lord his confession and obedience
- 4. is your loyalty absolute? (Luke 9:57-62)
 - a. Jesus said, "Remember Lot's wife" to warn us about looking back with longing toward the things of sin we must leave behind
 - b. divided loyalty between God and mammon will turn your faith into a pillar of salt

B. No Fellowship With Evil

- 1. James encouraged us as well to make this examination, but honestly (James 1:21-27)
 - a. most every face has a blemish that we would rather ignore, but we ignore our spiritual blemishes to our detriment—be honest in your examination
 - b. the word of God can save your soul, but only if you are a doer of it
 - c. examine your walk of faith—is it unbroken by apostasy
 - d. and what do you do when you see a blemish in the mirror to your soul?
- 2. David asserts that he has not sat with idolaters, hypocrites, evildoers or the wicked
 - a. he has neither accompanied them in their wickedness nor allowed them to influence him
 - b. it is not so much a fear of guilt by association, but a fear of being gradually coaxed into sin by its adherents and fleshly allure
- 3. David was turned off by sin and it caused him to turn off many activities
 - a. in our day, we must fight a battle with something called "desensitization"
 - 1. that is the numbing of our minds to sin by a constant barrage of profanity, obscenity and wickedness
 - 2. who among us is shocked to see a homosexual story line on television today?
 - 3. who is shocked to hear dirty words and sexual innuendo in restaurants and stores?
 - 4. I am no longer shocked by those things but I am still just as disturbed by them
- 4. you cannot allow yourself to be desensitized to sin (Psalm 119:104)
 - a. the inspired writer recognized the pernicious influence that an environment of sin can have (First Corinthians 15:33)
 - b. we cannot go along to get along (Ephesians 5:1-16)

C. Loving the Earnest of Heaven

- 1. I have always believed that the church of Jesus Christ is an earnest of heaven
- 2. David says, "I have loved the habitation of Your house, And the place where Your glory dwells"
 - a. it seems he was talking about the manifestation of God's presence in his life
 - b. the church we know today occupies the place of God's house where his glory dwells (see Ephesians 3:10)
- 3. the church, especially when assembled, is a hint at what heaven will be
 - a. the same people (though some will not make it all the way), the watchful, appreciative presence of God, the constant worship, praise and attention to God's will
 - b. when we sing, you can hear that worship no matter where you go in this house
 - c. heaven will be the absolute and perfect embodiment of these things
 - 1. there will be no exits to the tempting world, no hypocrites, no rich, no poor
 - 2. from border to border, all heaven will be a temple of constant praise
 - 3. I love it here; I will adore it there (Revelation 21:22-27)
- 4. when we love to come to assemblies and desire to never miss them, we inform God of our ardent desire to go home to be with him

D. To Heaven, Not Hell

- 1. we often remind people of all the great ones they would see in heaven—David, Peter, Paul, and loved ones we have known
- 2. but the converse is also true—imagine all the hated ones we would spend eternity with in hell
- 3. David pleads that he be not sent to the home of sinners, murderers, schemers and corrupt

4. an unfaithful life will put you in the company of the most vile people the world has ever known, people whom you would have loathed on earth will be your eternal companions
 - a. those who avoided the church, saying I don't want to spend time with a bunch of hypocrites will suffer the penalty of an eternity with hypocrites and evildoers
 - b. the kingdom is a pearl of great price that every man can purchase, but those who refuse it doom themselves to the company of filth forever (Matthew 13:40-46)
5. be part of the church, the body of the redeemed; stand on the even place, a firm footing (First John 5:13)

Conclusion

Will God vindicate us when the books are opened at the day of reckoning? Examine yourself today so that you can have confidence in it.

Psalm 27: The Lord is My Light and Salvation

Introduction

David's twenty-seventh psalm displays the joy and trust of a faith tested by life and proven authentic. David wore the more pious "No Fear" t-shirt of his day, a confidence that neither underestimates the devil nor forgets the power of God. Our lesson today presents David's faith as exemplifying courage, fellowship and faith. [Read Psalm 27:1-14.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. No Fear (1-7)

1. you will see many t-shirts these days with "No Fear" emblazoned on them
 - a. I think the meaning of this is the recklessness of youth
 - b. having no fear like this often leads to death and sorrow
2. David's "No Fear" was a confidence that God would be with him as in the past, and that no matter the trial, nothing can destroy the true heart of his life—not the body, but the soul
 - a. David wanted just to dwell with God forever
 - b. he knew life would end; he was interested in what was beyond that point for death is not the end, but only the beginning

B. Fellowship With God (8-10)

1. when David heard God's invitation, he accepted it and gained God's fellowship
2. ever to lose that sense of oneness with the Creator made him sick at heart
3. although people deserted him, he trusted that God would never forsake him

C. Faith In His Promises (11-14)

1. if we think certain information is valuable, we will strive to obtain it
 - a. directions to our classrooms at school or knowledge we need to pass the test
 - b. David knew that God's favor was tied up in understanding his will
2. and understanding and believing in God's promises of comfort and reward enabled him to keep going when the world tried to slow him down

II. Some Applications

A. If God Be For Us ...

1. our bodies are dying every minute we are alive and any number of things could hasten their extinction; it is our souls God promises to preserve along with our hope of heaven one day to be realized
2. nothing can snatch us away from Christ, unless we willingly walk away
 - a. first, we possess a hope of heaven (First Peter 1:3-5)
 - b. that hope is tested by the devil's inducements to trade it for comfort and indulgence today (First Peter 1:6-9)
 - c. despite his best efforts, the genuinely faithful persevere because that hope is too strong to be overcome (Romans 8:31-39)
3. but notice David's proclamation—saving faith is defined as seeking first the house of the Lord (Mark 8:34-37)
4. ultimately, it is that heavenly city which affords us the opportunities to see God's face and sing praises in the presence of his ears (Revelation 21:1-5)

B. We Can Have Fellowship With God

1. God has extended the invitation to fellowship to us (First Corinthians 1:4-9)
2. we accept that invitation when we accept God's grace according to his conditions (Galatians 2:20 and Colossians 2:11-12)
3. we maintain that fellowship by a just and penitent lifestyle (First John 1:1-10)
 - a. that fellowship contains temporal blessings and eternal promises (see Ephesians 1:3, First Timothy 4:7-8)
 - b. that fellowship is the sense of union that makes us confident about our journey (Philippians 3:7-14)

3. God strengthens our hearts when we are willing to wait for him and not take matters into our own hands

C. The Way of God

1. it is our duty to come to an understanding of God's expectations and standards (Ephesians 5:15-17)

2. we must beg Jesus in word and in deed—in prayer and in study—to teach us his perfect ways (Matthew 10:28-30; cf. Second Timothy 2:15)

3. we don't lose heart because we believe God will deliver (Second Corinthians 4:7-18)

Conclusion

David's twenty-seventh psalm displays the joy and trust of a faith tested by life and proven authentic.

Psalm 28: O Lord, My Rock

Introduction

The Bible likens God, and especially, Jesus, as a Rock. To the righteous, he is a rock upon which we stand and build our lives, while to the wicked, he is a stone of offense that causes men to stumble. The psalmist develops this idea in his prayer and praise here in Psalm 28. He thinks of God as his rock of defense, realizing that to his enemies, the Lord's way is offensive. Do you think of the Lord as a solid rock upon which to stand securely and deposit your soul's and life's work? [Read Psalm 28:1-9.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Lord Is a Rock (1-5)

1. Deuteronomy 32 is called the Song of Moses and it was his farewell number
2. Moses tries to teach Israel once more that God is the only truly solid thing they have and without him, all else will be like shifting sand (Deuteronomy 32:1-4)
3. Moses points out what happens to those who turn their backs on that Rock (Deuteronomy 32:15-18)
4. it is our Rock who blesses us and protects us (Deuteronomy 32:28-31)

B. Blessed Be The Lord (6-9)

1. before his departure, Moses was preparing the pilgrims for the task of taking the promised land to be their homeland by reminding them of the past (First Corinthians 10:1-13)
2. trouble had come to them on the way from Egypt when they had strayed away from God
3. he was solid and his position was unchanged, if they had only remained with him

II. Some Applications

A. Security of the Rock

1. our God is the true and living God and is steadfast forever, his kingdom will endure (Daniel 6:25-27)
2. God does not change his terms or fail to live up to them (Malachi 3:1-6)
3. God made a promise and an oath, two immutable things for One who cannot lie (Hebrews 6:16-18)
4. God does us no evil by temptation or curse, but blesses us physically and spiritually (James 1:12-18)

B. Will You Stumble Over or Build Upon Christ?

1. not everyone who claims to speak to God will be saved (Matthew 7:21-27)
2. not everyone who does a few pious works will be saved
3. if the conversation with God and the pious works are not truly constructed upon faith and love for the Savior, they are fruitless
 - a. building your life upon the Rock that is Christ requires obedience to his word
 - b. rejecting his will, to any degree and in any form, transfers your edifice to the shifting sands
 - c. rain and wind will come upon both, but only that which is built on the Rock can survive
4. great is the perseverance of a life built on Jesus, but great also is the fall of a life built on self, even a self-imposed system of religion that values human appeal over divine approval (see Colossians 2:16-23)

C. Will You Be Part of a Spiritual House?

1. you have tasted of God's grace, a word that tastes like pure milk (First Peter 2:1-10)
2. you can be part of the household of God built upon the Rock which is Christ (First Corinthians 3:9-11)
3. Jesus is the chief cornerstone of the church and those who believe in him are elected to salvation by their submissive faith and form the building materials—living stones—for the church (Ephesians 2:19-22)
4. living stones are a holy priesthood that offer up spiritual sacrifices and praise, but others stumble over the cornerstone and fall to their deaths

D. As A Stone of Offense

1. those who sought salvation without Christ by boasting of their allegiance to the law of Moses were soon disappointed for only perfect adherence to that law made one innocent in God's judgment (Romans 9:30-33)

a. no one can be perfect by the law of works, but anyone can be perfected by the law of faith
b. but so many dismiss the gift of God's grace through Christ Jesus and instead of being the foundation of faith, he is a stone over which the unbeliever and disobedient stumble to their shame

c. the gospel is a stumbling block to all those who complain it is too simple or not exclusive enough to disallow the dregs of humanity like sinners and the uneducated (First Corinthians 1:18-31)

2. the gospel of Jesus Christ is a stumbling block to all those who explain they feel they are good enough to go to heaven without the church and without worship (Second Corinthians 10:17-18)

3. God knows those who are his (Second Timothy 2:19)

4. discipleship demands a conversion from iniquity to piety (Galatians 3:26-27)

Conclusion

Everyone who refuses the gospel invitation by saying, "I am good enough to be saved without being baptized" is falling into the devil's snare of trust in self. One blemish is enough to condemn a soul and we all need the washing of water by the word to cleanse our sins away.

Psalm 29: Give Unto the Lord

Introduction

Psalm 29, from the hand of David, is an expression of reverence toward the powerful voice of God, who spoke light and life into existence. David's mind takes him across the world that he knew, into heaven and right up to the throne of God as he sings of God's awesome and beneficent power. In so doing, he points out the absolute importance of worshiping only the God of heaven and denying the subtle temptation of idols. In this two-part lesson, we will study the psalm, its implications regarding God's jealous nature, and the way in which idols trouble spiritual Israel today. [Read Psalm 29:1-11.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. "Give Unto the Lord" (1-2)

1. David begins by speaking to the mighty ones, which would likely indicate angels in the original Hebrew language ("sons of God")
2. his message is that these creatures should take diligence in attributing strength and glory to Jehovah and that they should worship him "in the beauty of holiness"
3. angels are messengers, ministering servants in God's scheme of the salvation of men (see Hebrews 1:14)
 - a. it is made obvious that they owe God their complete loyalty and that dividing their service with another master would be an act of rebellion and betrayal, as some did (see Second Peter 2:4)
 - b. holiness—undivided and unblemished loyalty to God—is a beautiful thing for angels and men
 - c. idolatry in any form will divide one's loyalty and blemish one's record; hence, John warns us to keep ourselves from idols (see First John 5:21)
4. our God is a jealous God who is adamant about demanding every ounce of man's worship for himself and he has that right as creator, sustainer and savior

B. The Voice of the Lord (3-9)

1. in these verses, David attributes a number of superhuman abilities to the voice of God, implying the reason for respecting God's word on every subject
2. when men begin to question the authority of God's voice or deign to curtail, drain or amend his revealed will, the awe for God's voice has diminished as an idol has taken a new throne

C. The Lord Sits Enthroned (10-11)

1. David reminds us of Noah's day, when God sovereignty in his creation was called into question by the wickedness of his brightest creatures, men and women; we all know how he answered from his throne in the heavens, just beyond the weeping clouds of a mighty, cleansing destruction
2. understand, David says, that God sits upon his throne forever and blesses his people
 - a. I am reminded of the words of Habakkuk: "The Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the world keep silence before him" (2:20).
 - b. when all authority was given to Christ (Matthew 28:18) as monarch over his kingdom, the church (see Matthew 16:16, First Timothy 6:15), man was reminded anew that it was not within him to direct his own steps (see Jeremiah 10:23) or make his own faith (see James 4:12)
3. man's dismissive attitude toward this divine rule was epitomized in ancient Israel at the end of the Judges period (First Samuel 8:4-9)
 - a. it was a yearning to be like the world that infected this formerly sanctified population
 - b. it was a conscious decision to be ruled by the passions of man rather than the compassion of God that caused their eventual downfall
 - c. it was a resignation to pushing God off his throne in the end, for Israel idolized their neighbor's system, which excelled God's by a worldly estimation
4. computers and rockets have not changed the psyche of man—a desire to be like the world will ultimately spur a coup d'etat to remove God from his throne and crown an idol as apparent co-monarch or even absolute master

II. Some Applications

A. Jealousy

1. to be jealous over something you possess is to refuse to share it with anyone else
 - a. normally, that is bad; sharing is a godly attribute
 - b. however, some things can be exclusively claimed and sharing is actually the sin instead
2. for example, my wife's romantic affections belong to me exclusively and sharing them with another person would be sinful (First Corinthians 7:1-4)
 - a. I am not only permitted to be jealous over those affections, it would be unhealthy were I not
 - b. that does not mean that I forbid her to talk to other people or deny her friendships, but when it comes to "eros," I am under no obligation to share; I must possess a godly jealousy (see Second Corinthians 11:2)
 3. there is a throne in every man's heart and God jealously desires to sit there alone, refusing to share the seat with anyone or anything else, even the heart's human possessor
 - a. this was codified for ancient Israel in their ten commandments (Exodus 20:1-7)
 - b. idolatry shattered the peace and was unacceptable to the true monarch (Exodus 34:10-17)
 1. God perceived a danger in close relations with an unholy world in adopting their ways and their idols, of making a covenant with idols and attempting to compel God to share worship with Molech, Baal and Ashterah
 2. his preventative was to remove the idols from Israel's paths (Deuteronomy 4:23-24)
 - c. idolatry promised to bring a writ of divorcement from God; he is the sanctified's bridegroom, refusing to share her affection with anyone else (Joshua 24:14-15, 19-20)
 1. the prophets spoke of God's punishment of Israel as the vengeance of his jealousy
 2. ancient Israel's history is provided to spiritual Israel, the church, as an example of the consequences of idolatry (First Corinthians 10:14-22)
 4. under the Law of Moses, God always referred to himself as being married to Israel, an adulterous bride who dallied with other husbands, other gods, even as her Groom pleaded for her return to the sanctified relationship (Jeremiah 3:6-14)
 - a. the absolutely only cause for a divorcement from Israel was spiritual adultery and she was guilty
 - b. it remained only for God to plead for repentance until longsuffering was exhausted and divine vengeance translated into a bill of divorcement, which happened finally when the Chaldeans laid waste the temple of Jerusalem and slaughtered the priests
 - c. under the Law of Christ, the Holy Spirit has cast the Lord in the role of bridegroom, wed to the church (Ephesians 5:25-32; cf. Romans 7:4, Revelation 21:2, 9)
 1. and God maintains a jealousy for his sanctified people's worship (James 4:4)
 2. once again, idolatry is the stumbling block that will lead to spiritual divorcement

B. Modern Idolatry

1. our idols are not exclusively made of wood and stone, but often composed of flesh and blood, circuits and transistors or paper and ink
2. idolatry is an expression of worldliness, a mindset that exposes a conformity to the course of the world (see First Peter 4:4), rather than a transformation to godliness (Romans 12:1-2)
3. the Scriptures call this disease "carnality," an addiction to the opiate of material fulfillment (Romans 8:5-8, 13)
4. these idols can take any number of forms and be known by any number of names
 - a. self (Second Timothy 3:1-2a, Second Corinthians 13:5)
 - b. money (Second Timothy 3:1-2b, First Timothy 6:17-19, Matthew 6:19-24)
 - c. pleasure (Second Timothy 3:1-4, Titus 2:11-14)
 - d. public acceptance and acclaim (Matthew 6:1-7, 16-18, 23:1-12)
 - e. things (First John 2:15-17, Matthew 6:25-34)
 - f. men (Acts 12:20-23, First Corinthians 3:1-4, 4:6)

C. Voice of the Lord

1. the New Testament magnifies God's voice in a special way (Hebrews 1:1-4)

2. God has spoken to us by Jesus, who also sent the Comforter to guide the apostles into revealing all truth to mankind, which we have inscribed for us on the pages of the New Testament
 - a. figuratively, man must remove his shoes when approaching the Bible; that is, hold it in such reverence that it never be diminished in perception, “for the place where you stand is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5)
 - b. every word here was given through the precious breath of God (see Second Timothy 3:16)
 - c. in this word, God has completely equipped his servants to do every good work (Second Timothy 3:17)
3. in it, he has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness (see Second Peter 1:3)
 - a. the system of faith and philosophy of life of God’s creation is thoroughly described and delineated on these pages, lacking nothing (Jude 3)
 - b. the word is an incorruptible seed that will never be destroyed or marred to the point that it loses its power to save (First Peter 1:22-25; cf. Romans 1:16)
 - c. when we decide to take our stand in God’s word, we take a stand on holy ground: “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God” (First Peter 4:11)
 - d. of one particular part of the New Testament, God warned (Revelation 22:18-19)
4. while not as poetic as David’s psalm, these passages form the same demand for reverence and heavenward devotion

D. Prescription for a Cure

1. if you recognize the presence of idols in your heart or approaching its throne and desire to avoid the pitfalls of a divided loyalty, the Bible combines the simple prohibition of idols with divine wisdom on overcoming their lure (First John 5:21)
2. primarily, it involves a conscious and committed decision to hate the darkness and love the light
 - a. walk as illuminated by the light of God’s word (Ephesians 5:8-12, Matthew 5:13-16)
 - b. renew your mind with noble thoughts and objectives (Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 4:8)
 - c. be led by the Spirit’s influence through his revealed will (Romans 8:11-14)

Conclusion

Worldliness will eat you alive in whatever form its idolatry takes. Do not believe the preacher who prophesies a false peace built on the tolerance of sin and error. There is no peace with God where the darkness is not loathed.

Psalm 30: I Will Extol You, O Lord

Introduction

The title of Psalm 30 indicates that this praise was first used at the dedication of David's house, but the context tells more of the story. It is apparent that David was sick and had been healed of his ailment, and for this, gives special thanks also to the Lord. When you read Psalm 30, it appears as though it could easily be read or sung following the conversion of a precious soul to Christ. David's words perhaps illustrate for us the joy of guilt relieved by contact the saving blood of our Lord, a fate dramatically altered and lent hope. [Read Psalm 30:1-12.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Uplifting of Conversion (1-3)

1. when David praises God for lifting him up, he uses a Hebrew expression that literally describes pulling a bucket up from a well; ever felt like a bucket down a well that needed pulling up
2. two things happen when a bucket is pulled out of a well—if you are the bucket, you get to return to the light and fresh air; if you are the person with the rope, you get the refreshment and cleansing that only water can deliver
3. this illumination, refreshment and cleansing are the sources of joy over which David rejoices

B. Conversion Bears Confidence (4-7)

1. I am sure that I was never happier than the evening that I became a Christian, standing there soaking wet in that pool of water, free of sin, full of hope and zealous to sing God's name
2. I no longer was forced to think of God as someone who would justly condemn and disown me because of my sin, but someone who would hear and nurture me because of my faith

C. David's Anathema (8-12)

1. people in the Old Testament had a very limited knowledge of the afterlife that is heaven and hell, and were curious and fearful about what was beyond the grave
2. we are blessed with a fuller understanding of what is in store for us (Hebrews 2:14-15, 9:27-28)

II. Some Applications

A. Conversion Cleanses the Conscience

1. Jesus himself went into some of the darkest places in Palestine to teach the gospel, going to the most backward of people to bring light into their lives (Matthew 4:13-16)
 - a. I remember the first gospel lesson I ever heard when I was 17 years old; it was like someone had turned a light on in my mind and was finally making sense of things
 - b. that is the joy and uplifting that one feels when the light of Christ is permitted to shine into a place previously darkened by sin and ignorance (John 12:34-36, 44-50)
2. why did the Ethiopian eunuch depart from his baptismal river rejoicing on the way?
 - a. because Philip had helped him finish the jigsaw puzzle and put every piece in its place
 - b. because he saw the light and was illuminated by it and his guilty stains were left behind there
3. conversion cleanses the conscience (First Peter 3:20-21)

B. God Hears Us

1. in trial and temptation (Hebrews 4:14-16)
2. in persecution and trepidation (Hebrews 13:5-6)
3. in defense of the gospel, with a heavenly hope (Philippians 1:19-21)
4. in times when prayer is the only hope (Ephesians 3:11-21)

C. Don't Lose Your Inheritance

1. when Paul said that among Christians there was one hope, this is the hope he intended—a heavenly inheritance (First Peter 1:3-5)

- a. now we have this inheritance only in an earnest and only through faith and hope (Hebrews 4:1-9)
- b. then, faith will be swallowed up by glorious sight and realization (Romans 8:16-25)
2. every single Christian's name is placed into the last will and testament of Jesus Christ and a remarkable inheritance is bequeathed to his name in the section called the Book of Life (Galatians 4:1-7)
3. until the day you take full possession of that inheritance, you possess only an earnest and a hope of it, and it can still be lost if you are disowned for violating the will by apostasy (Colossians 1:21-23)
4. while it can be said that we are saved when we are converted, eternal salvation is yet to be fully secured only at the day of judgment when the inheritance is entrusted to every soul (Titus 3:4-7)
 - a. of this yet future possession, the angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14)
 - b. the possibility of being disowned disciplines us to maintain our hope (Hebrews 2:1-3)

Conclusion

Conversion brings joy to a lowly spirit and introduces a realistic hope of eternal life to a heart that knew it not before. David called on his brethren to pray gratitude and sing joyfully when he was raised from sickness, like a bucket from a well. We will surely do likewise if you will consent to go down in this water and be raised to newness of life today.

Psalm 31: My Rock of Refuge

Introduction

In Psalm 31, David relates the fact that he continues to trust in Jehovah, despite the criticism and ridicule of his neighbors, enemies and acquaintances who find him detestable. Another Bible character, the apostle Paul, found his reputation with unbelievers about the same and yet proclaimed the same level of trust in God. When we compare the lives of these men to ours, it becomes clear how forceful is their example in encouraging us to be faithful and carry on. [Read Psalm 31:1-24.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. David's Flight to God (1-8)

1. when Israel was in trouble with both God and Egypt and the Lord considered destroying his nation and giving Moses a new troop, her leader begged God to relent for fear the Egyptians would mock both Israel and him as failures

2. so David here expresses a trust that he will never be shamed by God's failure to meet his promise

3. the king imagines himself in a wilderness of solitude and fear, finding a cave into which he can crawl and rest; this is his relationship with God when the going gets tough

4. in that rock of refuge, he commits his soul to God's tender care and guidance, as all must who want to be saved from sin and death

B. Suffering and Isolation (9-13)

1. still the grief of his isolation caused David many tears and a breakdown physically and emotionally; to hear the honesty of David in such a matter is reassuring for we all feel this way sometimes but are often convinced that we are not allowed

2. a Christian living in a godless world will often be made to feel isolated and alone, if he is truly living and speaking his faith

C. Trust in God (14-18)

1. David believed that we should say something for God everyday
a. maybe it is just in your home with your children; maybe it is in the workplace or classroom with troubled friends

b. we should never be ashamed to say, "You are My God"

2. our writer echoes the comment heard so often by the righteous afflicted for vindication

3. still, we must wait for God who owns the exclusive right to vengeance

D. Praise (19-24)

1. David believed that God's grace belonged to those who fear him
a. fearing God is built upon the belief that God exists, and can affect the lives and fates of mankind, and that his promise of final justice includes executing that right to vengeance on not only the blatantly wicked, but also the backslider

b. our fear of God is not a loathing, but a reverence and understanding of divine justice

2. David reveals a new understanding that he has gained, that even when the righteous think God is not listening because he doesn't seem to be alleviating the problem, he does hear and will solve everything in his time

II. Some Applications

A. The Sufferings of Paul

1. the thing that seemed to cause the most suffering in Paul's heart was actually something he had done to himself and other Christians before he was converted (First Timothy 1:12-15)

a. he was present when Stephen was martyred and began from that point a campaign of intimidation and terrorism meant to eliminate the name of Christ from the consciousness of Judea forever (Acts 8:1-3, 9:1-2)

b. the memory of this tragic period in his life haunted him for the rest of his days

2. following his conversion, Paul fell into quick disrepute among his former friends in the Jewish leadership
 - a. an attempt upon his life was made immediately by the Hellenists in Jerusalem (see Acts 9:29)
 - b. another attempt to stone him was made by both the Jews and Gentiles in Iconium (see Acts 14:1-7)
3. in Philippi, he was rewarded for exorcising a demon by being stoned and beaten with rods, then thrown into prison (see Acts 16:16-40)
4. his teaching on Christ's resurrection was mocked in Athens (see Acts 17:16-34)
5. he was at the center of a riot in Ephesus (see Acts 19)
6. when he returned to Jerusalem, he was nearly killed by the Jews again (Acts 21:27-36; 23:12-15)
7. he spent years in a Roman prison cell for no other reason than offending the Jews

B. Paul's Rock of Refuge

1. it will never get that bad for you and yet the lesson is still powerful—when a Christian is humbled and made to feel weak by the trials of life, then his strength can be refreshed by the might of God's grace which is sufficient and made complete only when men stop trying to stand on their own and learn to kneel (Second Corinthians 11:24-12:10)
2. if Paul could call his affliction momentary and light, why cannot I (Second Corinthians 4:13-5:9)?
3. if I cannot, it is because the eternal weight of glory is yet a mystery to me in exactly the respect that will rescue me from materialistic worry and shortsightedness
4. the end of all things is that my body is not eternal but heaven is and my yearning should be to lay up treasure forever, not in a perishable tent

C. Paradise

1. a lifetime of suffering cannot be compared to a single second in Paradise (Romans 8:18, 31-39)
2. understand as David and Paul did that if you are on God's side, you cannot lose the race
3. we are only more than conquerors when we conquer fear, shame or complacency and overcome our weaknesses to stand up for Jesus (Romans 1:16, Second Timothy 1:8)
4. I suffer but am not ashamed because I know God and trust that he is qualified to watch over my soul until the last day (Second Timothy 1:12)

Conclusion

Have you put your soul in God's hands?

Psalm 32: Blessed Is The One Whose Transgression is Forgiven

Introduction

Psalm 32 is headlined as “A Contemplation” of David. It is an instance when David looked back on how things had gone lately and realized that relief to his soul and conscience only came when he took courage and approached God for mercy, rather than cowering in the corners, ashamed of his blemishes. Haven’t we all felt that way sometimes when we find ourselves guilty of some error? Psalm 32 is about what we do with the pangs of guilt. David had to learn by unpleasant experience that avoiding the Lord means carrying around the baggage of sin with no one to remove it. [Read Psalm 32:1-11.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Beatitude on Forgiveness (1-2)

1. this passage is quoted by the apostle Paul in the New Testament to exemplify the idea that God can forgive sins, although man has not earned his mercy (Romans 4:1-8)

a. Paul’s point is that Abraham was a sinner and with his first transgression, he forfeited forever the possibility of being self-justified by sinless perfection

b. if Abraham is to find eternal Paradise, it will not be by his works for his sin prevents it

c. rather it is Abraham’s sincerely obedient faith that led him to God’s grace

d. Abraham’s eternal reward will not be the wages of one who earned heaven, for he sinned and “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23); God however makes provision for man’s sin through his grace and covers those transgressions with mercy

2. our salvation, because we are also sinners (see Romans 3:23), will follow much the same path

a. our first transgression means that we cannot earn salvation in life, for only sinless

perfection is self-justifying; we need God’s grace to have a hope of a heaven we could not earn alone

b. and the only way to find that reward is to have God cover our sins and impute them not to our account anymore, though we deserve them

B. Refusing Grace and Avoiding God (3-7)

1. when I read this passage, it rung so clear to me, for I can remember being too ashamed of some error to face my earthly father when I was child

a. as long as this went on, things just got worst and I actually began feeling resentful toward my father, although I was wrong and he just wanted to forgive me

b. David says that as long as he kept silent and refrained from repentance, his body ached with the groaning of guilt and mourning; a heavy hand was upon him

2. when you have sinned against God and become aware of it, the weight of the world seems to be placed upon your shoulders

a. if it is a sin you have had trouble with before and even repented of before, perhaps the guilt you feel prevents you from going immediately to God, for the shame is too great to face him

b. that attitude shows a heart soft enough to be touched with guilt and that much is good, for the Bible speaks of some whose consciences are seared as with a hot iron and cannot feel the guilt or shame of sin (see First Timothy 4:2, Ephesians 4:19)

c. that sense of shame is God’s gift, a sign of his love for your soul and desire to continue fellowship with you (Hebrews 12:5-13)

3. when one is ashamed to face his father, perhaps he can find somewhere to hide, but not with God

C. Don’t Be Like a Mule (8-11)

1. one day I tried to train my younger dog to walk on a leash, but she refused to do anything more than be dragged along on her belly; what stubbornness!

2. David realizes that when he refused to approach God with his sin, he was being as obstinate as an old mule that won’t obey and won’t do what is best for him, even though he is facing punishment

3. “He who is often rebuked and hardens his neck, Will suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy” (Proverbs 29:1).

4. if Christ is going to be your shepherd, you will have to learn to follow him and be teachable: “If you abide in My word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32).

II. Some Applications

A. Securing Grace

1. the offer of the forgiveness of sins is made universally, but received only by a minority
 - a. the majority teach a confusing doctrine wherein there are supposedly no conditions to God’s grace, and yet belief, confession and repentance are also mandatory while immersion is preferable
 - b. the Bible teaches that belief, confession, repentance, immersion, and a regenerate lifestyle are all expressions of faith, and are all conditional to securing God’s grace (Titus 3:3-8)
 - c. doing these things will never earn one his salvation for God cannot be put in man’s debt
2. David spoke of those in whose spirit there is no deceit; this is one whose conscience has answered the call of guilt by seeking mercy; only those who diligently seek it will find it: “But without faith it is impossible to please [God], for he who would come to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).
3. Jesus taught, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

B. Coming Before Him

1. the penitence of Simon the Sorcerer gets a bad rap among Calvinists because his sin proves the possibility of apostasy; they try to make it like he was never really a Christian at all, even after he repented before Peter (Acts 8:18-24)
 - a. Simon’s reaction, however, is exactly what a shamed sinner should have (Second Corinthians 7:8-11)
 - b. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (First John 1:9).
2. sometimes people fear admitting to a crime, hoping that the authorities will not find out and they will get away with it; children try to cover up a broken glass hoping to avoid punishment
 - a. forget that tactic when it comes to God for “there is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13)
 - b. that sense of guilt, sometimes created by rebuke from another person, or from a study of the Bible, or private contemplation of our actions against God’s standard, should lead us quickly to God’s mercy seat (Hebrews 4:14-16)

C. Joy

1. the wicked will face many sorrows, David says
 - a. I weep when I read all the statistics that point to the decline of the family in America and the fact that so many cannot correlate the problems of our youth with redefined morality and the tolerance of wickedness
 - b. the word of God, if heeded, will prevent divorce, most unwanted pregnancy, drug abuse, alcoholism, hate crimes, venereal disease and drunk driving
2. mercy surrounds the righteous, so rejoice (Second Corinthians 13:11)!

Conclusion

David had to learn by unpleasant experience that avoiding the Lord means carrying around the baggage of sin with no one to remove it.

Psalm 33: Rejoice In The Lord

Introduction

Attempts to ascribe this psalm to David or another writer are matters only of supposition. Neither the author nor its immediate inspiration are revealed. Psalm 33, therefore, takes on a transcendent meaning as it emphasizes the joy of the saint who serves the living God. Psalm 33 is a call to joyful praise of a good and considerate Lord who is our help and our shield. [Read Psalm 33:1-22.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Make a Joyful Sound (1-3)

1. when my wife is cooking in the kitchen, I will often wander in to look at the pots and pans (maybe I see a cake baking in the oven or some sauce simmering on the stove)
2. the aroma is pleasant to my nose and it gets my attention
3. Christian worship is not quite like that to those participating in it, but it is just like that to God
 - a. Noah revived in God a hope for the future of mankind when he punctuated the ark journey with a burnt offering (Genesis 8:20-22)
 - b. but making material sacrifices to benefit the work of the Lord has the same effect (Philippians 4:14-18)
 - c. love that considers brother and neighbor before self pleases God (Ephesians 5:1-2)

B. Fear The Lord (4-9, 16-22)

1. if God would come to the Earth and bend steel bars or lift automobiles, I suppose men would be more inclined to fear him as the psalmist encourages
2. there is even an entertainment troupe called The Power Team that tours the country trying to just that for God, perform feats of sideshow strength to get people thinking about the Lord
3. it will not work for appealing to the flesh will never save the spirit and fear of God must come from a willing and open heart, not one terrified into unwilling submission
4. fear of God remembers the fate of Sodom and Egypt and even Israel and Judah
5. God created the world from nothing, has flooded its entirety once and promises to melt the entire planet yet in the future; that is an ability that should inspire respect and even fear in those currently making reservations for the flames

C. Christ, Our High Priest (10-15)

1. is this America or Israel or what?
2. none of the above; the only nation that has Jehovah as its universal God is the kingdom of the elect, the called-out, the church (First Peter 2:9-10)
3. no other nation can claim universal belief in Jehovah among its citizens; membership in the church of Jesus Christ, however, is only attained by true conversion (Acts 2:37-47)
4. one's heart has to be refashioned by the power of the gospel (Hebrews 8:7-12)

II. Some Applications

A. Is There Joy Behind Your Worship?

1. are you glad to be here for this worship service or is your heart somewhere else?
2. are you pleased to return a contribution to God's work or do you make that offering reluctantly?
3. do you sing each word with equal emotion and thought or pass through the words without consideration of their intent?
4. do you dread Wednesday evenings as an unfair interruption of your week?
5. our worship is to be an expression of our joy at being saved by the love of God, but even the Israelites who passed through the Sea and ate food that fell from the sky came to take those blessings for granted and lose a sense of joy at God's providence and love
 - a. you cannot tell someone to be joyful; you must introduce the reasoning for joy to his mind and let him make joy part of his heart (Romans 15:8-13)
 - b. joy should come from realizing what God has done for us and what our eternal fate is to be
6. why do some Christians act like they are miserable?

- a. they have forgotten all that they have going for them and are inadvertently bringing ingratitude to God (Hebrews 13:14-16)
- b. worship should issue from a joyous heart and should look, sound and smell like it (Second Corinthians 9:6-7)

B. Instrumental Music

- 1. there is no doubt that the author is advocating the use of instrumental music in worship under the Old Testament law; however we do not live under the same law as he
- 2. the Bible makes it clear that the Old Testament authority has been superseded by that of the New Testament of Jesus Christ, which prescribes only singing as a form of musical worship (Ephesians 2:14-16 5:17-19)
- 3. the apostles and early disciples leave no record or example of using harps or lyres in the worship of the church and so we eschew them as unauthorized by our King

C. Fear

- 1. by fear, we do not mean the way that someone fears a bully or dreads a disease
- 2. by fear, we mean a healthy respect for the power of God that recognizes the dual nature of his justice—eternal blessing for the faithful and eternal punishment for the wicked
- 3. fear can help maintain faith, but fear alone will never give birth to faith—“Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied” (Acts 9:31).
- 4. lacking this fear of God leads to gradual rebellion and apostasy (Hebrews 3:16-4:2)
- 5. willful sin practiced after conversion returns the Christian to the devil (Hebrews 10:26-31)
- 6. see how faith and grace are connected to the fear of God (Hebrews 12:28-29)
- 7. some reject the fear of God based on John’s words (First John 4:17-19)
 - a. John is not talking about reverence and respect as we have noted, but the terror of judgment that the unfaithful and ungodly should possess
 - b. indeed Christians are not to be terrified of the judgment, but to be hastening it, for it holds the consummation of God’s glory for all mankind (see Second Peter 3:10-14, Hebrews 9:27-28)

D. Fashioning and Refashioning Our Hearts

- 1. God made men and understands their ways and strengths and weaknesses
- 2. furthermore God dwelt as a man in the body of Christ Jesus and has become our only High Priest laboring between man and the Father (Hebrews 4:14-16)
 - a. in the wilderness by Satan’s personal appeal, Christ faced temptation to indulge the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life
 - b. he understands what it feels like to be poor and hungry, to be lonely, disappointed, frustrated, angry and persecuted
- 3. he understands our prayers when we beg for help and strength and is only incredulous when we fail to pray such admissions and petitions (see Second Corinthians 10:12)

Conclusion

Christians should rejoice in the Lord and express their gratitude for salvation in their worship and their everyday lives.

Psalm 34: Taste and See That The Lord is Good

Introduction

The title bar of Psalm 34 includes the explanation that David wrote this song after he pretended to be crazy in front of King Achish of the Gaths. (Apparently Abimelech is a royal title like Pharaoh.) This event is recorded in First Samuel 21:10-15. David was driven away from the king and his life was spared. This psalm follows that event as David invites others to join him in praising a God who delivers the just from the unjust. Psalm 34 is an expression of the psalmist's gratitude when God delivered him from trouble (34:1-7), an invitation for others to experience God's goodness (34:8-16), and a reassurance to the righteous (34:17-22). [Read Psalm 34:1-22.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Deliverance (1-7)

1. this event takes place after Saul has realized that David is his rival for the throne of Israel and has become envious at David's heroism (First Samuel 21:10-15)

2. Saul is now pursuing David with the intention of killing him; to avoid having to fight and possibly kill God's anointed king, David is in flight

3. by feigning insanity, David manages to escape certain death in Goliath's homeland, but wisely, the future king recognizes that God would have rescued him by any means

B. Taste and See (8-16)

1. the psalmist challenges the reader of his work to test what he has claimed about God to see if it is true

2. he promises blessing to the trusting, providence to those in want, many good days to those who desire life, and an ear that hears the cries of the downtrodden

3. we have these blessings through our Savior if we live a life of faith (First Peter 2:1-3; cf. Ephesians 1:3)

C. Reassurance to the Righteous (17-22)

1. David reassures the righteous that God will hear them in their hour of need as he heard him

2. Jesus has promised blessing upon the kingdom of heaven to the poor in spirit and those who mourn (see Matthew 5:3-4); the idea is that a realization of the horror of sin is necessary to truly understand the need and power of God's grace and take full advantage of the offer

a. sometimes repentance is expressed without true contrition, in an attempt to convince people one is sorry when he is not

b. contrition is like David's reaction to Nathan's rebuke of his sin with Bathsheba; it is heart-rending and debilitating

II. Some Applications

A. Praise At All Times

1. if you were to examine all the membership directories of all the churches of Christ in the world, you would get a most inflated concept of the number of souls that will be saved in the end

a. the number of genuine Christians is decreased from such estimates because so many are only going through the motions, fooling elderships and themselves, but never God: "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me With their lips, But their heart is far from me" (Matthew 15:8).

b. they are wearing the costume of a saint, but beneath are hardly worthy of that noble calling

2. our God is continually worthy of praise, but many only bless him when things are going well

a. in times of hardship, when the cure is not found quickly enough, God is neglected; still many more reserve their worship of God for Sunday and live according to the world six days a week

b. instead, we worship God continually by following the example of patient Job (Job 1:20-22)

c. or the example of the apostles in prison who sang hymns and taught sinners

d. never let us become like the child who flatters his father when receiving gifts, but who has no use for him when the money is slow

3. we must strongly advocate private, daily worship in our homes and lives (Matthew 6:5-6)
4. a great act of worship is practical discipleship (Matthew 5:13-16)

B. Trust in God

1. David was delivered from physical harm, but we are more concerned with the harm reserved for souls that are enslaved by the devil
2. genuine trust in God that changes one's life and follows the Bible will preserve a soul (Romans 5:1-5)
3. "Whoever believes on [Christ] will not be put to shame" (Romans 9:33).
4. but this belief and trust must be of the enduring kind (First John 2:28-29)
5. this poor man cried but God was listening and acted to help (Luke 12:4-9)

C. Angels

1. so often it is angels in the Bible who carry out God's will in aiding his ministering servants (an angel fed Elijah, closed the mouths of Daniel's lions, and freed the apostles from prison)
2. they serve those who will inherit salvation (see Hebrews 1:14) and transport the souls of the righteous dead to Abraham's bosom in Paradise (see Luke 16:22)
3. here the angel of the Lord has circled the wagons to protect the Christian (Jude 20-25)

D. Conditions For Such Blessing

1. one must fear the Lord (see Hebrews 12:28)
2. one must seek the Lord ("Seek and you will find" (Luke 11:9); "Seek first the kingdom of God" (Luke 12:31))
3. one must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceit: "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor" (Ephesians 4:25-32)
4. one must depart from evil and do good: "Be holy for I am holy" (First Peter 1:16)
5. one must seek peace and pursue it (Romans 14:19)

E. Many Are The Afflictions

1. some criticize this psalm as unrealistic but I think this last passage reminds us that even the righteous are not immune from the world's suffering and problems
2. the difference is not in the storms that fall but the foundation upon which men build
 - a. if your life is built around Christ, it will inevitably go better for you in the long run
 - b. if you build on the shifting sands of the devil's promises, ultimately you will be swept away
3. be faithful (Hebrews 13:5-6)

Conclusion

Psalm 34 is an expression of the psalmist's gratitude when God delivered him from trouble, an invitation for others to experience God's goodness, and a reassurance to the righteous.

Psalm 35: Plead My Cause

Introduction

Psalm 35 is the first among a group called the imprecatory psalms, so called because their lyrics plead with God for punishment upon one's enemies. They are sometimes also called the cursing psalms and tend to astonish the Christian when he first reads them. And for good reason. Imprecatory psalms seem to have an attitude of personal vengeance, but in reality, they are merely honest prayers for divine vengeance. However, Christians know they must turn the other cheek and pray for the conversion of their enemies, a step that seems left out of the imprecatory psalms. If this is so, it is because they were written for consumption by the nation of Israel which fought literal battles to the death, unlike Christians who are to fight spiritual battles with weapons from on high. If we are forbidden from exactly echoing the attitude of the imprecatory psalms, what is their value to the modern reader? They are valuable in that they remind us of the what the New Testament teaches about enemies and vengeance. [Read Psalm 35:1-28.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Against Persecutors (1-10)

1. David asks God to take hold of the shield and buckler, two pieces of armor that are defensive in nature; David is on the defensive, but feeling weakened and in need of help
 - a. perhaps this psalm was written when he was in flight from King Saul or his own son Absalom, who rebelled against his crown
 - b. in any event, David's enemies have him on his heels and sensing desperation
2. more and more over the last few months I have had this sensation myself on behalf of the faith everywhere in this nation
 - a. a majority of people, it seems, have taken a cavalier attitude toward sin (fornication, drinking, adultery, lying) and I feel more cornered and isolated than ever
 - b. add to that the shrinking number of so-called Christians who believe in Creation rather than evolution and the earth seems to be shifting under my feet
 - c. in the church, so many are becoming drunk on unity-in-doctrinal-diversity through divorce and remarriage doctrines and the subject of the limits of fellowship
3. but we have as an example our Lord who was on the defensive in the presence of the high priest and Pontius Pilate (First Peter 2:19-24)
 - a. faith is proven when the going is tough, not easy
 - b. follow in Christ's footsteps and commit no sin and use no deceit; commit yourself to God's care
4. and the courage of the apostles before the council (Acts 5:26-29)
 - a. despite discouragement in evangelism, they pressed on
 - b. we are obeying the whims of men when we refuse to speak against sin or refuse to stand up for creation

B. Against Fierce Witnesses (11-18)

1. David is outraged at those who lie about and against him and who among us has not suffered this
2. Paul warns us that, "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"
 - a. but how do you handle it when someone is lying about you?
 - b. craft a reputation that makes it difficult to believe bad things said about you (First Peter 3:8-17)

C. Against Those Who Wrongfully Rejoice (19-28)

1. when David was on the run, his enemies rejoiced because they were certain they would defeat him; they mocked his weakness like Goliath had mocked him before
2. are we sometimes tempted to rejoice when an enemy stumbles?
 - a. I am not talking about his sin, but about some other misfortune, like illness or money troubles

b. remember we should look on the needs of our enemies as opportunities to heap burning coals on his head by doing him kindness when, if the roles were reversed, he would have kicked us while down

3. there is a growing contingent in this country that wishes to see the total collapse of Christianity and they inspire a little landslide every time a Christian fails to do them good

II. Some Applications

A. Hoping For Offense

1. but you will notice that David also asks for the spear; he would like to see some offense as well

2. he wants to be reminded that God is the savior of his soul

a. Paul faced a similar problem at the hands of violent unbelievers (Second Corinthians 4:7-12)

b. and he took up spiritual weapons to fight what was ultimately a spiritual war (Second Corinthians 10:1-6)

3. turning the other cheek does not mean letting evil have its way, refusing to rebuke wickedness or contend earnestly for the faith

a. turning the other cheek is a prohibition against personally executed vengeance

b. we are always obligated to fight our battles with the sword of the Spirit, God's word, as the only offensive part of our armor (Ephesians 6:10-17)

B. Hidden Nets

1. David says that his enemies are acting without cause, that he had done nothing evil to them to warrant such unfair treatment (verse 7); if only the world were fair!

2. such people are self-willed and carnal and the Bible says that they will bring themselves to destruction by these plots (Proverbs 1:10-19)

a. don't participate with those who do evil things, even reluctantly, for you will be buried the same way as they; you will spill your own blood and destroy your own life

b. guilt by association may ruin your reputation without your actually doing what your associates do; eventually these associations will influence you to accept and then join them (Second Corinthians 6:14-7:1)

C. Curse Their Plots, Not Their Souls

1. we hear David praying that their plans will come to nothing (verse 6)

2. and we are reminded that the conversion even of our enemies should be our prayer

D. Love Your Enemies

1. David is hurt by this onslaught because he had always treated these people fairly and with fraternal compassion; now they were repaying him with malice

2. "Love thy neighbor" was Old Testament doctrine, but an allowance for hating one's enemies had been added to it (Matthew 5:43-48)

a. faith is not proven by loving those who love you, but by loving those who hate you

b. to be complete means doing more than even the worldly will do

3. perhaps David was at times tempted to turn on his enemies, but he did not show it against Saul, nor Jonathan; he continually blessed them and hoped for understanding and reconciliation

a. our goal with our enemies is mutual reconciliation to each other through Christ (Romans 12:14-21)

b. good is overcome by evil every time a Christian adopts the ways of his enemy—name calling, physical violence, gossip, vengeance, and indifference to his soul

E. Let God Be Magnified

1. in this Earth, we are to be reflectors of Christ's glory and goodness by means of the good deeds of our discipleship to the Master (Ephesians 3:20-21)

2. don't detract from that great light by dipping a toe into the darkness when tempted to condescend to the level of one's enemies

Conclusion

Imprecatory psalms seem to seek personal vengeance, but are mostly prayers for divine vengeance.

Psalm 36: An Oracle Within My Heart

Introduction

Psalm 36 shows the mind of David grappling with life's complexities in light of the power of evil men despite the light of God's truth and goodness. Like any truly righteous man, David marvels that some people can be so wicked and unconcerned about the will of God. Still his prayer in the end recognizes that we all stray from time to time and must be reminded that we desperately need God's mercy. [Read Psalm 36:1-12.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. A Portrait of the Wicked Man (1-4)

1. it is one of those simple explanations that we grope to find all the time and then amazes us in the end how easy it is—unrepentant sinners live their lifestyles because they just do not fear God

a. truly, the easiest answer usually is the correct one, for while we search for deep psychological reasoning, in the end, it is simple irreverence for the Almighty that allows a wicked person to keep on being wicked without much concern

b. and yet, the Bible reminds us that without a fear of God, we are going to miss the point of our entire life (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

c. Job 28:28 says, "Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding."

2. even the law of faith that brings salvation by grace to man is dependent upon a fear of God—"In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears him and works righteousness is accepted by him" (Acts 10:34-35)

a. when you find yourself in the throes of temptation, forced to choose between the right path or the left, look above and see God watching over your decision and know that he is deeply concerned with how you exercise your free will

b. if my earthly father had watched over more of my decisions, I would not have made as many foolish choices; fortunately our heavenly Father is perfectly vigilant

B. Divine Goodness (5-9)

1. remember it is God's patience that often hardens the hearts of sinners, who mistake that longsuffering for impotence (Second Peter 3:1-9)

2. those who think God cannot act willfully forget that he already has, in Noah's time, and that upon this proof, he promises to act once more in destroying our Earth

3. and so, to the sinner, every time the sun rises, it is an expression of God's mercy to a lost world that still holds some with hope of being saved

a. like sand in the top of an hourglass, God's mercy is not inexhaustible; eventually this Earth will reach the degree of Sodom and Gomorrah and he will strike it

b. your responsibility is to be prepared whenever that day comes, even if it does not come in your lifetime, for death holds the same promise of concluding the time of preparation

4. David has trouble understanding God's mercy because it seems so far beyond anything that a man would be willing to extend; his mercy is great enough to forgive the chief sinner on Earth who sincerely repents

C. Prayer and Confidence (10-12)

1. wisely, David sees we do not deserve all that God has given to us and that we are unworthy of his mercy and grace

2. and so, even we who try to live justly, need his help every day with our weaknesses and failures

II. Some Applications

A. Flattery of Self

1. David sees that such wicked people flatter themselves in that they think they have gotten away with something

2. how many criminals on Earth have been wrongly acquitted, yet their date with God remains etched in stone and the great Judge will make no such errors

3. Paul told the Romans that every day of life was another chance to make oneself right with God, yet he saw that many of them were instead hardened by God's patience and resolved to continue in sin, confident that they would not be called to judgment any time soon: "Or do you despise the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent hearts you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:4-5)

a. so much full apostasy begins with the indulgence of one sinful temptation that snowballs because judgment against it is deferred until life's end (Ecclesiastes 8:10-13)

b. God's patience is mocked and the heart grows hard until it is beyond feeling the pangs of guilt anymore (see Ephesians 4:19)

B. He Does Not Hate Evil

1. when we understand what an insult sin is to our God, we should then see that hating sin is healthy and necessary, especially our own sin (Psalm 119:97-104)

2. most people do not hate sin, only the consequences in terms of loss, shame or imprisonment

3. hating evil is the beginning of avoiding it

C. Mercy, Faithfulness, Righteousness, Judgments

1. David extols God's mercy as in the heavens, his faithfulness as reaching to the clouds, his righteousness as like great mountains, and his judgments as a great deep

2. emulating these qualities sets the Christian apart from that wicked man of the early verses

3. former Congressman J.C. Watts of Oklahoma said that, "Character is doing the right thing even when nobody is watching"

4. it is being faithful when no one could ever find you out if you were otherwise; it is doing the right thing even when most others would be overcome by the temptation to act selfishly; it is discerning good from evil and choosing the former despite great pressure from one's peers to go with the crowd (Ephesians 4:30-5:2)

D. Light and Life

1. David speaks of the abundance of the saint's satisfaction with God's blessing in his house

2. in God is the fountain of life and light

3. the translation of this life and light to man is the objective of the gospel (John 1:1-9)

a. it is impossible to appreciate light until you have dwelt in darkness, or to appreciate life until it has been threatened with death, and so the gospel goes to men in the darkness of sin, confronted with its due penalty of eternal death

b. God did not cause the sin, but he provided its remedy

E. Protect Us

1. we also pray that he might protect us from those who live wickedly and think little of our faith

2. we pray that no soul might be lost due to the pressure of wicked men

Conclusion

Our world is much like David's, in that we must daily deal with men who hate our God and his ways and hold us in contempt for having faith. Yet we are satisfied with God's protection and promise.

Psalm 37: Do Not Fret

Introduction

Psalm 37 begins by admonishing its reader not to fret, an exhortation with special meaning in an age defined by stress, depression, worry and suicide. This poem has been compared to the Hebrew proverbs because it presents so much practical advice. Psalm 37 is divided into four parts, each promising the child of God that the Lord will watch over him and bless him. Verses 1-8 call upon us not to worry over the success of the wicked, but to trust in God. Verses 9-22 promise that the Earth belongs to the submissive and righteous. Verses 23-33 describe the benefits of living righteously. Verses 34-40 present a closing challenge. [Read Psalm 37:1-40.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Do Not Fret Because of Evildoers (1-8)

1. how many times do we find ourselves admiring the beauty, wealth or power of those who either attain or maintain these marks by means of ungodliness
 - a. why do we compare ourselves to those who dress immodestly, or make fortunes selling sinful substances or mistreating others, or who exercise power in abuse of their fellow man (Proverbs 24:19-20)
 - b. genuine Christians are the most blessed people on Earth; why should we be envious of anyone outside the body (Proverbs 23:17-18)?
2. envy is a work of the flesh that comes from discontent with spiritual bounty and leads to an emulation of the covetousness and iniquity of those that define success in physical values (see Galatians 5:21)
3. when you find yourself envying anyone outside the body of Christ, your foundation is drifting

B. Inheriting The Earth (9-22)

1. Jesus repeated this promise that the meek would inherit the Earth; it was a Jewish proverb tied to the conquest of Canaan
 - a. meek people are occasionally taken advantage of, but never take advantage of another
 - b. meek people are sometimes ridiculed as being too unaggressive, but never are pressured into aggression
2. many think that meekness is synonymous with weakness, but our Lord described himself as meek and he was very strong
 - a. meekness is a quiet strength that does not require self-serving displays of power or ability to prove it
 - b. meekness is a fruit of the spirit, defined as “gentle, kind, not easily provoked, ready to yield rather than cause trouble” (Ephesians 4:1-3)

C. Steps of a Good Man Ordered By The Lord (23-33)

1. how can I know I am walking in steps ordered by God?
2. by doing what Jesus did or would do in every situation
3. even if I suffer like Christ, I know that, like him, I will not be utterly cast down, or lost forever for God will uphold me

D. Wait On the Lord (34-40)

1. David has seen the wicked man enjoying all his wealth and power and behaving as if he owned the world, but sooner or later, he comes to naught and is erased
2. to wait on the Lord is to have a patient dependence upon him with an expectant faith, not fretting or anxious that his promises may fail (see Hebrews 11:1)

II. Some Applications

A. Trust In The Lord

1. David counsels us instead to trust in God and delight in his providence so that he can give us the desires of our hearts

- a. some take this to mean that you just need to be faithful and God will make you rich and give you what you want, but that idea misses the point too much
 - b. if you are truly trusting in the Lord, the desires of your heart are going to be different—no longer a new car or a bigger house, but a new spirit or a bigger kingdom of the redeemed
2. faith means that we place the fate of our lives and souls in his hands without any misgivings or withholdings (Proverbs 3:5-6)
- a. that is not waiting for some miraculous sign, but trusting in the word of faith once delivered, the Bible, to guide our steps
 - b. there is no revelation more special than the words of the prophets and the apostles, the foundation of faith and the church

B. Rest In the Lord

- 1. how many times have you lay awake at night, worried over this or that or wanting to accelerate time
- 2. sometimes we trust that God will avenge the righteous but we want to hasten him along
- 3. we forget that patience is indeed a virtue: “He who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword, Here is the patience and the faith of the saints” (Revelation 13:10) and “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12)
 - a. losing patience leads to wrath and anger at the sinner and sometimes at God
 - b. do not fret; it only causes harm; let God take care of his work in his time

C. God Laughs At Him

- 1. God watches the world and sees things from an eternal point of view; he sees men forfeiting eternity in heaven for a few moments or even years of pleasure and riches, and God laughs when the wicked think they have won
- 2. God sees that his day is coming, when even 80 years of pleasure will be reduced to chaff and the righteous will be crowned
- 3. this is illustrated best in the account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-25)

D. Never Forsaken

- 1. you will never see the righteous begging, for God’s plan takes care of the poor, widowed and orphaned
- 2. individuals practicing pure and undefiled religion will help those in dire need (see James 1:27) and the church is ready to practice benevolence to needy saints (see Second Corinthians 9:1) and widows indeed (see First Timothy 5)

E. The Law Is In His Heart

- 1. the Christian has the law of God written on his heart; it is not just some external code of conduct, but is a way of life (Jeremiah 31:33)
- 2. his words reflect God’s wisdom, not man’s

F. Mark The Blameless Man

- 1. instead of being impressed with worldly greatness, we should be impressed with spiritual greatness and note those among us that walk in Christ’s footsteps, for they are bound for the last Canaan
- 2. God will keep us until that day (Second Timothy 1:12)

Conclusion

Psalm 37 serves to remind us that life is not about who dies with the most in the bank, but who dies with everything in the Lord.

Psalm 38: Iniquities Over My Head

Introduction

The Bible collection of Psalms includes seven penitential works that express a deep godly sorrow for some sin the writer has committed. This is the third such work by David which goes under the heading, “To bring to remembrance.” Most of us would rather forget our sin as soon as possible, but for the godly, there is something we must do first. We must bring it to remembrance in the front of our minds and acknowledge it before the Lord. Psalm 38 is the experience of David speaking with God about his sin and admitting that it had brought much shame upon his soul. In verses 1-8, David recounts the conviction and affliction that came from his sin. In verses 9-14, he remarks about his loneliness and guilt. In verses 15-22, David expresses his confident hope that God will not forsake the penitent. [Read Psalm 38:1-22.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Conviction and Affliction (1-8)

1. in a matter of a few words, David defines for us godly sorrow, an overwhelmingly painful realization that one has broken his commitment to the Lord and brought reproach on the cause of righteousness

2. we envision David as too distraught to do much of anything, save for prayer; the burden of guilt is so great that it bows him down

3. I can vividly remember this feeling when I was a child in my father’s house and I would do something that disappointed him

a. but David’s grief is greater and the consequences more far-reaching

b. and yet that disappointment in oneself for disappointing his father helps us to understand how our every sin affects the God who sacrificed his only Son that we might not sin

B. Lonely Suffering (9-14)

1. in this passage, we find that David feels alone with his pain, that it seems all have forsaken him

2. sometimes this is because we are too ashamed to approach those closest to us with our shame and sometimes it is because they are too ashamed to approach us with sympathy

3. but this loneliness has at least one benefit—it reminds us our own responsibility for our own actions, that ultimately it is the sinner who must get on his knees and beg God’s mercy and go to any offended person and make restitution

4. no one can do my repenting for me

C. Confident Hope (15-22)

1. David trusts that God will hear him when he prays penitently, declaring his iniquity

2. God already knows about our sin, so declaring one’s iniquity is not about informing God so he will know; it is about informing God that we know

3. then we can confidently hope in the God of our salvation

II. Some Applications

A. Laying Aside the Weight of Sin and Guilt

1. if you have ever seen the inside of a race car, you must have noticed that there is nothing unnecessary in there; it is a stripped down model if there ever was one (Hebrews 12:1-6)

a. when one is in a race, he does not voluntarily load himself down with various weights and encumbrances

b. rather he makes certain that his back is unburdened and his limbs are untangled

2. the Hebrew writer puts us in a race, surrounded by a great audience of witnesses who ran the same race of faith to victory

a. wisdom dictates that we not burden ourselves with sin and guilt, for they will sap our endurance and possibly leave us exhausted short of the finish line

b. Jesus invited “all you who labor and are heavy-laden” to come unto him for rest, for his “yoke is easy and [his] burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30)

c. some are guilty over cheating at school, or committing acts of immorality like premarital sex or drug experimentation; others are guilty about failing at marriage or as parents; others are guilty for not being better children or Christians

d. Jesus invites you to come and remove that burden of guilt, just as David did, in repentance and recommitment to following what is good, “for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them” (Luke 9:56)

3. unlike a foot race on Earth, there is not a limit to the number of crowns which can be won in the Judgment Day and so fellow runners aid one another rather than competing (Galatians 6:1-2)

B. Though All Forsake Me

1. some of the evenings I spent in Lithuania were the loneliest of my life—no people in the flat, no television to make noise, no one to talk to on the phone, no Internet to visit

2. I have never found myself so yearning to pray as that time, because God was the only one to whom I could talk

3. the gospel can be very divisive and leave a Christian with a fleshly family that does not understand or care about spiritual things and may actually mock his faith (Matthew 10:34-39)

4. when we are weakened thus, we go to God for strength most (see Hebrews 13:5-6)

C. Godly Sorrow Works Repentance

1. godly sorrow produces diligence to overcome one’s weakness and make restitution to anyone who was wronged or offended (Second Corinthians 7:9-11)

2. it produces a clearing of oneself, a removal of guilt by unburdening oneself perhaps to a brother (see James 5:16) and certainly to the Lord

3. godly sorrow produces indignation, an anger at the sin one has committed, the way he has failed his Savior and harmed his own reputation and possibly that of the cause of Christ

4. it leads to fear, yes godly fear of falling into the hands of the living God (see Hebrews 10:31)

5. godly sorrow works vehement desire to do better and to do whatever is necessary to avoid that temptation in the future

6. and finally repentance brings vindication, absolution from sin through an application of mercy in Christ’s blood

Conclusion

Godly sorrow will wreak havoc on your soul until you repent. Make things right with God.

Psalm 39: I Will Guard My Ways

Introduction

Psalm 39 is addressed by King David to the chief musician and is a combination confession of sin and realization of the vanity of life. David's words are apparently occasioned by some circumstance in which he felt surrounded by his enemies and obliged to keep silent, lest he sin with his tongue. Unfortunately, his anger got the better of him and opened his mouth to retaliate. Psalm 39 is his confession of sin. [Read Psalm 39:1-13.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Confession Of Sin (1-3)

1. David understood before how much evil the tongue could do, but now he has experienced its true power for himself
2. he found that it was especially difficult, yet all the more important, when he was subjected to the presence of his enemies, to bridle his tongue
3. what we think minor, understandable and unavoidable, Christ will judge as though bitter water came from a fresh spring
4. we see the tongue's evil power in different ways
 - a. gossip, sport of the idle, envious and carnal
 - b. backbiting, profession of those intent on destroying the church
 - c. slander, gossip for liars
 - d. profanity, communication of the ignorant and unwashed
 - e. deceit, self-preservation through prevarication

B. The Vanity of Life (4-6)

1. this sin has caused David to think about the duration of his life; it is just a vapor he claims
2. folks who have lived a while and see the end growing nigh will generally agree that it seemed only yesterday that they were young
 - a. most will also lament the opportunities they neglected and the time they wasted
 - b. we waste much time through procrastination and security that there will always be a tomorrow to do what we could have done today (see James 4:13-16)
3. but David sounds more like his son, Solomon (Ecclesiastes 1:1-11)
4. Solomon's solution is wise advice (Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:1, 6-9-14)

C. God's Discipline (7-13)

1. David says that God's discipline hurts him and yet God never laid a hand on him
2. God's discipline hurt David in the conscience, where the blows of his word landed firmly
3. those pangs of conscience help show God's love for us and that he considers us his children (see Hebrews 12:3-11)
4. if you find yourself sinning without a pained conscience, worry!

II. Some Applications

A. Self-Control and Moderation

1. so David tried to muzzle his mouth and mute himself, but found it very difficult
2. no doubt his enemies taunted him and sought to make him speak; it is frustrating to fight with someone who turns the other cheek and refuses to fight back
3. so often, the Holy Spirit encourages temperance and moderation in our speech; Jesus reminds us that he will judge every idle word spoken by man (see Matthew 12:36)
4. James wrote on this subject as well (James 3:1-12)
 - a. the tongue is more difficult to control than the body
 - b. the tongue is a small rudder that can determine which direction your life will lead
 - c. the tongue is a small spark that can ignite a forest fire
 - d. the tongue is more difficult to tame than a wild animal
 - e. the tongue is like a viper, striking quickly and deadly

f. the tongue shows man's contradictions—blessing God at one moment and cursing his fellow man the next; this contradiction needs to be corrected; Paul warned us that language like this grieves the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:20-32)

5. overcome the evil of an enemies' curses with good (Romans 12:17-21)

B. Anger

1. Paul warned us not to let the sun go down on anger, for it tends to become more deeply ingrained if not treated quickly (Ephesians 4:25-26)

2. he also warned that giving in to the impulses of anger is like giving the devil an opportunity with our souls

3. anger can be justified when it is against evil and it can be properly vented, but to resort to angry words is to invite the devil in

C. A Carnal Life is Worthless

1. David weeps for those who make accumulation their life's work and neglect the weightier spiritual matters (Romans 8:1-11)

2. just as Solomon wondered about those who labor so hard and then die; their possessions belong to another man and who knows if he will use them wisely or gratefully

3. we parents are sometimes caught in the middle of wanting to do the best for our kids spiritually and materially

a. time is usually the medium of exchange—work longer to give them things or spend more time at home to give them love and attention

b. choose that which lasts

D. Prayer

1. David closes by praying that God's gaze will be removed, that sense of shame David feels

2. his prayer is for renewed strength and it will be answered (Philippians 4:4-7)

Conclusion

Psalm 39 should teach us all about the vanity of sinning or wasting time in this life.

Psalm 40: I Waited Patiently

Introduction

Psalm 40 is the work of David, but certainly does more than describe one of his own myriad hardships in life. Very clearly, Psalm 40 is haunted by messianic undertones, making David's work typical of the Savior yet to come. In this lesson, we will look at the psalm as it derives from David and points to Jesus. [Read Psalm 40:1-17.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Rescued From The Pit (1-3)

1. David's description of his descent into a horrible pit of adversity is somewhat like the problems faced by another voice of justice, Jeremiah, who was imprisoned for preaching an unpopular doctrine that also happened to be true (Jeremiah 38:1-13)

2. we also hear the echoes of our Lord's prayer in the garden of Gethsemane just before he was betrayed into Roman hands

3. the thing about miry clay is that it is like quicksand—the more you struggle to emerge from it, the deeper you find yourself

4. when the Christian or sinner finds himself sinking in such a pit of despair or persecution, what can put his feet back on solid rock?

a. the answer this passage offers is that residence in a pit of miry clay is the occasion for diligent prayer, even if we still feel ourselves continuing to sink (see First Thessalonians 5:17)

b. rescue does not always come the moment we think to request it

B. Beatitude (4-5)

1. David reminds us again that the man who makes God his trust and security will not be disappointed

a. it seems harder today to convince people to put their trust in the Lord for the devil is exploiting technology and economy and feeding people's complacency and ingratitude

b. we let the devil twist God's abundant gifts into something that corrupts the spirit instead of leading it to show gratitude to the giver of every good thing (see James 1:17)

2. the materialism that grips the world and is infecting the church is constructed upon the devil's lie—you will not surely die for indulging this evil desire or making Jesus wait (see Genesis 3:4)

3. and so men continue becoming lovers of themselves rather than lovers of God (see Second Timothy 3:2) and yet popular religion cannot recognize the problem

C. Obedience (6-10)

1. the Hebrew writer quotes the Septuagint translation of this passage to illustrate the obedience of Christ to God's will and the effect upon mankind (Hebrews 10:1-10)

a. the obedience of Jesus upon the cross accomplished what the blood of bulls and goats could not—lasting, enduring redemption from sin through God's mercy

b. the sacrifices of the law of Moses were ultimately flawed in that they were insufficient to remove sins and in that the one doing the worship often did so without sincerity in his heart, but from a sense of customary obligation

2. the offering of Christ's body, prepared by Jehovah to be sacrificed to benefit all men, sets the believer apart from the lost

D. Prayer For Mercy and Deliverance (11-17)

1. while David states he has not withheld God's loving-kindness and truth from those whom he influences, he also remarks that these two divine qualities are his own source of preservation

2. loving-kindness is a fount of encouragement that produces patience, endurance and hope while truth is that which directs our footsteps and corrects our missteps

a. being a member of the body of Christ surrounds us with God's expression of love for his people (see First Timothy 3:15)

b. being a disciple of the word of Christ surrounds our minds and hearts with God's expression of truth for living (see John 8:30-31)

II. Some Applications

A. God Bends Forward

1. literally, David suggests that when God heard his cry, he bent forward to press his ear to the king's mouth
2. as Jeremiah was pulled up from the dungeon and as Daniel's three friends were saved from the fiery furnace before he himself survived the lion's den and as Christ was rescued from hades and enthroned in heaven, so the Christian can be assured that God will bend forward and hear his prayer
3. there are all sorts of ways prayers can be answered in this lifetime, but the big picture also settles upon judgment day when sincere prayers for deliverance are answered identically
4. there we sing a new song of praise to God before his throne (see Revelation 14:3)

B. Christ The Perfect Example

1. our Lord exemplifies this security in God and distaste for trusting the temporal
 - a. when Pontius Pilate spoke to Christ, he became frustrated because Jesus did not cower before him and beg for his life (John 19:5-11)
 - b. Jesus did not believe in the power of Pilate, but of his father
2. while most of his followers receded into the background to wait out their Lord's destiny in relative safety, Jesus stepped up and showed courage to the end because he truly believed in his father
3. making the Lord your source of security requires taking risks that men of lesser or no faith would avoid (First Corinthians 16:13-14)
4. like Peter and John defying an edict to quit preaching Jesus or Paul risking his neck on preaching journeys and before unkind rulers; this the faith that moves mountains

C. Scheme of Salvation

1. David rounds out this section by praising God for his innumerable wonderful works
2. I am sure we do not know the half of what God has done for us, but we do know is that he sacrificed his only son that every soul on earth might have the chance at being delivered from its own pit of sin; how many of you would be willing to give up your own child to benefit people who rebelled against you and made this sacrifice necessary through their weakness and selfishness (Ephesians 3:8-12)?
3. in the fullness of time, Jesus came and fatally wounded the devil's ability to corral souls into doom; count such blessings!

D. Christ's Example of Self-Sacrifice

1. is there anything we can learn from Christ's self-sacrifice
2. this faith is focused upon a willingness to sacrifice oneself in favor of others (Romans 12:1-2)
 - a. our bodies are temples of God and not to be joined to evil like fornication (see First Thessalonians 4:1-8)
 - b. our interests should be subject to the needs of those whom we love (see Philippians 2:3-4)

E. Deliverance Through Resurrection

1. I wonder if we underemphasize the Biblical prophecy concerning a general resurrection of departed souls (see Second Corinthians 5:10)
2. compared to all the ways God might deliver us in this lifetime, the resurrection to judgment for the faithful is beyond comparison (First Thessalonians 4:13-18)
3. David calls on those who love God's salvation to say continually, "The Lord be magnified"

F. Failure For the Wicked

1. we also hear David praying for the failure of wicked men, but in Christ we hear a prayer for their conversion
2. the two attitudes are reconciled in a number of ways, but recall that Jesus foiled the plans of the wicked on many occasions himself, even as he prayed for the conversion of those that could be won
3. there is no sin in hoping that wicked intentions fail and that wicked men are made ashamed, for perhaps then they can see the light

Conclusion

Psalm 40 is haunted by messianic undertones, making David's work typical of the Savior yet to come.

Psalm 41: Friends and Neighbors

Introduction

Psalm 41 is a song of lament and faith that completes the First Book of the Psalms. In it, David considers the poor and God's concern over them, as well as his own troubles and hope for relief. His greatest pain is reserved for a certain friend who betrayed him. [Read Psalm 41:1-13.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. A Christian Beatitude (1-3)

1. it seems that David is undergoing hardship again and it seems like this is a common theme to his psalms, it is

a. actually, it is not that David was constantly going through rough patches, it is that in each trial, he wrote many psalms

b. indeed, many like this one are attributed to the period of time in which his son Absalom revolted against the throne

2. David writes here a beatitude for those who remember the poor, or a better translation, the powerless, sick or weak

a. he says this because he is suffering some physical or mental malady at this time himself and is finding no assistance, even from his friends

b. David's implication is similar to the beatitude of Jesus in the sermon on the mount: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7)

3. we might ask then, who are the poor?

a. the poor includes anyone who is in need of aid and the responsibility is part of what we call pure and undefiled religion which belongs to every individual member of the body of Christ, who suffers with the suffering (see James 1:27 and I Corinthians 12:26)

b. we think of the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

1. to receive the blessing both David and Jesus promise, we must be of a mind to treat all who need our help as a neighbor and extend ourselves in assistance

2. to the truly needy, we give of our time and possessions; to those who need to be encouraged to stand on their own, we deny them a crutch and compel them to help themselves (Second Thessalonians 3:10-12)

B. With Friends Like This (4-13)

1. both Jesus and Paul knew what it was like when David wrote of the betrayal of his friends

2. the Lord went to the cross while his closest friends hid in the corners of the city or warmed their hands at the fire with mockers and persecutors

3. Paul wrote Timothy of one occasion in which he defended both himself and the gospel and no one stood with him, but all forsook him (see Second Timothy 4:16)

II. Some Applications

A. Showing Mercy

1. the merciful nature of God is one quality that Christ and his apostles spent much time trying to impress upon the disciples

2. our world is often cold and lacking compassion, but the doctrine of Christ calls for a degree of mercy unparalleled (Matthew 18:21-22)

a. in fact, the golden rule teaches if you want men to show you mercy when you need it, you must first practice mercy toward others: "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy" (James 2:13).

b. when a brother begs your forgiveness, you should be willing to grant him mercy (Matthew 18:15)

c. when someone genuinely repents of a sin and asks to be welcomed back into the fellowship of the congregation, he ought to be met with open arms (see Second Corinthians 2:8)

d. we ought always to be ready to forgive, even as God in Christ forgave us of a far greater weight of transgression (Colossians 3:12-15)

B. Hardheartedness

1. in answering Peter's question about how many times he should forgive an offensive brother, Christ taught another parable about two debtors (Matthew 18:23-35)
2. the point is that the grace we received from God when our sins were first forgiven can be revoked if we do not abide in the doctrine of Christ: "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries" (Hebrews 10:26-27).
3. and so we must forgive a penitent brother "from the heart"
 - a. no holding of grudges or remembrance of the wrong so that it can be resurrected as a weight over his head
 - b. forgiveness from the heart in God's model is wiping the slate clean and recalling the offense no more

C. When Friends Fail

1. being a friend after the doctrine of Christ means bearing another's burdens (see Galatians 6:1-2), quelling the fires of gossip rather than fanning the flames, speaking truth even it hurts (see Ephesians 4:26), and being an influence for good (see First Corinthians 15:33)
2. friendship is a matter of mutual interdependence (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)
3. dependable friendships are won through effort (Proverbs 18:24)
4. they can be ruined by ubiquity, lies and failure (Proverbs 25:16-19) and gossip (Proverbs 17:9)
5. they can become evil if a friend is a bad influence (Proverbs 22:24-25)
6. friendship gives the benefit of reproof (Proverbs 27:6, 17)

D. Doxology

1. each of the five books of psalms ends with this doxology of verse 13
2. our eternal God is blessed indeed

Conclusion

David considers the poor and God's concern over them, as well as his own troubles and hope for relief.

Psalm 42: As The Deer Pants

Introduction

The second book of Psalms begins with a “Contemplation of the sons of Korah”, which again bears the familiar signs of exile and anguish. In Psalm 42, the psalmist expresses the pain of a man longing for God, but finding it difficult to grope his way back to the Lord. Yet, in the end, he finds the rock of his salvation and fastens his faith firmly to it. We shall study Psalm 42 in two parts. Verses 1-5 express the hunger of a saint in exile. Verses 6-11 indicate the agony and ecstasy of comprehending the plan of God. [Read Psalm 42:1-11.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. My Soul Thirsts (1-5)

1. the writer begins this psalm with one of the most vibrant images of all the Bible, that of a weary deer who perhaps has completed a long and speedy flight from a predator, and who now searches just as desperately for a brook from which to drink refreshing, simple water

a. we might think of the soldier whose canteen is empty and who finds himself deep behind enemy lines or the explorer crossing the desert, praying an oasis might appear over the next sandy horizon

b. all these images fit the writer’s state of mind, a parching thirst for that sense that God is beside him, hearing him, healing him

2. the apostle Paul wrote the first Corinthian epistle in a state of thirst and need (First Corinthians 4:11-13)

a. but our psalmist is employing a metaphor to show his ardent desire to relocate God’s abiding presence

b. Jesus promised a blessing upon those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, that they would be filled (Matthew 5:6)

c. one wonders what will become of those whose interest in righteousness is only a minor pang of the stomach instead, or those who can be satisfied with junk food, far short of the spiritual nutrition found in the milk and meat of God’s word

3. extreme hunger or thirst will make you do desperate things; recall how Esau’s hunger led him to sell his birthright to Jacob in exchange for a mere bowl of stew?

a. turned in a just direction, the hunger and thirst for God’s favor will lead you to think spiritually, not carnally, and turn all your energy upon the search (see Matthew 6:33)

b. it will lead you to value worship and Bible class over all else, and to forgo rest for meditation

c. Amos prophesied of a day in Israel when there would be a different thirst (Amos 8:11-13)

d. how many have made this a self-imposed drought?

B. I Will Remember You (6-11)

1. there is no greater recognition than that one’s souls is cast down, for Christ also pronounced blessing upon the poor in spirit and they that mourn, that they should be comforted and given the kingdom of heaven (see Matthew 5:3-4)

2. the places the psalmist mentions in verse 6 were in far northern Israel; he was far from the temple and his home in Jerusalem

3. if you ever found yourself far from home and perhaps far from a congregation of God’s people, you may know this same sense of isolation

4. the psalmist then reflects again upon his environment and hears the storms beating against him and the floods rising inch by inch to engulf his body and drown him in solitude and misery

5. but even as the deluge gains on his throat and is about to submerge even his head, the psalmist beats back the waves with the hope of God’s loving-kindness and the promise of his own worship and prayer (Matthew 14:22-33)

a. you see that Jesus can rise above the most tumultuous sea and call on you to walk with him if your faith can bear the journey

b. we must learn to walk upon those things that would cast our souls down, climb upon them like the cliffs of a great mountain until we reach the summit, making our trials and our failures and successes regarding temptation to be stepping stones of spiritual growth and progress (James 1:2-8)

II. Some Applications

A. Appearing Before God

1. there are many ways we think of worship services; we generally call it, “going to church”
2. but our psalmist likely has the very best idea about worship services; he considered it an appearance before God
 - a. are some just making an appearance before their parents, or their children, or the preacher, or the elders, or that cute girl or handsome boy, or business contacts?
 - b. if only two or three souls gathered in this spacious building, it would not change the fact that God would grant them an audience, just as he does each Lord’s day when this company assembles
 - c. right now, as I speak, God is watching me and watching you, listening to me and searching you for that kernel of praise that glorifies him in the way he deserves
 - d. but right now, as I speak, God is scanning the pews, looking for one of his children who is absent, whom he then finds to be on a boat on the lake or perched upon his easy chair, worshipping the almighty television’s glow and message
3. when one receives a summons or subpoena to appear before a judge, he puts on his reverent apparel and dutifully appears on time
 - a. but how many see the clock hands move toward the worship hour en route to their couch and not their pew?
 - b. this many have shunned the Lord’s summons, refusing to appear before their creator and ultimate judge (Hebrews 10:24-25)
 4. but even one’s presence is little comfort to the “churchgoer” who is here in the flesh, but absent in the spirit because his mind is permitted to wander back into the world while others sing from the heart and study with a hungry soul
 - a. the psalmist thinks of the joy it used to bring him to hear others singing praise to God along with him; now he is alone
 - b. do the songs of God’s people excite your zeal to serve God?

B. Why Cast Down?

1. the psalmist then asks his soul why it is cast down
2. in the times of darkest despair, hope yet springs eternal if Christians can still pray and praise
3. recall how Paul and Silas were arrested in Philippi for preaching Jesus and exorcising a profitable demon from a young girl (Acts 16:20-26)
 - a. the worst doubt an infidel can insert into a Christian’s mind is why God is not rescuing him more quickly: “Where is your God?”
 - b. the surrounding darkness of trial only makes the light of deliverance the more remarkable
 - c. the ability to praise God and trust him for rescue from the deepest pit tells the world that God’s children will not be defeated, for God will not be overcome by evil (Second Peter 3:1-7)

C. The Devil Twists the Knife

1. the psalmist thought he would anchor his soul to the rock of salvation, but was getting the feeling that he was adrift
2. the rock however does not move; if we have the sense of separation from God, it is always due to our own drift, not God’s
3. we drift when we pray less, meditate sporadically or without purpose, or indulge temptation rather than fight
4. the psalmist’s enemy asks again, “Where is your God?”
 - a. he could have replied that it would have been even worse if his God were not present
 - b. he is the help of my countenance—that which turns my frowns to joy
 - c. and one day, I will ascend into the clouds to meet Jesus and no one will be asking where God is then (see First Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Conclusion

The psalmist expresses the pain of a man longing for God, but finding it difficult to grope his way back.

Psalm 43: Vindicate Me

Introduction

Some believe that Psalm 43 is not really a separate psalm at all, but a mistakenly disconnected fragment of its predecessor. It is just as likely, however, that those manuscripts which combine the two are in error and that Psalm 43 is indeed a separate work, though a fitting successor to the message of Psalm 42. Psalm 43 is a brief prayer offered to God in hopes of gaining some comprehension of a downcast soul. Consider the roles it assigns to God—deliverer, source of strength, light and truth, joy and hope. [Read Psalm 43:1-5.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Vindication (1)

1. it is surmised by some that Psalm 43 is David's reaction to Saul's decision to treat his former friend as an enemy and pursue him to the death

a. David finds himself unjustly in the position of "enemy of the state" and is particularly wronged by one man named Doeg

1. as David fled from Saul's presence, he came to a community of priests called Nob and was aided by Ahimelech and the others there

2. the Edomite Doeg, a chief herdsman of King Saul, however, was also there and saw how the priests aided the fugitive

3. when Saul arrived at Nob, Doeg took the side of the unbalanced monarch (First Samuel 22:6-10, 18-19)

4. perhaps Doeg is the unjust man David had in mind

2. after David became king, his own son rebelled against him and put him to flight from Jerusalem

a. Absalom also added one of David's closest counselors, Ahithophel, to the rebellion

1. David prayed that Ahithophel's advice would be turned to foolishness (see Second Samuel 15:31) and it was (Second Samuel 16:20-23)

2. his later good advice was disregarded and he killed himself, but the betrayal of David surely wounded the king in a like way to his son's rebellion

b. in this case also, David found himself an enemy of the state and seeking any port of refuge

c. perhaps Psalm 43 is a reflective prayer on those hard times; we can learn of the helpful nature of our God from its words

B. God as The Answer (2-5)

1. the psalm begins with a prayer for vindication, but then asks why the writer should feel downcast if God is with him

2. he begins to acknowledge again that God is his source of light, life, truth and joy, as he must be ours

II. Some Applications

A. God as Deliverer

1. the psalm begins with a prayer for vindication, a legal term denoting that the defendant is innocent and justified

a. the plaintiff is an ungodly nation, making judgments according to unrighteousness

b. to the writer, only God could possibly deliver him from the deceitful and unjust man; I think it is most likely that this man is just the epitome of all the evil present in the nation at that time

2. our own supposedly "Christian nation" has grown quite ungodly in recent years and it may be that we are also seeking deliverance

a. "Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34)

b. morally, America barely resembles the country that began this century, even this decade

1. it is now commonplace for unmarried men and women to live together and produce offspring, homosexuality is gaining protection as a civil rights issue, the murder of the unborn continues unabated and profane language is now found in cartoons

2. Christianity is being marginalized as intolerant and dangerous to the public weal

3. because evil men tend to wax worse and worse (see Second Timothy 3:13), it appears unlikely America will ever rescue herself from this moral morass, but the fate of our souls does not depend upon the fate of our country; we must be interested in deliverance on an individual basis
 - a. this was the mission of our Lord (Luke 4:16-19)
 - b. his death provides the ultimate deliverance (Hebrews 2:14-15)

B. God as Source of Strength

1. the psalmist wonders within himself why he is so downcast, seeing God is with him
2. he recognized that God was the source of his strength
 - a. the Hebrew writer says of Sarah that she “received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged him faithful who had promised” (Hebrews 11:11)
 - b. faithful will find the strength to stand for right in God and be blessed with enhanced endurance
 - c. God told Paul that divine strength was made perfect in weakness (see Second Corinthians 12:9), the realization of need and decision to depend on God for its supply
 - d. what do you do in time of weakness or temptation?
 1. if you are wise, you will realize you need help and fall to your knees in prayer (see Colossians 1:11-12)
 2. in times of weakness, you will seek guidance in God’s word (James 4:6-10)
 3. we avoid prayer and study in these moments because we secretly want to fail and that is the greatest weakness of all
 4. when faced with the temptation to lose your temper, engage in filthy language or jokes or do something immoral, recognize the weakness and seek God’s strength for you can overcome all things if Christ strengthens you (see Philippians 4:13)

C. God as Light and Truth

1. Jesus prayed that God would sanctify his children by his word, for his word is truth (see John 17:17); the psalmist said his “word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (119:105)
2. the psalmist here is groping to find what is right and to find his way to God’s service and favor; he pleads for the way to be lit
3. the light of God’s word will guide the erring and wayward back to the right (Ephesians 5:8-14)
 - a. to love and crave the light of God’s word, you must be prepared for that light to expose your own blemishes (John 3:18-21)
 - b. sometimes the truth hurts, but that hurt is evidence of a heart yet soft enough to be corrected and made pleasant to God

D. God as Joy

1. notice that our psalmist does not call God the fountain of joy, or the giver of joy or maintainer of joy, but Joy Itself, his exceeding joy
2. finding his way back to God’s worship and service would renew that joy in his heart
 - a. the light of truth will always lead you to praise God, both in private and in this assembly
 - b. the light of truth will never lead you to some place else and if you find yourself there when the saints are meeting, it is not God’s word that has led you there
 - c. there can be no Christian joy in disregarding God’s light of truth to get yourself away from the assembling saints
3. the message of the gospel is intended to bring the faithful joy, no matter what the events of the day may be (First John 1:1-4)

E. God as Hope

1. the driving force that allows men to go on is hope
2. the Bible says that all Christians share in one hope of their calling (see Ephesians 4:4) and that is to be delivered at last from this corrupted planet (First Corinthians 15:50-58)

Conclusion

If we allow God to be our light of truth, he will strengthen us every day with a sense of joy and hope and ultimately we shall be delivered and crowned with glory.

Psalm 44: In Days of Old

Introduction

The forty-fourth psalm is a work of one spirit's confusion. The writer begins by recounting stories of Israel's history, learned at his father's feet. Through these stories, he learned how Jehovah prospered Israel, though she was smaller and weaker than her enemies. Now, however, the writer seems to be part of a faithful remnant, cut off from that larger body which fell apostate, and curious as to when God would begin to prosper them as their ancestors before. Through this psalm, we can gain some understanding of our own position in God's small, but faithful remnant. We can stand on the fact that God changes not and will always, eventually, prosper his faithful few. [Read Psalm 44:1-26.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Deeds God Did (1-8)

1. my own house is filled with books—there must be thousands of them; and my daughter has inherited that love of literature herself
 - a. she has many books of exciting stories, filled with tales of derring-do and yet none of them approaches the Bible in terms of both thrills and consequence
 - b. in the word of God, she can read or hear the most exciting stories ever put to paper and everyone of them, not only true, but punctuated with a strong moral
 1. when I was young, I heard of Noah, who found grace in God's eyes because of his faithful obedience, and who built the ark that preserved the human race from its self-inflicted destruction
 2. I heard of Jonah who tried to run away from his obligations to God, only to find his faith in the belly of a great fish
 3. I was told about Daniel who survived the lions' den and of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who emerged unharmed from the fiery furnace
 4. and of David who slew the giant with a sling and prayer
2. everyone of these stories—these lessons in faith—are of what God did among his people in olden times

B. A Lamentation (9-16)

1. but our psalmist has only heard these tales and he is not seeing much evidence of their revival in his land
2. he sounds as if he is part of Judah's remnant, that generation of Jeremiah, left behind to witness the smoldering embers of Jerusalem's destruction by Babylon in 586 B.C. (Lamentations 1:1-5)
 - a. Jeremiah was part of that faithful remnant, who suffered physical hardship due to the sins of others
 - b. today there exists a faithful remnant that likewise must suffer upon earth due to the sins of others
3. and likewise we are often heard to wonder when God will redeem the fortunes of this new remnant
 - a. we are the few who have chosen the narrow and often difficult road less frequently traveled (see Matthew 7:13-14), who have built our houses not upon the shifting sands of convenience and instant gratification, but the rock of moral stability and patient perseverance (see Matthew 7:24-27), who have agreed to be saved through water baptism for the remission of sins (see First Peter 3:20-21)
 - b. yet our nation is in the ashes of moral decay and even the church seems bent on self-destruction as error after error arises
 - c. has God forgotten his people and sold them for next to nothing?

C. Stretching Out Our Hands (17-26)

1. the psalmist's faithfulness was dependent upon the fact that he had not forgotten God's name
 - a. it bothers me that I am not better with names than I am; sometimes I will forget the name of someone I once knew very well, just because we have not spoken in years
 - b. the chances are slim you will literally forget God's name, but figuratively, you forget it when you cease using it

2. when you cease to speak to your father in heaven, you have forgotten his name by lack of use: “Pray without ceasing” (First Thessalonians 5:17)

3. we are seeing a remarkable thing in this nation today as neglectful fathers are trying to approach the children they abandoned years ago and start a relationship, only to find the children are little interested

a. for such fathers, it seems to be too late, but your father has never neglected you (see Matthew 7:11)

b. do you neglect him or do you ignore him?

II. Some Applications

A. The Present Concern

1. the psalmist’s present concern is the distinction God had historically made between Israel and the rest of the world and the way he had prospered their efforts to conquer Canaan

a. back at the beginning of the Exodus, the enslaved Hebrews shamed the mighty Egyptian overlords for this very cause (Exodus 11:4-7)

b. the psalmist had heard stories of Canaan’s conquest that fit the promises given before it began (Exodus 23:27-33)

2. in most every case, the enemy army was physically mightier than Israel’s and on paper, would have won every battle

a. Israel gained the reputation of a hornet, small, yet fierce, and possessing a power beyond imagination, attributed to their God

b. when she entered Jericho, the people’s hearts melted in resignation of defeat

c. to remind Israel that it was God’s power winning these impossible battles, he compelled Gideon to winnow his forces down to a minuscule 300 soldiers who won the day through faith

B. Soldiers of Christ

1. some people object to the militaristic images in the New Testament, but clearly the Holy Spirit envisioned his people engaged in daily spiritual warfare (Second Corinthians 10:3-6)

2. fortunately, we are no more to fight such battles on our own than was Israel (Ephesians 6:10-18)

a. God has provided a suit of mail that fits every saint wise enough to put it on, who wants to overcome the wiles of the enemy

1. the belt of truth which holds all in its proper place (see John 8:32)

2. the breastplate of righteousness that protects our hearts from drifting into wickedness or rejoining the slaves of Satan (see First Peter 4:3)

3. the shoes of the gospel of peace which permit us to walk by faith, desiring harmony with the Lord and all men (see Romans 12:18)

4. the shield of faith that can be instantly mobilized against quick and surprise attacks by the devil (see First Corinthians 10:13)

5. the helmet of salvation that protects the mind by teaching it to esteem every carnal impulse of lesser importance than spiritual health (see Second Corinthians 4:16)

6. the sword of the spirit which is God’s word itself empowers us to convict the lost and edify the saved, and to rebuke everyone who espouses error, especially those who teach falsely (see Hebrews 4:12-13)

C. God is Yet Watching

1. no indeed, God is still watching over us and is able to preserve us through national decay and church splits

2. we must keep ourselves in his love (Jude 20-25)

a. through constant prayer, gradual edification, and unchallenged attention to one’s eternal reservations

b. God is able to keep the one who keeps himself in God

3. our lot is no worse than any in the Bible record and to complain that we have it so bad is to mock the suffering of men like Jeremiah and Paul who truly knew godless governments

4. we must learn to be patient (James 5:7-11)

D. Don't Stretch Out Your Hand to A Foreign God

1. John closed his first book with the words, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (First John 5:21).

2. your position in the faithful remnant, awaiting redemption, may be daily threatened by the allure of a god foreign to Bible faith

a. in olden times, a tree was cut down and part of the wood was used to cook stew while another part was used to fashion an idol

b. men and women would kneel before them, stroke them or kiss them; they would speak to them instead of God and expect prosperity to come from them

c. what do we treat with such reverence today in God's place?

1. we kneel before our televisions which occupy center stage in our homes in place of the

Bible

2. we stroke our cash and kiss our freshly waxed automobiles

3. we are more likely to be found on the phone than on a praying knee

4. we think lasting prosperity will come from our occupation, neglecting our eternal profession of faith

d. such idols are just as foreign as a Baal or Ashtoreth; keep from them

Conclusion

Like the psalmist, we are tempted to be impatient with God, but after we have persevered, we will be rewarded.

Psalm 45: Ivory Palaces

Introduction

In every wedding I have ever witnessed, music has played an important part. What we have before us in Psalm 45 is just that, a wedding song to celebrate the union of the great king to his beautiful and obedient bride. In 1981, millions around the world tuned their televisions to Westminster Abbey to view the wedding of Lady Diana to Prince Charles. The pageantry and splendor captured our imagination and held us spellbound for hours. Yet, the wedding before us in Psalm 45 is grander and described in more picturesque metaphors. It is the union of Christ to his church. [Read Psalm 45:1-17.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Bridegroom In His Glory (1)

1. the immediate context of this psalm may have some reference to Solomon, but clearly it is more messianic in nature
2. the pen of the ready writer is held by a man overcome by joyous emotion at the thought of his king being wed to his bride
3. today we recognize that king to be Jesus (First Timothy 6:11-15)

B. Grace On His Lips (2-3)

1. Psalm 45 predicted that the Messiah would come with grace on his lips and indeed the gospel, that good news, was focused upon the offer of God's unmerited favor
2. a recent newspaper editorial by a Jewish columnist summarized the mission of the Lord well: "It is a widely held article of Christian faith that no one can be spiritually saved except through Jesus ... Judaism teaches differently. No intermediary can deliver God's grace and forgiveness, Jews believe; one must earn his favor directly, through prayer, repentance and charity" (Jacoby).¹
3. to be a Jew and hold this belief, you must reject Psalm 45, for it predicts an "intermediary" would come with grace on his lips, which also indicates that salvation would be offered with a word (Romans 1:16-17)

C. Example of Truth, Humility and Righteousness (4-5)

1. our hymn, *Ivory Palaces*, is about the sacrifice of Christ and what he gave up in heaven to benefit all mankind
2. the Holy Spirit was a ready writer on this subject also (Philippians 2:1-11)
 - a. perhaps the more you possess, the more difficult humility is to number among those possessions (First Timothy 6:17-19)
 - b. but Jesus had everything desirable and forfeited his place in heaven for more than three decades to dwell on Earth in the humblest of circumstances
3. all that Jesus did was designed to fulfill all righteousness, even his baptism by the hand of his cousin, John (Matthew 3:15)
4. his devotion was to truth (John 8:30-32)
 - a. his truths about sin, grace and salvation would set men free from their sins and bondage to the devil (verse 44)
 - b. living a truthful life and speaking truth each with his neighbor would free them of the entanglements of deceit

D. The Bride In Her Beauty (6-17)

1. as the wedding is about to begin, we are reminded of some things that John said (John 3:27-29)
2. the psalm points to the anointing of the bridegroom for the ceremony (Matthew 26:6-13)
3. verses 6-7 of the psalm before us are quoted by the Hebrew writer (see Hebrews 1:8-9) as he showed the superiority of Christ to angels and other servants in the scheme of God (Hebrews 1:1-4)
4. we are briefly left to wonder about the identity of the bride and how the wedding will be accomplished

II. Some Applications

A. Worship Him

1. the psalmist predicts the submission of the bride to the bridegroom in commanding the church to worship the Christ

2. as Ephesians 5 focused on this relationship, other passages examine the submission that every saint and every church should feel to the authority of the master, to whom all authority has been given (see Matthew 28:18)

3. he is the head of the church, which is his body (see Ephesians 1:22-23)

a. the prophets described his arrival (Zechariah 9:9-10)

b. his arrival fulfilled their prediction (Matthew 21:1-11)

c. this king's coronation was of a different nature, however; it was accomplished with a crown of thorns, a bloody death and glorious resurrection (John 18:33-38)

1. Pilate did not understand the nature of his kingdom, that a kingdom could exist, though not in the fashion of this world

2. he was also a stranger to truth, a student of Greek philosophy that held there was no objective truth

B. An Everlasting Kingdom

1. unlike every other kingdom in history, including the one Pilate served in, Christ's kingdom is everlasting, unshakable according to Hebrews 12:28

2. after nearly 2000 years, the kingdom of Christ still stands and will continue until it is delivered back to the father in the fullness of time

3. as in the Old Testament, where Israel was called the bride of God, in the New Testament, the church is the bride of Christ

a. Ephesians 5:22-32 describes their relationship

b. the wedding is discussed in Revelation 21:2, 9

4. each time a soul is converted, the composition of the bride expands by one (Revelation 22:17)

5. indeed every conversion is cause for rejoicing in that another soul has been wed, or joined, to the bridegroom (see First Corinthians 6:15-20)

Conclusion

Psalm 45 is meant to remind us of the glory of our king and to keep the image of his majesty alive in our hearts. When that image is present, we will gladly bow before him and worship him, as the bridegroom of the church.

Psalm 46: God is Our Refuge

Introduction

Some of the things that Psalm 46 describes as troublesome and frightening are happening around us today. The psalmist was using them to illustrate the depths of despair that can grip humanity, but actually we are witnessing them and more. The message of this psalm, which author is unknown, is that in times of greatest trial, the godly have no cause to fear for the Lord is their refuge and strength. Psalm 46 is sometimes known as Luther's Psalm, because he was so fond of it and even set its word to a tune of his own. We will study this psalm in three parts: Verses 1-3 discuss the divine refuge; Verses 4-7 combine the ideas of the church and the gospel; Verses 8-11 tell us to be still and watch. [Read Psalm 46:1-11.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. A Refuge in Times of Distress (1-3)

1. when you look at the phenomena that the writer mentions—earthquakes, floods, etc.—it should be easy to imagine how frightening all this would be to those in the midst of it
2. but the writer is only using these physical catastrophes to illustrate the depths of human suffering and fear; they are meant to be extreme representations of times of trouble
3. trouble comes to the people of God today in the form of war, crime, hatred, sin and suffering; fear is that natural impulse which cripples us and makes us defenseless
4. anxiety testifies to a doubt about the power of God to help us
 - a. David wrote, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil” (Psalm 23)
 - b. we see this reaction and weak faith in the disciples of Christ (Matthew 14:22-32)
5. the lesson is that when we find ourselves in a troublesome position, we ought to seek out a truly safe harbor

B. The City of God (4-7)

1. although the writer probably had the city of Jerusalem in mind as he wrote, the prophetic backdrop of his words are fulfilled in the modern city of God, the church of Jesus Christ
2. whether she is the church militant upon Earth or the church triumphant in heaven, the city of God is on a firm foundation (Hebrews 12:22-24)
3. our solemn hope is rooted in that city whose builder and maker is God (Revelation 21:1-4)

C. Be Still and Watch (8-11)

1. for every Christian overcome by the notion that the wicked seem always to prosper on Earth, look again and see how God has left him desolate
2. the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians and Romans all suffered great destruction because of their wickedness
3. men like the Herods, one of Christ's time and the other of Paul's, were desolated
4. the return of Jesus will be the crowning moment of the desolation of men and women who loved and practiced wickedness (Second Thessalonians 1:3-12)

II. Some Applications

A. Refuge

1. the psalmist states that God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble
2. periods of distress in life should not ultimately be tests of our faith, but reminders that our only hope is in heaven
3. an occasion for fear in infidels should be the impetus of a revival in the faithful, for when they are weakened by nature, they can be strengthened by God (Acts 17:24-28)
4. God is a very present help in such times; he is not distant or preoccupied so that he cannot attend to our prayers
5. if you have watched many disaster movies—about earthquakes, tornadoes or even the *Titanic*, you get the idea that people are moved to pray when disaster threatens
 - a. they are seeking refuge in a storm
 - b. we should always stay in that harbor (Ephesians 3:20-21)

B. The Gospel

1. old Jerusalem was surrounded by deserted areas so that when conquerors came, they often found it difficult to locate a water supply while they besieged the walls of David and Nehemiah
 - a. so long as those inside could maintain that water supply, they stood a better chance of victory than men heavily armed without
 - b. this psalm venerates that river whose streams make the city of God glad
2. in heaven are pictured a crystal sea and a river of life (Revelation 22:1-5)
 - a. heaven is the source of this river which flows now onto Earth as an earnest of refreshment to come (John 7:37-41)
 - b. indeed, the gift of the Holy Spirit is promised by Peter to all those on Pentecost who believed and were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins
 - c. both his gift, eternal life, and himself dwell with us today, through the power and influence of the words he inspired between the covers of God's book
3. the city of God is strong so long as she is watered from heaven by divine words of the gospel of Christ and the apostles' doctrine
4. long ago, Amos prophesied a famine upon the land, "not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (8:11)
 - a. this likely foreshadowed the time when God did not send prophets or revelation anymore until Christ
 - b. but now we find many have imposed this drought upon themselves, by forsaking the assembling of the saints and letting their own Bibles collect dust at home

C. Be Still

1. for this cause, we should not murmur against God or accuse him of injustice or indifference to our pleas
2. recall how Aaron "kept his peace" when his sons were punished by God for stoking profane fire before him
3. recall how Habakkuk was rebuked by God for judging the events of men on his own time line and accusing God; he learned that, "the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the Earth keep silence before him" (2:20).
4. the key to Habakkuk's curiosity and our questions regarding God's sovereignty in the affairs of men is that we are probably missing most of what he is doing because we are too occupied with the questions to see the answers
5. God is active today and will be exalted forever

Conclusion

The message of this psalm is that in times of greatest trial, the godly have no cause to fear for the Lord is their refuge and strength.

Psalm 47: God Is Awesome

Introduction

Psalm 47 could have been written when David led the ark of the covenant into the city of Jerusalem behind great dancing, singing and playing. In this work, David calls on all the world to recognize the awesomeness of his God and to worship him as sovereign. Psalm 47 descends to us today with illustrations of the spiritual warfare in which all militant saints must engage and the need to worship God with understanding. [Read Psalm 47:1-9.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Awesomeness of God (1-4)

1. Jehovah's divine authority over all the earth was no more universally recognized in David's day than it is in ours
2. yet like ours, there was a desire by God and his people to make his recognition universal
 - a. Israel accomplished this, to some degree, through carnal warfare, conquering enemies and lands and instilling a fear of Jehovah throughout the world
 - b. for this cause did Rahab the harlot confess all her people's hearts melted when Joshua's forces approached Jericho
3. in the ultimate sense, God is King over all the earth
 - a. the earth only continues to spin because he allows it (Colossians 1:15-18)
 - b. he has the power of fate and eternity in his hand (Ephesians 1:19-21)
4. but much of the world continues to reject him through sin and atheism, tempting the second coming and patience of God
5. when that day comes, atheism will be abolished (Philippians 2:9-11; cf. Romans 14:11-12)

B. Sing (5-9)

1. this could be the occasion of which verse 5 speaks (Second Samuel 6:1-15)
2. the ark symbolized God's presence and allowed him an instrument through which to speak to Israel
3. in these last times, God has spoken to man through his son, who went up on the cross and blazed the trail to heaven (Hebrews 1:1-4; cf. John 14:1-6)

II. Some Applications

A. The Mean Time

1. in the mean time, his children make it their mission to bring as many as can be converted into his fold of safety
2. we do not conquer lands, conduct Crusades or Inquisitions, but assault the forces and creeds of error with spiritual weaponry, the sword of the Holy Spirit (Second Corinthians 10:3-6)
 - a. spiritual Israel is far different from fleshly Israel in this regard, for she is doctrinally forbidden from destroying the enemies of truth, instead commanded to love their souls and persuade them to be converted to it (see Matthew 5:43-48)
 - b. the perfect hatred of Old Testament warfare has shifted to the perfect love of the New Testament; we seek to overcome evil with good (see Romans 12:17-21)
3. as it was necessary for fleshly Israel to learn proficiency with their weapons, so must spiritual Israel gain experience and ability with hers (Second Timothy 3:16-17)

B. Applause

1. you will note that the psalmist calls on people to applaud God as a sign of respect and praise
2. like instrumental music in worship and dancing, this appears to be something which God did not request, but winked at under the law of Moses, a time of ignorance (see Acts 17:30)
3. and like instrumental music in worship and dancing, applause is not authorized as an act of praise under the New Testament
 - a. to worship in spirit and in truth means avoiding any form of praise which God has not specified as pleasing to him (see John 4:23-24, Colossians 3:17)

b. most often, applause today is directed at the speaker or performer and not the object of adoration anyway

C. Due Praise

1. the hearer is called upon to sing praises unto God, who sits upon his holy throne (Ephesians 5:17-20)

a. we are to sing with understanding of every word and sentiment we pronounce, of the cause for our rejoicing, and whether or not we are doing so in spirit and in truth (see First Corinthians 14:15)

b. our songs should be borne in gratitude (see James 5:13), not uttered in apathy and lacking emotion or concentration

c. to be filled with the Spirit in this passage means to be influenced by the revealed and written will of God and moved to such joy that it cannot be contained when the song leader lifts his hand

d. the only instrument authorized in this passage for our musical worship is the heart, the only instrument that could do praise service

2. our songs of praise are a form of sacrificial offering like when Israel burned an animal offering (see Hebrews 13:15)

a. when you forsake this assembly, you have neglected your sacrifice, withheld your gratitude and thumbed your nose at your savior

b. we ought to put everything we have into our singing and do it to the best of our ability

c. our singing should not resemble an offering grudgingly given, but we should sing with confidence and joy in our hearts

d. otherwise we sound like reluctant slaves under duress, singing because someone made us, but not because we truly believe the words

Conclusion

God is greatly exalted by all that he does and has done, but also through the response of his people. Praise him.

Psalm 48: Great Is The Lord

Introduction

Psalm 48 extols the majesty of God who helped Israel fight her battles and win against the odds. For modern readers, it is a reminder that the church of Jesus Christ is his temple and city today and that his watchful hand is always about us. [Read Psalm 48:1-14.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The City of Our God (1-3)

1. Jerusalem was once known as the “Queen of the East” for her beauty and power
2. Mt. Zion represented the giving of the law of Moses and access to the will of God through the clouds of creation
3. to the Jews, she was the heart of religion, the place of worship, commerce, society and governance
4. her walls had withstood generations of enemies, being built upon the vanquished heathen themselves
5. Jerusalem was as much about symbolism as anything

B. The Kings Are Assembled (4-8)

1. during the reign of King Jehoshaphat, an event occurred which may be the inspiration for these words
2. if not, this event is certainly in the same spirit (Second Chronicles 20:1-24)

C. God’s Praise (9-14)

1. the work of the church is to glorify God according to his will (Ephesians 3:8-12)
2. for he works through us when we are obedient (Ephesians 3:20-21)

II. Some Applications

A. Her Successor

1. Jerusalem was destroyed twice over by the Babylonians and the Romans, the first sacking bringing on the remnant period and the second, the fullness of the church period
2. the prophet, Isaiah, spoke of that age in the first century A.D. when the kingdom of Christ was established as the church (Isaiah 2:1-5)
 - a. all nations indeed have flowed into the Lord’s house, “the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (First Timothy 3:15)
 - b. as Daniel predicted several hundred years later, but also several hundred years before Jesus, the church assimilated citizens of every nation and tongue into its membership (Daniel 2:44-45)
 - c. also the law of the kingdom of Christ sprang forth from Jerusalem, beginning on the day of Pentecost, when Peter delivered the first gospel lesson of the age
 - d. the Messiah’s message was one of peacemaking

B. Heavenly Jerusalem

1. clearly, the Hebrew writer shows that the church is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy and is a greater institution than all of the former Hebrew existence (Hebrews 12:18-29)
2. our names are registered in heaven
3. Christ is our mediator with God concerning sin and souls
4. we must not refuse him who thunders forth from the Mount, but accept each word with grace and reverence

Zion

- a. Moses and the people were exceedingly afraid and respectful when they came near Mt. Zion
- b. whenever we pick up the New Testament, we are coming near something more imposing than even that, and with grander promise and consequence
 1. “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God” (First Peter 4:11)
 2. “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (James 3:1)

C. God Protects the Church

1. we are more than conquerors (Romans 8:31-39)
2. sometimes God delivers us from threats (Revelation 3:7-12)
3. sometimes the threat is deliverance (Revelation 2:8-10)
4. but in every case, the faithful are victorious (see First John 5:4)

D. A City Set On a Hill

1. the church only achieves this goal when her members undertake to make themselves the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16)
2. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).
3. we add savor to the world by eschewing the baser things and choosing the noble

Conclusion

For modern readers, Psalm 48 is a reminder that the church of Jesus Christ is his temple and city today and that his watchful hand is always about us.

Psalm 49: What Money Can't Buy

Introduction

Psalm 49 is among the class known as wisdom psalms, in that they invite the reader to listen and learn. This particular work is directed to the Chief Musician and the chorus known as the Sons of Korah. It calls on all the inhabitants of the world to gather and hear a musical proverb concerning the frailty of wealth. [Read Psalm 49:1-20.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Why Should I Fear? (1-12)

1. the psalmist sounds like someone who has taken his share of knocks, and with the experience of maturity, he has finally figured a few things out
2. the things he might have spent his whole life worrying about now all fall into place and don't seem as grave as before
3. they say that youth is wasted on the young and it may be that experience teaches us how better to enjoy life, but by the time most figure that out, their lives are nearly over
4. the invitation, then, is to hear God's wisdom and learn this lesson earlier, that life might not be wasted on ultimate trivialities

B. The Way of the Foolish (13-20)

1. the foolishness of trusting in uncertain riches is explained by the account of Jesus in Luke 16:19-26
2. in the grave, worms make no distinction between the richest man who ever lived and the lowest pauper, but God distinguishes between the just and the unjust
3. God will redeem the justified from the power of the grave, in answer to a reasonable hope of a better life afterward (First Thessalonians 4:13-18)

II. Some Applications

A. What is Money?

1. the psalmist sounds like a man who has spent a lifetime fretting over why the wicked seem to be prospering as he has to go twice as fast just to stay where he is
2. for many, the bitter yearning for vengeance—personal or divine—is overwhelming and thus ruins a life
3. he has witnessed so many around him who trust in their riches, who have bought their way out of every difficulty and taken every license to increase more in earthly standing; our psalmist may be the man who does no evil but envies those who do and get away with it
4. but finally, it has become clear to him and this sickness of his heart is cured—that wealth and all it has bought are but nothing in the grander scheme of human existence, for they are not negotiable when it comes to the human soul, the only eternal thing about man
5. if I can have my soul redeemed by forsaking such iniquity and becoming a slave to justice, I will receive the richer prize, my spiritual redemption
 - a. the redemption of the soul is costly and God could not be bought off with anything of material value, raising the stock of the soul by valuing it at the expense of his own son's life and blood
 - b. the apostle Peter taught that Christians “were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (First Peter 1:18-19)
 - c. one wonders how many will arrive at the day of judgment, stand before the bar on high, and reach for their wallets, only to find their contents wholly insufficient to pay the price which Jesus paid and they rejected

B. What Will A Man Give?

1. it may be that the psalmist had lived a life of sacrifice, but not always as joyously as he probably should have; he may have envied the luxury and fleshly indulgence of the wicked at times
2. but maturity and experience have shown those weaknesses of his own mind to be in error; he lived the right life and he wants others to follow suit, but avoid the pitfalls of envying the wicked

- a. the Proverb writer said, “Do not let your heart envy sinners, But be zealous for the fear of the Lord all the day, For surely there is a hereafter, And your hope will not be cut off” (Proverbs 23:17)
- b. you have made the better choice, now enjoy it (Hebrews 11:24-26)
- 3. a righteous life will, of necessity, require sacrifice (Mark 8:34-38)
- 4. the wicked men around our psalmist seemed to have gained the whole world, but what do they really own?
 - a. they own a piece of something, for a few brief years, which is doomed to annihilation anyway
 - b. my daughter often comes home with a cheap, helium filled balloon, from a restaurant or elsewhere, and it makes her very happy for a few hours and then it flutters away to the ceiling, or it pops or it deflates overnight, and then she is left with nothing; so is the prosperity of the wicked
- 5. what are you giving to the cause of Christ?
 - a. if the Lord put a price of \$1000 on your soul, would you not raise the funds and pay it?
 - b. is it asking more than money to obey the gospel then?

C. You Can’t Take It With You

- 1. all across Texas, farmers and ranchers are selling land that has been in their families for 150 years, great expanses of land made profitable by the blood, sweat and tears of their grandfathers and grandmothers, who once nailed up signs that boasted ownership, which are now being torn down and put in museums or basements
- 2. their dying wish was that the land stay in the family forever, but their grandchildren have no choice now but to sell to developers
- 3. what good is the land doing those dead people now (Ecclesiastes 2:18-23)?

D. You Still Can’t Take It With You

- 1. I guess I heard this phrase in a song once: “You never see a hearse with a luggage rack.”
- 2. Job was the rare rich man whose blessings did not corrupt him, much to the surprise of the devil; upon losing it all, he said, “Naked I came from my mothers’ womb, And naked shall I return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).
- 3. it is not so much riches that corrupt, but the obsession with riches, obtaining and maintaining (First Timothy 6:6-10)

E. Like the Beasts That Perish

- 1. a man who has everything in the world going for him, but has not faith, is no better than a dumb animal, for he mastered all but the only important function God has for his human creation, giving praise heavenward and pleasing the maker with an adoring life
- 2. then the laws of economics will be rewritten to reflect a spiritual existence and the poor in spirit will be crowned

Conclusion

A trust in riches will cause you to make decisions that you would never make if under the influence of the word of God. Won’t you cast off that perishable lifestyle today and carry your cross in the service of a healthy eternity?

Psalm 50: God Has Spoken

Introduction

We arrive at the one-third mark in our examination of the Psalms, with a work of Asaph which rains rebuke down on the people of Israel. God's rebuke is centered around the fact that while Israel was going through the proper motions of worship, their hearts were far from right. God has always wanted men's hearts to be behind their praise for him, not just an attitude of tradition or of hypocrisy. Psalm 50 reminds the worshiper to prepare himself to meet his judge. [Read Psalm 50:1-23.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Here Comes The Judge (1-6)

1. the image of God appearing with fire before him is one that echoes throughout both the Old and New Testaments

a. he appeared to Moses in a burning bush to announce his intention to redeem Israel from Egyptian captivity and then he chose to reveal the old covenant upon a mountain which he engulfed with smoke and fire

b. the keys of the kingdom of Christ were first used on the day of Pentecost, in which the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles in the form of tongues of fire

c. the temporal judgment of the ancient Roman empire is described in Revelation, in symbolic terms like those used against Babylon and Israel, flaming fire

2. indeed, the final judgment of all mankind is everywhere described as a fiery day which will lead to fiery vengeance upon the wicked (Second Peter 3:1-13)

a. the warning is the same one issued in Psalm 50, concerning God's fiery vengeance, even upon his own children who stray back into the devil's sway

b. Israel suffered her punishment and was obliterated; what will become of those who turn away from God today (Hebrews 12:18-29)

3. remember always that the subject of Psalm 50's warning is worship that is practically correct, but spiritually vacant

B. To Israel (15)

1. God states that he will not rebuke his people for their sacrifices or burnt offerings, for such acts have been done according to the letter of the law

2. he will, however, rebuke them for falling short of the spirit of the law

3. Israel had developed an attitude regarding worship that God was in need of the things they offered him; that God needed them to support him

a. they had the process of worship down pat, but they no longer understood the reason of the heart of worship

b. the prophet Isaiah revealed the reason this was so (Isaiah 1:10-20)

c. it was nothing more than trampling his courts to worship him with hands made filthy by six days of sin

d. he was not fooled into thinking that 24 hours of thoughtless piety obscured a daily addiction to sinful things

C. To The Wicked (16-23)

1. this rebuke is to all those who know God's will, who might even make profession of it, but who refuse to live by it

2. they cast God's words behind them by forging ahead into life without the discipline of divine wisdom

3. hypocrites share in the sin of thieves and adulterers, although they may make great swelling speeches against such people

4. thus did Jesus condemn the Pharisees who could make long prayers in the morning and devour widow's houses in the afternoon (Matthew 23:14) without any pangs of conscience

5. furthermore, Psalm 50 exposes those who use their mouths to speak evil, lies and slander (Matthew 15:17-19)

- a. opening your mouth does more than expose how straight or white your teeth are; it exposes how straight and white your heart is
- b. the mouth is a fountain which springs forth the content of the heart and if your mouth produces evil, your heart is poisoned (James 3:6-12)

II. Some Applications

A. The Witness of the Heavens and Earth

- 1. in Psalm 50, God calls the heavens and earth as witness against his wayward people
- 2. judgment always begins with the house of God first (First Peter 4:17) and the terrestrial and atmospheric creation around us serve God as figurative witnesses of all that we do, for they survive generations and are ever-present (Isaiah 1:2-3)
- 3. this message takes on special meaning, for the New Testament makes clear we are waiting for new heavens and earth, but we will not receive them if we have been corrupted in the presence of the old

B. Can This Be Repeated?

- 1. can spiritual Israel fall into the same trap, by performing worship that meets the letter of the New Testament law, but fails miserably to approach the spirit?
- 2. our musical worship is to be the sacrifice of the fruit of our lips (see Hebrews 13:15), but it becomes just a nauseatingly lukewarm beverage (Revelation 3:16) when we sing without consideration of the words or knowledge of their meaning (see First Corinthians 14:15)
 - a. we may have the form right, by worshiping in song as did the early saints in reverence to God's silence concerning instruments of music in the new covenant
 - b. but if our songs are not sung from the heart, they are no more effective than clanging cymbals in God's sensitive ear
- 3. our prayers should be fragrant incense before the Lord (see Revelation 5:8), but if they are ritualistic chants or showcases, they just stink (see Matthew 6:5-13)
- 4. we can ruin our observance of the Lord's Supper, although we seem to eat and drink according to the early custom
 - a. if we turn communion into a social or divisive exercise, we have hurt its soul (see First Corinthians 11:17-34)
 - b. Paul argues that blemishing the communion will cause us to fall into God's judgment, just as Psalm 50 warns
- 5. our financial offering can be ruined, even if we are constantly increasing the amount we offer
 - a. it is to be a willing sacrifice, not a hated one (Second Corinthians 9:6-7)
 - b. sneering at the basket makes the gift a curse in God's sight
- 6. even our periods of teaching can be of no effect to you, if you meet only the letter of the law by appearing at the assembly (see Hebrews 10:24-25)
 - a. not paying attention to the lesson makes it as if you were never here at all
 - b. being a distraction to others makes it worse than not being here at all

C. Set In Order

- 1. the wicked were emboldened to continue sinning because judgment did not come swiftly
- 2. they perceived things materially and had grown unable to understand spiritual warnings or the eternal nature of the soul
- 3. they had forgotten God, not a lapse of memory, but a lapse of lifestyle, and because judgment did not come like Sodom and Gomorrah, they marched ahead without a care
- 4. all the while, their sin begged God to act and he will (First Peter 5:1-5)

Conclusion

We stand today in the midst of these warnings. Let us heed them lest we also perish in the same manner.

Psalm 51: My Sin Is Ever Before Me

Introduction

Psalm 51 has become a theological football, a plaything of Calvinists, who in it see evidence of man's total hereditary depravity, and cause the passage to contradict other, clearer passages which deny such a theory. Ultimately, Psalm 51 is a confession of sin, but of no sin other than the sinner's. The subtitle of this work sends us back to the occasion in which King David committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and then covered it up by having him killed. His friend, the prophet Nathan, came and rebuked him and rendered the remorse and godly sorrow that pours forth in this psalm. [Read Psalm 51:1-19.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Have Mercy (1-6)

1. with the sins of murder, adultery and duplicity hanging over him and poisoning his conscience, David goes to God, the one whom he has ultimately betrayed, in search of mercy

a. he does not presume that his heart is yet right before the Lord, but hopes for reconciliation based on God's nature of mercy and loving-kindness; "his mercy endures forever" (First Chronicles 16:34)

b. on seeing David's godly sorrow over his sins, Nathan told the king that although his betrayal was great, God's grace was greater, and the Lord had put away his sin (cf. Second Samuel 12:13)

2. while David was covering up his sin, with numerous attempts to fool Uriah into thinking the child conceived in adultery was his, he could not be forgiven, for he was not sorry over his sin, but only its political and social implications

a. "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13)

b. you cannot be forgiven of your sin while you are seeking to cover it up or are still engaged in it

c. God desires that all come to repentance because mercy is his nature, but you have the power in your little stubborn heart to prevent the flow of grace, simply by choosing error over truth

B. Broken Bones (7-19)

1. God's chastening had broken David's bones

2. that chastening came from a righteous friend who spoke rebuke to him; it may come today the same way, or through a toe-smashing sermon, or private Bible study that lands on just the right page

3. God's chastening breaks down our pride and the illusion of self-sufficiency so that we can be rebuilt as recipients and agents of grace (see Hebrews 12:7-13)

II. Some Applications

A. Wash Me

1. David takes Nathan's assurance and pleads with God for inner, spiritual conscience cleansing

2. the hypocrite, you see, would be satisfied with clean clothes, but the true disciple needs a clean conscience, too

3. remember that David's sin is his betrayal against God; we approach this level of iniquity ourselves simply by betraying the savior of grace in a liaison with the devil

a. we cannot be forgiven of those sins by ignoring them, but must choose to repent (see First John 1:5-9)

b. admitting wrong is a humbling experience, but pride is what occasioned David's ill-fated cover-up to begin with (James 4:8-10)

c. today we also must think of the baptism of the faithful as a cleansing experience (see First Peter 3:18-22)

B. Sin Ever Before Me

1. David complied with God's mandate and received his forgiveness, but the consequences of his sin on Earth remained painful

a. the king of Israel was exposed as an adulterer, a murderer, and a liar

- b. his reputation was sullied and his moral authority to reign was damaged
- c. “the way of the transgressor is hard” (Proverbs 13:15)
- 2. this situation is the continued guilt that plagued David’s conscience even after he was assured that God had forgiven him; the betrayal he committed haunted him every day of his life
- 3. we hear this same attitude in the apostle Paul, who became a great worker for truth, but never fully forgot how he had persecuted the saints before
- 4. there is, however, great strength in this statement, for it is evidence that David learned a lesson he has not soon forgotten
 - a. it is not good to get over failure too quickly; remember long the awfulness of this sensation so that you do not wander near it again
 - b. do you think the apostle Peter ever denied Jesus again after that dark betrayal night when the rooster crowed to signify his failure; Peter went out and wept bitterly, learning the lesson that his pride often got ahead of his mouth and heart

C. Conceived in Sin

- 1. John Calvin and the creeds he inspired have had a field day with verse 5
 - a. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin wrote that man is born “altogether devoid of good” (page 143), “cannot move and act except in the direction of evil” (145), “all the thoughts that proceed from it are derided as foolish, frivolous, perverse, and insane” (142), is “incapable of one righteous desire” (129)
 - b. elsewhere, he wrote, “there are some infants in hell not a span long.”
- 2. the belief, then, is that David is stating he was a sinner from the point of conception and never had a chance against temptation
 - a. the New International Version of the Bible has twisted the text to support this creedal view: “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”
 - b. yet it must be admitted that trustworthy translations do not necessarily convey the idea of total hereditary depravity here
- 3. other passages would also have to contradict this one, if it so teaches
 - a. Zechariah 12:1 credits God with forming man’s spirit within him, which would make God a Dr. Frankenstein if he is creating a million evil souls every day
 - b. Jesus urged his followers to become converted and as little children (cf. Matthew 18:3); does this mean they should become incapable of one righteous desire and unable to act except in the direction of evil, as Calvin asserted about children?
 - c. Ezekiel 18:19-20 states that the soul that sins shall die and that the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father; while sin’s natural consequences may be visited upon others, the actual guilt and accountability belong only to the sinner himself
 - d. Second Corinthians 5:10 argues that each one will stand before God in judgment, receiving the things done in his body, whether good or bad, not someone else’s body
- 4. before I seek what verse 5 means, I already know that it cannot mean when the Calvinists say
 - a. some have argued that David was sired illegitimately, or that the passage merely speaks of the sinful society into which David was born
 - b. others point to the illegitimacy in David’s line, back to Judah’s relationship with Tamar and the consequences which were then visited upon ten generations thereafter (cf. Genesis 38:13-20, Deuteronomy 23:2)
 - c. note that the iniquity in this verse describes his bringing forth and no child is responsible for his birth; the sin is reckoned to his conception and he is not accountable for that either
 - d. David is not throwing off responsibility, but confessing to God that he was overcome by evil urges and temptations, that he gave place to the devil (cf. Ephesians 4:27) where truth and loyalty should have reigned alone

D. A Clean Heart

- 1. David goes to the creator to request a clean heart and a renewed spirit within him
- 2. Paul said that, “it is God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (Second Corinthians 4:6)

3. if doctors could create clean hearts in the laboratory and insert them in sick people, they would save millions of lives, but still only work a minor feat compared to what God does to the heart through the gospel

4. a clean heart is created by mercy and maintained by zeal (see Romans 12:1-2)

E. Then I Will Teach

1. David had become an example of corruption and sin, but he hoped that his confession and conversion could make him a teacher of righteousness, one who had been there (First Timothy 4:11-16)

2. if the taught do not teach, who will?

F. Deliver Me From Guilt

1. guilt has gotten a bad rap lately; most people think that anyone who makes them feel guilty is an enemy

2. but David was grateful to Nathan for making him feel guilty because it led him to seek mercy; forgiveness is a better state than ignorance

3. guilty consciences are our Lord's specialty (Matthew 11:28-30)

a. then our worship is acceptable to God, as from a sincere heart

b. then our service to God is not hypocritical

Conclusion

Psalm 51 is a confession of sin, but of no sin other than the sinner's.

Psalm 52: Why Do You Boast In Evil?

Introduction

The title of the fifty-second psalm suggests that David wrote it as a contemplation concerning the actions of an Edomite named Doeg who revealed his sanctuary while the future king fled from the hand of a deranged King Saul. It seems as though the Psalm is written in rebuke of Doeg, rather than Saul, for David always refused to speak evil of his king. Psalm 52 is about the wickedness of Doeg, his opportunism and willingness to call good, evil, and evil, good, when it suited his selfish purposes. Ultimately, the words apply to all in any generation who do not make God their strength, but trust in uncertain riches or the ladder of sin. [Read Psalm 52:1-9.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Saul's Persecution (1-4)

1. David was an unknown youth until he entered into battle with Goliath, the giant Philistine
2. when he emerged victorious against all odds, he became a national sensation, an idol to the men and an icon to the ladies of Israel
3. the once humble King Saul, however, reacted with self-doubt and worry over David's mercurial rise, beginning to plot to eliminate him
4. Saul's son, Jonathan, was more noble than his father and used his position to protect David from harm
5. to avoid fighting Saul, David chose to flee Jerusalem, coming eventually to the land of Nob, where he was helped by some priests (First Samuel 21:1-7)
6. Saul had not given up his pursuit of David and eventually honed in on the right track (First Samuel 22:6-22)
 - a. David blames himself for allowing the priests to be put in such a difficult predicament, but he knows that the wickedness of Doeg is what did them in
 - b. Doeg attributed to the priests a sinister and disloyal motive, when in fact, they did not know of the conflict, for David had misled them

B. Riches and Wickedness (5-7)

1. Doeg was a wicked man, put in charge of Saul's flocks, who betrayed justice in the name of self-promotion and the pursuit of evil
2. but there are occasions in which otherwise good people are corrupted by a desire to gain or maintain riches
 - a. the same Bible that demands we labor to support ourselves (see Second Thessalonians 3:12) and share with others (see Ephesians 4:28) also commands that we refrain from overworking to be rich (Proverbs 23:4-5)
 - b. beyond a need to support oneself, there can arise an overpowering yearning to be rich that corrupts the heart and drives faith downward (Matthew 6:19-24)

C. Waiting on God (8-9)

1. whereas the covetous trust in uncertain riches, the children of God trust in the Lord's mercy
 - a. money has no mercy and only a tiny bit of durability and opportunists like Doeg can prosper on Earth only to find themselves bankrupt in the beyond
 - b. without the ability to trust in God's mercy, we are lost and hopeless (Titus 3:3-7)
2. the green olive tree is young, just flowering and bearing fruit, with much potential and a bright future; so is the child of God who maintains his zeal and gratitude for God's mercy

II. Some Applications

A. Devouring Words

1. the psalmist suggests that a wicked man loves a sort of language which he calls "devouring words"
 - a. he has seen the priests devoured because of lies—his own lie was made worse by the lie of Doeg concerning the priests' actions
 - b. there are even today words that are devouring in nature

2. the New Testament writer, James, said more on this subject than just about anyone else, warning about the tongue's power to devour (James 3:1-18)
 - a. the tongue which can readily be used to sing praises to God, lift up the incense of prayer to his nostrils and share the gospel with a lost soul is a remarkably useful creation
 - b. but like any of God's gifts, it can be turned over to the devil's direction
3. we use devouring words when we seek not to edify, but harm others with our language (Ephesians 4:29-32)
 - a. we hear much about the dangers of firearms today, but without a human being to pull the trigger, a gun is harmless
 - b. so with the tongue, it takes a careless, thoughtless, or even malicious person to pull its trigger and fire its weaponry, which can be just as dangerous any gun
4. how do we turn our tongues to wickedness?
 - a. we obscure the truth, utter half-truths or outright lies with intent to harm, as did Doeg
 - b. we fall into the habit of gossip or slander and smear the reputations of those around us—perceived rivals, neighbors, even friends or brethren; we lose sight of the golden rule and do unto others what we would never want done unto us (Galatians 5:13-15)
 - c. we use the truth like a club instead of a sword, no longer using it to bring people to salvation but to intentional conflict
5. Proverbs 25:15 says, “By long forbearance a rule is persuaded, And a gentle tongue breaks a bone.”
 - a. what we attempt to accomplish by the language of force could often be achieved more successfully by the language of persuasion, meekness and patience
 - b. enemies can be turned into allies and sinners turned into saints by a language that does not devour, but fills with truth and the Spirit of life

B. The Rich Young Ruler (Mark 10:17-27)

1. picture the eagerness of this young man, formerly beholden and dependent upon no one, but with the humility now to run to catch up with the messiah and seek an audience
2. before asking his good question, however, he has already presumed the answer, and that this answer would extol him as already qualified without another step needed
3. even after Jesus had listed a number of commandments, the ruler was confident, for he claimed to have kept them all from his youth
4. but then Jesus took note of the idol in the young man's heart—he was more attached to his treasure on earth than anything else
5. how hard it is for those who trust in uncertain riches to enter God's kingdom (First Timothy 6:6-11, 17-19)

C. Waiting

1. despite the evil Doeg had committed, David is resigned to waiting on the Lord, having enough faith to stick it out until God sorts it out (Psalm 27:11-14)
2. leave vengeance to God, leave bitterness to the wicked, and wait on the Lord, for his mercy is great and it will not fail (Romans 12:17-21)

Conclusion

There will always be Doegs in the world with whom we will have to deal. Don't let them tear you down or drag you into the sewer with them. Stand for right and wait on God.

Psalm 53: The Fool Has Said In His Heart, "There Is No God"

Introduction

The text of the fifty-third psalm is almost identical to that of the fourteenth; one verse is here omitted and some words of explanation have been added. Some theorize that David so revered the words of the fourteenth psalm that he wanted to emphasize them anew later in life, seeing that conditions in Israel had changed little morally. Psalm 53 shows us the convenience and folly of choosing to dismiss the evidence of God's existence in favor of a life devoid of objective standards and divine expectations. Whatever road you choose in life, it will ultimately lead to the Lord's judgment seat where eternal fates are pronounced. [Read Psalm 53:1-6.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Atheism (1)

1. the word "fool" has a very special and grave connotation to it; it is no ordinary descriptive term, but one used only very seriously and forcefully
2. sometimes it evidently refers to a person who is not exercising any mental faculty at all, thus promoting senseless behavior in his own life; other times it seems to refer to a person who does reason but arrives at foolish conclusions nonetheless
3. truly, it does not matter how one arrives at the conclusion that God does not exist; foolishness is both the cause and effect

B. None Good (2-5)

1. the Hebrew language states that God leaned forward to get a better view of the proceedings on Earth and found them to be as discussed in Psalm 53:2-3
2. we are once impressed with the fact that depravity is not hereditary but chosen, for men "turn aside" and "become" corrupt
3. sadly, though, there is an almost universal nature to the disease of sin
 - a. save for those in life's infancy or prevented by mental retardation from making the decision to reject God's will, all sin and fall short of the glory of God (see Romans 3:23)
 - b. that same chapter of the Roman letter reports on the sad condition of mankind at large, quoting from the present psalm (Romans 3:9-20)
 1. this passage does not affirm that every person commits every possible sin, but that every person does commit sin (see First John 1:8) and that he therefore cannot be saved by perfect law keeping, but must desire and seek restoration through grace (Romans 3:23-26)
 2. we are redeemed from the vileness of this lifestyle and leave it altogether when we start our walk in Christ (First John 3:4-10)

C. Out of Zion (6)

1. people of the psalmist's age waited for the redeemer to come to save Israel from her captivity and this he did in the person of Jesus of Nazareth who marched out of Jerusalem and onto a cross of infamy and destiny
2. as atheism leads to despair and enforced ignorance, faith leads to hope and understanding (Hebrews 6:17-20)

II. Some Applications

A. Rejecting God's Existence

1. there are no photographs of Julius Caesar and yet we all believe that existed, just about the same time on Earth that Jesus did, because the evidence is overwhelming and undeniable
2. when we consider the existence of God, we are faced with a similar challenge: can we discover evidence of his existence despite the fact that no living person has actually beheld him with the eyes
3. the honest heart wants the true answer to this question while the profligate heart hates the prospect of God and hopes it dead
 - a. if God be removed from the human equation, every objective and ancient standard becomes optional and arbitrary, changeable as man desires for he himself then fills the vacuum of deity

- b. what was immoral yesterday can be deemed moral today, for the unchangeable God is removed
- c. this is how many people who love darkness deal with the prospect of guilt; they convince themselves that the legislator of objective morality and its eternal judge do not exist
- d. yet God has left his fingerprints all over his creation, signing his masterpiece in the corner as any great artist would, by proving that nothing that is came without intelligent design (Romans 1:18-23)

B. Convenient Atheism

1. it is no accident that so much liberalism and iniquity seem to soak through atheism; the rejection of God is the rejection of good and evil must follow to fill the void (Romans 1:24-32)
2. it is hard to justify sinful behavior and thus many choose atheism to soothe their guilty consciences
 - a. Proverbs 14:9 says, “fools mock at sin,” meaning that they make fun of the concept
 - b. some things may be wrong but they cannot be called sin, for this invites a consideration of God into the discussion
3. it is not common, but does happen, that members of Christ even begin to suggest that they are losing their faith, when they find themselves given over to the pursuit of some sin they do not intend to give up
 - a. atheism thus becomes a convenient excuse for living in sin and not the true belief of the heart
 - b. this form of atheism often lives only until the person reaches his deathbed, upon which he tries to overwhelm a lifetime of iniquity by a few words of insincere remorse

C. God’s Fingerprints

1. the decision of atheism, whether chosen through reason or convenience is a foolish one, for it denies every parcel of evidence for God’s existence in the world and word around us
2. God’s world and God’s word work in tandem to direct us to him; his world creates a mystery of obvious design of a bygone designer and his word fully reveals that creator to be Jehovah God (Job 12:7-12 and Romans 16:25-27)
3. by way of comparison, it would seem that a believer beholds a great work of art like the Mona Lisa and concludes that an intelligent and talented designer worked magnificently to create it while an atheist would marvel at how it must have evolved from primordial paint and canvas molecules, never stopping to consider who created the primordial molecules
4. the atheistic argument is baseless and hopeless

D. Two Distinct Peoples

1. the psalmist did not have in mind that all peoples are alike before God no matter their relationship to him
2. God has put a difference between spiritual Israel and spiritual Egypt, demarcated by the new covenant of obedience to the gospel and hope of everlasting reward by gracious gift
3. our psalm shows the difference between the workers of iniquity and God’s persecuted people
 - a. although it is true that all sin, all do not remain in their sin
 - b. some choose to escape (Romans 6:15-23)
4. workers of iniquity wage war against the faithful and their beliefs, forcing the hypothesis of evolution to be taught in the schools as if it were established fact, demanding that every hint of God be removed from the public square in a misguided attempt to separate God and state, and mocking faith as mean-spiritedness and hatred
 - a. such people do not fear God and they do not call upon him, but one day they will meet the lone great fact and be faced with their folly
 - b. for every ridicule of Noah’s construction project, there is a flood; for every pounding on Lot’s door, there is fire and brimstone raining down on Sodom; for every high hill and green tree, there is Babylonian siege wall

E. He Is Coming Back

1. the redeemer will return to ransom home his people when the last trumpet sounds; for this we wait patiently as David and his flock waited in their day for the first coming (First Thessalonians 4:13-18)

2. who knows how many seconds or years separate us from that event, or if any or all of us will live to witness it?
3. in any event, let us all be glad at the prospect and live lives of preparation and anticipation

Conclusion

I hope there are no fools in the audience today, who say there is no God. If there are men and women of discernment and understanding who wish to take their stand with the savior, we invite them to confess him and be baptized for the remission of sins. If you believe, won't you obey?

Psalm 54: Save Me By Your Name

Introduction

Between the defeat of Goliath and his coronation, young David spent a great deal of his time in flight from a jealous King Saul. You may recall that two psalms ago, David's hiding place was betrayed by Doeg the Edomite, which led not to David's capture but the massacre of the priests in Nob. Now it is the Ziphites who are telling David's position to gain favor with the fading king. Psalm 54 is an example of the way that David could be heavy-laden with worries, enter into a solemn psalm of concern and emerge moments later with a joyful song of hope and certain rescue. When we are laden with cares, perhaps the gifts of song and prayer might lend us a renewed sense of hope as well. [Read Psalm 54:1-7.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Give Ear (1-2)

1. as noted in our introduction, David had slain Goliath and made himself a national hero in Israel, at the expense of King Saul's pride and adoration
 - a. with respect for God's anointing, David chose not to defend himself against the king but to assume a self-imposed exile from the court, even as Saul began a bloodthirsty pursuit of the young shepherd
 - b. on several occasions, David was in a position to kill Saul, but each time stood on honor and did not
2. Saul's character declined into madness, treating David like the white whale of Moby Dick to Captain Ahab
3. he resorted to sinful, murderous, selfish means to discover David and put the nation at risk to true enemies
4. at last, David took refuge in the wilderness of Ziph, a territory southeast of Hebron that is a jumble of arid hills with little rainfall and even less habitation, much like the Davis Mountains of West Texas (First Samuel 23:13-15, 19-29)

B. Strangers Have Arisen (3-7)

1. David prays for salvation and vindication, a sign to both Saul and himself that David has committed no sin and does not deserve this ill treatment; never does his faith waver or does he begin to doubt that he is acting righteously because he respects God's anointing and the divine right to execute every part of his plan in his own time
 - a. David saw that he could not make himself God's anointed by killing God's anointed, no matter the circumstances
 - b. had he resorted to regicide, he would have given every rebel in his kingdom justification for plotting against him
2. the name of God is invoked into this dispute and that name carries much weight
 - a. even today we find ourselves engaged in certain acts for the sake of God's holy name
 - b. we suffer and do good, teach and are taught to glorify that name
3. never does David doubt that God will hear his prayer and never should we doubt that God is listening to us, so long as we are penitent in spirit and trusting in nature
4. David recognizes rightly that he is not the inherent cause of this persecution, that these people have rejected God and he just happened to get caught in the crossfire
5. David does not resent God for this cause, but pleads for his assistance and to uphold his life
6. when relief comes on that Rock of Escape, David bows the knee and promises his gratitude; faithfulness is the only means by which we can show our thanks to God and even though that is all we can do, it will never approach repayment

II. Some Applications

A. For God's Name's Sake

1. the name of Jehovah was placed in reverence at the burning bush, when the Lord adopted a name that merely represented his existence and his omnipresence—"I AM"
 - a. the first of the ten commandments inscribed the importance and gravity of that name in stone

- b. the name of Jehovah gained fame throughout the world, as those who had long forgotten their maker were reminded of his power when Israel set its sights on Canaan
- c. Rahab the harlot spoke for Jericho when she confessed they trembled at the prospect of dealing with Jehovah and the nation that honored his name (Joshua 2:8-11)
- 2. as the conquest of lands was done for the sake of God's name in Old Testament times, so the conquest of souls enslaved to the devil bring glory to Jehovah today (First John 2:12-14)
 - a. we take our stand on the Rock of Escape when we step down into the waters of baptism with confession on our lips and repentance in our hearts
 - b. we bring glory to the name of God and his son when we recant our association with the devil and pledge fidelity to heaven (Ephesians 3:8-21)
- 3. for the sake of God's name and the ability to pronounce it in his presence around the throne of heaven, we learn to look beyond the temporal to the eternal and make certain sacrifices (Matthew 19:25-30)
 - a. for his name's sake, we do not lose heart (Second Corinthians 4:16-5:1)
 - b. the name of God is soiled when Christians disobey their knowledge of truth to justify a sinful indulgence
- 4. for the sake of God's name, Christians are willing to endure the hatred of unbelievers and the assaults of the devil through them (John 15:18-25)
- 5. for the sake of God's name, we share the gospel, knowing that most will never accept it (Third John 5-8, Revelation 2:1-3)

B. God Hears the Prayer of the Penitent

- 1. God surely has the ability to hear and discern the prayers and words of every human being on Earth at every moment of time, to hear saint and sinner alike and respond accordingly
- 2. indeed every idle word of men is recorded and preserved as evidence for the day of reckoning (see Matthew 12:36); with their thoughts men can accuse or excuse themselves concerning judgment (see Romans 2:15)
- 3. but in terms of petitioning the Lord's audience and assistance, that privilege is reserved for the precious few who have learned to mourn their sin and speak penitently to God
 - a. the formerly blind man rightly asserted, "God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, he hears him" (John 9:31)
 - b. this truth is reflected over and over in the Old Testament (Isaiah 59:1-3; cf. Zechariah 7:13)
- 4. it is too simplistic to say that God only hears the prayers of Christians; that is too narrow, for God also hears the prayers of those who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness that he may provide for them (e.g. Cornelius)
 - a. God heard David because he was humble and striving to serve God in truth and he will hear you for the same reason unless you have returned to wallow in sin and only expect God to overlook it and come to the rescue when you find yourself in dire straits
 - b. we become God's foul weather friends when we have use for him or prayer until the gloom of hardship sets in

C. Atheism is the Root of All Sin

- 1. the oppression of David was due to the fact that he believed and others did not; this allowed them to use sin to suit their selfish purposes and disregard righteousness altogether
- 2. seemingly religious people, like the Ziphites who were Israelites and supposed devotees of Jehovah, can fall into a practical brand of atheism that has all the appearance of piety but none of the essence (Acts 4:13-21, 5:24-42)
 - a. the Jewish leaders could ignore miracles if that evidence of God's hand got in the way of their ambitions and power grabs
 - b. today, God is set aside by human creeds, by so-called Christians who claim to have found a better way outside the Bible pattern and by the ordinary Christian who clings to sin so fast that he must attack anyone who offers reproof
- 3. God is no longer set before us when we can tolerate error in the name of truth and overlook sin in the pursuit of holiness
- 4. we become Ziphites, betraying the son of David, when we invite the prince of this world into the lair of God's servants through compromise with worldly ways

- a. it's not outright atheism, but a more insidious and infectious form that compromises Genesis 1 to find a faulty harmony with scientific hypothesis
- b. that compromises God's plea for holiness and pure doctrine to create a false harmony of conflicting teachings on matters of spiritual life and death
- c. we have lost the fear of God from before our eyes when we sell out the son of David to appease his enemy, personally or collectively

D. The Assistance of God

- 1. you used to see those bumper stickers on cars which said, "God is my copilot"
- 2. hopefully something good was meant by that, but bumper sticker theology rarely has any real foundation in action to it; it turns out to be more show than anything else, much like the WWJD bracelets being worn by teenage boys and girls in short shorts and bathing suits in public
- 3. the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much (see James 5:16) and we see evidence of this all the time, from the almost impossible recoveries of those for whom we pray to the manner in which God providentially does what is ultimately best for us
- 4. in his time and in his way, God effects all things to work together for the benefit of the kingdom
- 5. in times of despair like David's, we can trust that God hears (Romans 8:31-39)

E. Gratitude Through Faithfulness

- 1. the prayer of the desperate, when answered, should be acknowledged through an expression of gratitude, both in prayer and in everyday faithfulness (Romans 12:1-2)
- 2. God is owed all that we can give and even this will never approach our debt before him

Conclusion

Psalm 54 show David in a familiar position and one not unknown to us. Like the future king, we can overcome when we stand on the Rock of Escape and trust in Jesus to deliver.

Psalm 55: Give Ear To My Prayer

Introduction

It is uncertain what particular event in David's eventful life caused him to pen the fifty-fifth psalm, but the context makes clear that it was occasioned by the betrayal of a trusted friend and the torture of watching his own city being decimated by a usurper's immoral and illegal reign. Americans have become accustomed to betrayal. We are a litigious society, in part, because, fraud is common to the marketplace. The divorce rate soars because both men and women consider their wedding vows of fidelity to be a matter of mere custom and levity, rather than a binding union before the divine witness. Our children are confused about right and wrong simply because adults have betrayed their obligation to instill virtues in them. When David complains about betrayal 3000 years ago, he is foretelling our time, in which trust is a rare commodity. Our lesson will center on the fifty-fifth psalm, and specifically, David's complaint about betrayal, his impulse to flee rather than fight, and his trust in prayer. [Read Psalm 55:1-23.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Flight Impulse (1-8)

1. it is a common weakness in humanity, to desire to flee a confrontation, rather than face it
 - a. Adam and Eve did not confront their sin when God walked into the garden, but hid themselves away
 - b. Moses tried to step back from God's will from him by complaining he was not eloquent enough to lead
 - c. both Aaron and King Saul tried to blame their failed leadership on other people instead of facing the music
 - d. who can forget the response of Jonah, when God instructed him to go and preach in Nineveh and he instead fled to Tarshish on stormy seas?
2. flight is a proper response when faced with an overwhelming temptation, as Joseph fled Potiphar's house and his wife's embrace
 - a. Paul tells Timothy and us to flee youthful lusts (see Second Timothy 2:22), not congregate around them to see how much we can endure before breaking down; that presumes failure at some point
 - b. he told the Corinthians to flee fornication (First Corinthians 6:18), not flirt with the possibility and heavily pet the prospect until passion undermines piety
 - c. the Holy Spirit adds in the same letter that we must learn to flee from idolatry (see First Corinthians 10:14)—the worship of self, money, other people, and things
3. but apart from these times of temptation, we are confronted in life with decisions to be made, stands to be taken, battles to be fought in the name of God and righteousness
 - a. then, flight is only the option of cowards and the faithless
 - b. then, we must fight the good fight of faith (First Timothy 6:11-12)

B. The Betrayal of a Friend (9-15)

1. the rebellion by David's son Absalom may mark the occasion in which he wrote this psalm, not necessarily about his son, but about his trusted counselor, Ahithophel, who sided with the rebel
2. Absalom subverted the kingdom (Second Samuel 15:1-13, 30-31)
3. David sent Hushai back to Jerusalem as a spy and he found opportunity to hear Absalom's plans and Ahithophel's counsel (see Second Samuel 16:20-17:7)
 - a. Husahi protected David and put Absalom into danger, allowing the rebellion to be put down
 - b. proud Ahithophel, however, did not recover (see Second Samuel 17:23)
4. David had trusted Ahithophel, but he simply followed the money and power and exchanged loyalty for security, going so far as to encourage Absalom to fornicate with David's harem
5. perhaps it is this friend's betrayal which caused David to write Psalm 55

C. Prayer (16-23)

1. Abraham was called the friend of God and no one's prayers are more often recorded than David's
2. these men knew how to call upon God and when

- a. some folks reserve prayer for times in which things get really tough, but prayer is to be a regular, consistent avenue of communication between man and creator
- b. I want to encourage those here who are not yet Christians to pray like Cornelius did, for guidance in what you should do
- c. some Christians feel funny about praying for non-Christians, or encouraging them to pray, but that is silly
- d. surely, God does not hear the prayers of sinners, but if your intention is pure and penitent like Cornelius, you are in the process of being converted from saint to sinner and God will assist you, if you ask and follow through

II. Some Applications

A. David's Temptation to Flee

1. in his time of betrayal and conflict, David admits that he was tempted to surrender the throne and flee into permanent exile
 2. he envied the bird, which at a moment's notice, can simply fly away from a conflict and land somewhere else; haven't we all wished we could avoid some difficult duty by simply walking away?
 3. the life of a Christian is marked by many opportunities to do—not necessarily the right thing or the wrong thing—but nothing
 - a. like Jonah, God has a plan for us, laid out in scripture and played out by providence, which we can either seize or reject
 - b. it is amazing just how much those plans involve our interaction with other people
 - c. the Bible mandate is to get yourself squared away and then prepared to assist others in their search for grace and bearing the burdens of life (see Matthew 7:1-5, Galatians 6:1-2)
 - d. the solitary lifestyle of self-centeredness was pronounced wanting in Eden and remedied by the institutions of family, church and society (Philippians 2:1-4)
 4. we flee like Jonah when we hear a friend, neighbor or relative expressing life's anguish, but we fail to offer them the word of God
 - a. we flee like Jonah when we fail to take a stand against godlessness in our schools, workplaces and communities
 - b. we flee like Jonah when we neglect to oversee the portals of our homes, allowing filth and obscenity to make its home there through the television, radio and printed word
 5. in addition, every life is filled with storms of trial through sickness, death and material needs; will we fight or flee (Matthew 7:24-27)

B. Friendship

1. friendship is a Bible subject, with many examples such as David and Jonathan, Jesus and John, Paul and Timothy
2. the proverbs say much about friendship
 - a. true friends make one another better (Proverbs 27:17)
 - b. true friends are not yes men (Proverbs 27:6)
 - c. true friends are loyal always (Proverbs 17:17)

C. Betrayal

1. the genuineness of friendship is overthrown by an unwillingness to correct, help or stand by someone
2. we have all known people that we thought were our friends, but turned out to be using us for ulterior reasons; David's false friend was doing the same (Psalm 55:20-21)
3. but we can become betrayers ourselves if we do not show ourselves friendly by the Bible definition (see Proverbs 18:24)
 - a. are we fair weather friends who cannot be counted on when another needs material assistance (First John 3:16-18)?
 - b. are we too weak-kneed to correct a friend who is drifting into error (Hebrews 3:12-14)?
4. to look at it the other way, consider who your friends are; do they make you a better person or worse (First Corinthians 15:33)?

D. Cast Your Burden on The Lord (Psalm 55:22)?

1. life is truly a burden, but that doesn't mean that it is an unbearable drag, but a package of obligations, responsibilities, accountabilities, successes, failures and blessings
2. ultimately, each one must bear his own load before God (Galatians 6:5), but Jesus is ever present to give rest to the weary (Matthew 11:28-30)
3. if you are laden down with a burden of sin and guilt, the Bible counsels you to remove it through faith, and promises you will be enabled to run life's marathon with endurance and vigor (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Conclusion

Psalm 55 reminds us of life's difficult burdens, but also that they can be borne. The waters of baptism await for any who would stir them following a confession of faith and determination to cast off a sinful life.

Psalm 56: The Silent Dove in Distant Lands

Introduction

David evidently wrote the fifty-sixth psalm during his flight from the hand of King Saul, who felt threatened by the people's adoration of heroic David, slayer of Goliath. The psalm reflects the dark days in which the future king fled from God's anointed on principle, only to find his life constantly in peril everywhere he went. [Read First Samuel 21:10-15.] The title seems to point to this episode in David's life as occasioning this psalm. It was a time in which David was nearly overcome with worry and fear, but a retreat into God's favor and hand buoyed his spirits with the certain prospect of protection. [Read Psalm 56:1-13.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Petition (1-2, 5-7)

1. David feels so hopelessly oppressed by his pursuers that he, who embarrassed the Philistine's champion, leaves Israel for one of the major cities of Philistia, where his reputation alone would put him into peril

2. leaving home did not leave his troubles behind however, for his enemies hound him all day, endeavoring to swallow him up; they are like ravenous wolves, traveling in a pack with the smell of blood in the air

3. the Christian who is ridiculed for his faith or the decisions he makes because he is a believer may feel like a silent dove in distant, lonely lands

a. sometimes persecutors gather into packs, shamed by a Christian's just behavior and returning with rage (First Peter 4:1-5)

b. yet let us never become as disconsolate as Elijah, who thought that he alone was left on Earth to serve God; remember that he still has his 7000 and more who will stand up for truth where they are

c. remember that a light shining suddenly in absolute darkness always makes people uncomfortable, but that some will love the light and those who hate it possess opinions worth very little (John 3:16-21)

B. Trust (3-4, 8-11)

1. although the motto, "In God We Trust," still appears on our money, it is plain that America trusts less in God today than ever before

a. like ancient Israel in the days of the judges, prosperity has created time and means for moral laxity and experimentation

b. it seems like every man is doing what seems right in his own eyes; the result is moral confusion and decay

c. good is called evil and evil is called good; zealous Christians are dangerous while zealous homosexuals are martyrs

2. we are so cowed that we are afraid to utter God's name in school, lest we be sued or arrested, afraid to walk in the Spirit for fear of violating federal laws or provoking the wrath of our neighbors

3. but God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind (see Second Timothy 1:7)

a. that may seem odd after watching David feign insanity, but his tactics probably will not work too well for us today

b. we need to be prepared to respond to those who question our faith, both those who are curious and those who belittle it (First Peter 3:13-17)

C. Promise (12-13)

1. in a wedding ceremony, a man and woman pledge to love one another and stay together in sickness and health, joy and sorrow, wealth and poverty, good times and bad

2. when wed to Christ at baptism, a Christian promises to remain faithful unto death, come what may (see Revelation 2:10), and give God praise in joyful times and sorrow through songs or prayer (see James 5:13)

3. vows made to God are binding, whether in marriage before his witness, or in conversion before his authority

II. Some Applications

A. Twisting Words

1. David found that his enemies would take his words and put a negative spin on them, or report them out of context to give a distorted impression of what he actually said

2. how many times have we been accused of not believing in grace because our statements are taken out of context; even the writer James was accused of the same thing by Martin Luther (Second Peter 3:14-16)

a. scripture twisting is a favorite ploy of the devil, who often transforms himself, his ministers and his work into a costume resembling angels of light (Second Corinthians 11:12-15)

b. one verse is pitted against one another and before long, James and Paul are believed to be at odds and the words of Christ are emasculated from strong obedience down to milquetoast vacillation

c. don't twist the scriptures—as strongly as the New Testament says believe, so it says be baptized and submitting to water immersion as did Jesus, Paul and every other convert to the faith will not overthrow grace or betray an expectation of earning salvation

B. That Pack Mentality

1. we must also be careful not to fall into that pack mentality ourselves; sometimes the person being picked on at school, work or in the neighborhood is not a Christian, but perhaps a different race, handicapped, overweight, unintelligent or poor

2. he or she becomes the object of ridicule and the pack mentality draws us in, lest we join him in the place of scorn

3. this pack mentality is sinful, whether it is ridiculing someone who is different or planning another sin (Proverbs 1:10-19)

C. Tears In A Bottle

1. David says that God numbers his wanderings, collects his tears in an eternal bottle and records them in his book

2. he is a great source of consolation and hope

a. people of olden times had a strange custom of visiting sick people and actually collecting their tears in a bottle to give them when they recovered as a memento of their ordeal and relief

b. it seems as if God is able to do much more, to visit us in distress, acknowledge our tears in a bottle and reveal their significance

3. he is able to dry our tears, as he did for the sisters of Lazarus by raising their brother; genuine and enduring faith in him promises everlasting victory (First John 5:1-5)

4. why fear or go on weeping (Matthew 10:27-31)?

D. God Keeps Us

1. there is a wonderful little promise tucked away near the end of the New Testament, in a tiny book just before the massive Revelation (Jude 24-25)

2. we have no cause to fear, for as long as we remain in God's hand, no one can pluck us out (Second Timothy 1:12, 2:11-13)

Conclusion

If you have ever felt like a silenced dove in a distant land, now you know how to handle the sensation. Trust in God and stand fast in your faith.

Psalm 57: Refuge in the Shadow of God's Wings

Introduction

When I was a little boy, we used to play out in the country around my home town and one of the rules of the game was to jump over the side of the hill every time a car came, to pretend we were hiding from enemies. Fortunately, very few cars traveled on Oil Ridge and we managed to survive both real and imagined enemies. In Psalm 57, we find the future King David, in flight from a real enemy—King Saul—and hiding in a cave. Like David, Christians today have targets painted on their backs. Often, we are made to feel as if we need to retreat into a cave to survive, but we would be better off if we could find refuge in the shadow of God's wings. [Read Psalm 57:1-11.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Into The Cave (1-3)

1. David's reputation preceded him and made him a target, not only to King Saul, but every other leader in the area (First Samuel 21:10-22:4)

2. it seems like verse one of chapter 22 is so brief in describing the time David spent in this cave, while the psalm before us is so thorough and plainspoken about the ordeal that put him there

3. what we note from the psalm and this passage is that David was not so much fleeing into the depths of the earth, but into the arms of God, who immediately began to bless him with relief, company and hope

B. My Soul Among The Lions (4-6)

1. I wonder if Daniel was able to think of this part of Psalm 57 that night when he was lowered into the lions' den to face certain doom

2. David's lions were figurative while Daniel's were actual and fierce

3. yet both men expected their respective lions to be tamed by the power of God and neither was disappointed (Daniel 6:13-23)

C. Steadfastness (7-11)

1. the devil doesn't believe that man can be steadfast, but that he only praises God when the going is good

2. he insulted Job's faith and attributed it entirely to God's blessing upon him, challenging God to allow it to be removed, so that the falseness of Job's faith would be revealed

3. the devil did all he could and Job's faith did not waver

4. here we find David hiding in a cave, having been led to believe he was the anointed future king, but in mortal flight from the present one; the devil is doing all he can but he has no foothold in David's heart and the worship and trust keep flowing

II. Some Applications

A. Take Refuge in God

1. eighteen times in the book of Psalms, God is called by David and other writers their "refuge"; maybe they were on to something

2. when life gets us down and it seems difficult even to go on, when we are moved to crawl away from life's challenges and regroup in solitude, then we should take God with us, or better go to him

a. that is when fervent, private prayer is most valuable and irreplaceable (Matthew 6:5-8)

b. don't believe that public prayers led for you, or even by you, in the assembly will do what private prayer will do

c. David writes, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and he shall sustain you" (Psalm 55:22); only you can know the depths of your own heart and the details of all your concerns and only you can communicate those to God most effectively

3. when bowed down because of disappointment, sorrowed over loss, or threatened by persecution, the arms of God are big and his shoulders broad to offer refuge (Psalm 94:16-23)

4. the ultimate effect of prayer is to enable us to put things into perspective, that no matter how many trials afflict us, our hope of heaven can always shine through (Hebrews 6:17-20)

5. our refuge is knowing that soon the suffering will pass and the glory will dawn

6. Psalm 142 is attributed to the same era as this one (Psalm 142:1-7)

B. Figurative Lions

1. the fiercest lion described in figurative terms in the Bible is the devil himself (First Peter 5:6-11)
2. he afflicts Christians the world around in like manner, but his den—this earth—can be survived just as Daniel's and David's
3. the spirit is refreshed by retreating into God and trials are cut down to size in our estimation, allowing us to see more clearly that we can overcome and actually be strengthened by the experience (James 1:2-4)
 - a. it is up to you whether a trial is going to increase your faith or destroy it
 - b. understand that those who would make themselves your enemies are setting a snare for themselves and that you will only fall into it if lured there by the devil, either believing you are above temptation or in possession of the right of vengeance
 - c. when pursued by lions of persecution or trial, we must learn to take heed lest we fall and leave vengeance to its owner, God

C. Be Steadfast (First Corinthians 15:57-58)

1. steadfastness means that you stand behind God and for what is right when times are good and when times are rough
2. steadfastness means consistency, even when life is marked by hills and valleys
3. steadfastness means trusting in God when men and women of weaker faith would curse him and die (Second Corinthians 1:3-7)

Conclusion

Everyone of us is going to find himself holed up in a cave of fear and despair at some point in our lives, if for no other reason than we have chosen to be Christians and are thus unwelcome in the world. It is up to us to turn that cave into a prayer closet and find comfort in the consoling arms of God.

Psalm 58: Surely There Is A Reward

Introduction

Psalm 58 is a most imprecatory psalm, calling upon God to preserve the righteous and punish the wicked. To our New Testament sensibilities, Psalm 58 sounds harsh and cruel, and it is not likely that we could imitate its words in good conscience. To a troubled Old Testament character, however, the psalm reflects a clear sense of right and wrong and an understanding that judgment is inevitable. The work begins with a metaphorical description of the wicked in verses 1-5, followed by a pointed prayer against them in verses 6-9. The final two verses describe the vindication of the righteous through a proverb of victory. [Read Psalm 58:1-11.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Wicked (1-2)

1. we must note first of all that these verses are not meant to describe every single person on Earth; David is making a contrast between those who strive to live righteously and those who have no consciousness of the morality of God's law

2. the things said here are not meant to be a universal indictment of the human race, but a summary of the ways in which wicked men act

3. from the example of the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah and the conquest of Canaan, we know, however, that this indictment fits the majority of people and that, "righteous" can only be affixed as a description to the few

B. Prayer for Remedy (6-8)

1. breaking out their teeth or fangs is symbolic of silencing them somehow

2. the literal would certainly work, but other means might also effect the same result

3. humility and conversion would be our primary wish regarding our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48)

C. Rejoicing Righteous (9-11)

1. consider the figure used in Revelation 14:18-20

2. the righteous rejoice at their relief and reward

II. Some Applications

A. A Heart Problem

1. the objection David makes to them involves their speech and their judgment

2. wickedness is expressed in the things they say, although certainly not everything they say, and in the decisions they render, although certainly not in every decision

3. the fact is that they are labeled wicked because their lifestyles are marked by willful rebellion and impenitence

4. the trouble is not that their tongues slip from time to time or they make uninformed and foolish decisions on occasion, but that their hearts are so bound by iniquity that they are likely to choose evil over good at any moment, and will rationalize their sin later as justifiable or insignificant

a. we may do the same thing and not even realize that our hearts are gradually being corrupted by small doses of sin

b. we cannot excuse our indulgence and assign it no importance, for it is the work of our hearts and if the heart is sick, the soul could die

c. Simon the converted sorcerer made just such a poor judgment and uttered a foolish thing with his mouth to the apostle Peter (Acts 8:9-13, 18-24)

d. it was Luke who was the beloved physician, but Peter who peered into Simon's heart and made an emergency diagnosis

5. when we find ourselves committing sins on a regular basis, rationalizing away guilt afterward or chastising anyone who would rebuke us, we are exhibiting a heart problem through symptoms of sin

B. Estranged From The Womb

1. the Calvinistic spin on the phrase "estranged from the womb" would make men inherently sinful, created as wicked, but the context does not bear that out

- a. again, David does not class himself among that group, although he had committed grave sins in his life, for he was a penitent man who genuinely sorrowed and strived to do better
 - b. one commentary calls wickedness man's second nature, trying to prop up the concept of hereditary depravity, but unwittingly tearing it down
 - c. it is not our first nature, for God creates people and calls it good, giving them the freedom to choose which path they will take
 - d. it only becomes one's nature to do evil later on, if he chooses a lifestyle of rebellion
2. man has choice and God will judge according to it (Ezekiel 18:4-9, 20)
 3. we can escape whatever wickedness overtakes us (Ephesians 2:1-7)

C. Figures of Estrangement

1. verses 3-5 are poetic in nature, symbolic and figurative
2. no one speaks a lie in swaddling clothes on the day of his birth; the metaphor merely shows how quickly the wicked choose their way, and that we should not overlook the sins of children, but discipline them promptly lest they learn to depend upon sin: "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him" (Proverbs 22:16)
 - a. allowing the child to get his way through tantrums and tyranny will firmly establish rebellion against authority in his heart
 - b. yet neither does the child need to be slapped in the face or humiliated, just punished enough to get the point across
3. the poison tongue is often a sign of estrangement from godliness (James 3:5-10)
4. like the untrainable cobra, such a person can become so bound with iniquity and never disciplined, that he goes completely astray

D. Destroy Their Significance

1. verse 7 continues as a plea to make them powerless; I think of Haman, the bureaucrat in Persia who troubled Queen Esther and the Jews and how he plotted and conspired to increase his power and ended up being stripped of authority and found on the very gallows he had constructed for good Mordecai
2. as sin is a reproach to any nation, we might pray that wicked men not be put in positions of authority and judgment over us
3. we must also be willing to admit that Christians give the ungodly much of their power in persuasive speech by proving themselves hypocritical in public
4. we can make their arguments impotent by being the kind of people we claim to be, giving the adversary no evidence for his accusations (First Peter 3:16)

E. Take Them Away

1. three more figures follow in verses 8-9
 - a. let the wicked be like snails who melt away as they move
 - b. let them be like a stillborn child who dies before he lives and a pot that never gets heated
2. David's prayer is that the wicked may be removed before they can trouble the righteous any longer; we guard ourselves against hating any one, no matter how wicked and even as we despise some of the things they do
 - b. we pray for their conversion and even work to that end, but never can we pray that the wicked will thwart God's final judgment and as hard as it is to know that some whom we love will surely be among that unfortunate number, it would be even more tragic if God forfeited his eternal justice and failed to uphold his covenant with us
 - d. we just cannot pray the wicked past the Bible and around the creek into heaven, not even at the funeral (Second Corinthians 5:9-11)

Conclusion

Psalm 58, while sounding very vengeful to us, actually serves to show the distinction between righteous and wicked. It reminds us that God has put a difference between his people and their enemies and that judgment will surely come. Which side will you be on when the last trumpet sounds?

Psalm 59: Deliver Me

Introduction

The fifty-ninth psalm once again finds the shepherd and musician who would be king in peril of the current monarch. David is under pursuit by a jealous and mad King Saul who feels threatened by the lad's renown among the Israelites who are appreciative of his exploits in killing Goliath. This particular song finds David trapped in his house and seeking escape from murder. Even then, he simply prays for and anticipates deliverance, while wishing truth to be revealed regarding his enemies in the court. [Read Psalm 59:1-17.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. In Peril of the King (1-4)

1. before David's battle with Goliath, the young shepherd had been a favorite of Saul's, because his music soothed the king's stress

2. Saul even tried to prevent David from fighting the Philistine and was overjoyed when the young man succeeded

3. that appreciation turned to jealousy, however, when the affections of the nation fell upon the ruddy warrior (First Samuel 18:5-16)

4. a little romance was added to the jealousy and intrigue when David married Saul's daughter, Michal

a. like many in-law relationships, this one was troubled by a father-in-law who despised his son-in-law, however; Saul continued trying to kill his (First Samuel 19:9-17)

b. thus began the long pursuit by Saul of David that would culminate in the crown passing to the son-in-law, who never touched a hair of the head of the man who tried to kill him over and over, out of respect for God's anointing

B. Waiting For God (5-15)

1. it is interesting that David does not ask for the death of his enemies, but the embarrassment and exposure

2. it was common in the imprecatory psalms to ask for the harshest of divine judgment on the enemies of God, but here, perhaps because that enemy is still God's outgoing anointed king, David asks only that they be exposed as evil

3. when men and women make themselves our enemies, what recourse do we possess?

a. we cannot pursue our own vengeance upon them, for that would make us as vile as they and bound for the same judgment

b. we cannot curse God for this eventuality, for we were forewarned that persecution and hardship would come due to our faith (see Second Timothy 3:12, Matthew 10:34)

c. like Lot, we must not cease tormenting our souls when we perceive error, lest we become insensitive to it and tolerant of it (see Second Peter 2:8)

d. all we can do to our enemies is something for them, that causes us to rise above the evil and magnify Christ (Matthew 5:43-48)

C. I Will Sing (16-17)

1. the spirit of David was eminently musical, borne not only of his natural talent, but also of his love for God

2. some among us have natural musical talent and so it comes more naturally to us to sing praises unto God; others may have no real ability and yet we are moved to sing to God just to express our love for him anyway

3. the spirit of David was alive in the apostles and early saints, who sang hymns together when they assembled and even joined in song while imprisoned for preaching Jesus

a. how many of us find ourselves singing hymns while doing housework or yard work, because they are on our hearts and in our minds

b. we spend so much time listening to popular music, but we ought to need some time with songs of praise

II. Some Applications

A. No Fault of Mine

1. the workers of iniquity and bloodthirsty men had gathered against David, not because he had sinned against them, but because he was more righteous than they
2. the pride of an insecure man in a place of power had been wounded accidentally and David was due to pay the price
 - a. to illustrate, what sin had Lot committed against the men of Sodom to make them hate him so passionately?
 - b. no sin, but the light of his righteousness has exposed the obvious darkness of their characters and they would rather have remained under their rocks like vermin engaged in wickedness (Genesis 19:4-9)
3. Jesus warned that such would be the lot of all his disciples who lived righteous lives and did not hide their confession of faith (John 15:18-25)
4. John wrote, “Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you” (First John 3:13).
 - a. living a noble life will necessarily make sinful people uncomfortable; it is unintentional but inevitable
 - b. some, because of this discomfort, will be driven to reassess their habits and even be converted to become as you are; others will loathe your very presence and either avoid it or punish it
 - c. perhaps you will be tempted to still your faith and pretend you are less spiritual and more ambivalent about sin, but remember that it is a short span between such pretense and genuine apostasy

B. Swords Are In Their Lips

1. David’s enemies were like growling dogs, those animals in ancient Israel who invaded the deserted city streets at night in search of food and refuse to eat, and who terrorized anyone who happened to be outside at that hour
2. they were scavengers, vicious, diseased and foul
3. this image is borrowed by the apostle Paul, who reminds Christians not to become enemies of one another (Galatians 5:13-15)
 - a. this passage is often used to prove that we should not snipe at each other and tear down one another, and rightly so
 - b. it must be noted, however, that the immediate context is that we should not devour one another by false teaching

C. “Who Hears?”

1. here is why your enemy seems no powerful—he has absolutely no consciousness of divine morality or eternal judgment
2. he does evil and has no fear that God will hear and punish
3. sound rebuke is almost powerless, for he does not believe; yet, his sin will find him out anyway and judgment will come upon him in this life and beyond (Romans 12:17-21)

D. God Is My Defense

1. we would sing because God is our defense and a God of mercy
2. adding music to your daily life will change the way you approach things, even if you happen to get imprisoned (Ephesians 5:15-21)

Conclusion

Psalm 59 is an exceptional example of David’s ability to sing praises while in hardship. He teaches us to worship God always and wait on him.

Psalm 60: Restore Us Again

Introduction

The sixtieth psalm is a work of King David during a temporary crisis of humiliation in the nation of Israel. Just after the death of the king of Ammon, David had sent messengers of comfort to the new king, but the princes believed that David was secretly trying to infiltrate and conquer the mourning nation. King Hanun thus took the messengers, shaved off their beards and tore their garments at the waist. This humiliation apparently is reflected in Psalm 60 as a nation tends to its collective wounds of humiliation. Ammon had provoked a sleeping lion and once the beards were regrown, the insult would be repaid. There is a lesson to be learned from this psalm, regarding the nation of God and its occasional chastening. Many who hear this introduction will immediately think that the United States is the nation of God, but the Lord has no special relationship or covenant with America. Our nation is sometimes his tool and sometimes his target, but we are no closer to heaven than any other location on Earth. No, the nation of God is spiritual Israel, the church of Jesus Christ. While we maintain temporary citizenship in America with its flaws and imperfections, we cling to eternal citizenship in heaven, where no tear falls and no sin blemishes. [Read Psalm 60:1-12.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Castaway (1-5)

1. while the beards were growing back, Israel had time to consider this embarrassment at the hands of the heathen
 - a. her history had always proven that she was successful when God was on her side and that any great failure indicated divine displeasure
 - b. now that she has met with such disgrace, she naturally assumes that God is chastening her
 - c. David describes the depression in Israel as castaway, broken down and confused
2. often, when we perceive that we are being chastened, it is received with the same sort of discouragement and confusion
 - a. these Hebrew Christians were being chastened by God, challenged so that their faith would grow, but with the peril that it may be destroyed instead
 - b. as a father challenges and disciplines the child whom he loves, so we can expect God both to present us with opportunities to increase and to afflict us with guilt and sin's consequences when we are in need of it
 - c. we learn to praise our earthly fathers for challenging us because we became stronger men and women for it; we must also learn not to curse God when he expresses his love in the best way he can

B. God Has Spoken (6-8)

1. the Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it
2. he is in control no matter how confusing things may seem, exercising absolute sovereignty over the universe
3. in Habakkuk's day, the prophet wondered how God could allow the Babylonians to conquer the Jews, but God showed him that it was not a matter of who was more righteous, but which outcome furthered God's ultimate purpose
 - a. sometimes a painful defeat teaches people lessons that easy costless successes cannot
 - b. even Paul said, "When I am weak, then I am strong."
 - c. defeat has as much to teach as victory
 - d. the righteous will not always prevail in every skirmish here on Earth, and that by design, but every victory and every defeat can lead us closer to the ultimate reward if we patiently persevere (James 5:7, 10-11)

C. Give Us Help (9-12)

1. David recognized something important; Israel lost its battles when God did not go out to fight with them
 - a. he defeated Goliath because God was with him, but Israel failed at Jericho when God refused to help a nation that harbored a man like Achan who plundered Ai for himself
 - b. Moses had warned them it would be this way (Numbers 11:41-43)

2. men who trust in themselves and judge success by material gains often go off to battle without the Lord
 - a. it happens to elderships that value gains in membership and treasury so much that they are willing to compromise the New Testament to gain them
 - b. it happens to preachers who value their own job security so much that they are willing to obscure the offensive parts of God's counsel to avoid rocking the boat
3. sometime we are like King Josiah, going off to engage in battles that God warned us to avoid

II. Some Applications

A. Chastening A People

1. God's chastening is generally individual, it seems, but sometimes it extends collectively or even universally (Hebrews 12:5-13)
 - a. all the churches of Asia Minor shared in the chastening of brutal persecution in the first century and those that remained were stronger for it
 - b. today the churches of all the world are being tried by errors of compromise and what remains will be stronger for the contest
2. sometimes God even uses the very worldly as instruments to chasten his people
 - a. the bloodthirsty tyrant, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, was even called the servant of Jehovah, not for his spirituality, but because he was an unwitting tool in God's hands to chasten Judah (see Jeremiah 43:10)
 - b. we often pray that God's purposes will be fulfilled without a clear understanding of what those purposes may be in a given situation
 1. ultimately, his purpose is the salvation of as many souls as possible, but immediately, his purpose may include chastening his people with hard challenges and burning away chaff on the church
 2. Christians may have a particular leadership candidate in mind as more godly than another, and expect that God will raise him up, but that expectation does not necessarily reflect what God's immediate purposes may be

B. The Wine of Confusion

1. the wine of confusion is a Hebrew idiom used to compare the lot of chastened people to the stupor of a drunk
2. how often do we hear chastened people cast suspicion on God and wonder aloud why the righteous must suffer?
 - a. such a plea can only result from confusion, for the New Testament clearly indicates that suffering is the anvil upon which faith is tried and proven (Second Thessalonians 1:3-7)
 - b. Paul strengthened the souls of the disciples and exhorted them to continue in the faith by saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22)
3. when we are chastened by God through the consequences of sin, the pangs of conscience when scripture steps on our guilty toes, or when a compassionate brother in the cross takes us aside, we should rejoice that God cares enough about us and thinks enough of us to chasten us as his own children, for there is a banner over us and God knows those who are his (see Second Timothy 2:19)

C. Know

1. the Bible says that the meek will inherit the Earth
2. this too was a popular idiom in ancient Israel, describing their conquest of Canaan, dependent upon their loyalty to God and humility before his power in battle and life
3. Jesus reiterated the promise to spiritual Israel, though, indicating that the new heavens and Earth would be awarded to the meek of his discipleship, not another corruptible, temporary earthly dwelling, but an eternal home beyond (First Peter 1:3-9)

D. God Will Lead

1. when we feel outnumbered or doomed to failure, we need to remember that one man with God on his side is ultimately invincible
2. although we may lose battles, giving the adversary the appearance of victory, heaven will ultimately be our home if we learn from defeats, accept persecution as the cost of discipleship and press on with a chastened, strengthened spirit

3. as obedient sheep, follow the Chief Shepherd, and you will not be led astray (Hebrews 13:20-22)

Conclusion

Although we are sometimes humiliated by sin, troubled by the world and led almost to surrender, the wisdom of this psalm restores us to confidence that when God goes with us, we cannot fail, even in apparent defeat. We must capitalize on our victories and learn the lessons of every loss if we intend to wear a crown in eternity.

Psalm 61: Hear My Cry, O God

Introduction

Life without God is an empty existence. It imagines no accountability for the decisions we make and heeds no moral restriction higher than its own. It knows no joy from sacrificing for a higher cause, nor any pleasure from fellowship with the almighty. Life without God is wrapped around a vapor of time, doomed to decay and hopelessness. Psalm 61, fortunately, is not about such a life. Instead it is about a life that finds satisfaction in serving a real and living God, one that appreciates the blessings of fellowship. Its writer, King David, knew little of the Messiah and so his comprehension of the blessings that we enjoy is greatly limited. His sweetest song on the subject does not even begin to address what we have in Christ Jesus. In God's fellowship, David found a rock, a shelter and a heritage. In Christ, we find protection. [Read Psalm 61:1-8.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Rock That Is Higher Than I (1-2)

1. Franz Delitzsch and other commentators believe that internal clues prove that this psalm was written while David was exiled from Jerusalem during the rebellion of his son, Absalom

2. if so, we can imagine with David, the state of confusion and weariness that accompanies one who is far from home and prevented from returning

a. all of us have been away at camp or college, traveling for work or stranded by weather and thus prevented from being where we feel most familiar and comfortable and with the people we love and trust

b. David's crisis is primarily a physical one that affects his spirit

c. today, we ourselves were once strangers from the heavenly Zion and witness countless other wanderers, flitting from one end of the Earth to the other, never able to climb to a rock of safety

3. the only feeling akin to being prevented from returning home is the sensation of being lost and unable to find your way home

a. spiritually again, being lost and wandering is not uncommon (Ephesians 2:1-13, 19-22)

b. hearts are overwhelmed by the sense that there is something more than this life, but not knowing what that is

B. A Shelter To Me (3-4)

1. Old Testament cities were customarily marked by a citadel, a fortified tower in which the citizens could flee when attacked

2. we sing, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," to reflect this protection in a spiritual realm, in which weapons are not carnal, but are yet mighty (Second Corinthians 10:3-6)

C. The Heritage of The Saint (5-8)

1. Paul says in Ephesians 1:3 that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus

2. Peter adds that he "has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (Second Peter 1:3)

3. the heritage of the Christian is the unlimited resources available to his children, for if God did not spare his own son when our souls were threatened, how will he now refuse to give us all that we need to maintain them (cf. Romans 8:32)

II. Some Applications

A. Attend To My Prayer

1. David, like Cornelius, pleads for God to hear his prayer

a. Pharisees are satisfied by praying with themselves, hearing the tones of their own prayers and impressing other men with their eloquence

b. deists are satisfied that God cannot respond to prayer anyway

c. infidels forget the beauty of prayer and attribute it to madness

d. true Christians require that God hear their prayers and in his time, answer them as he sees

best

2. it will never be divine impotence that prevents God from considering and answering our prayers (Isaiah 59:1-3)
 - a. David's hands were clean, or cleansed by now, since he had done grievous sins, but turned away from them
 - b. when our spirits are vexed and we plead with the Almighty to respond, we must first ensure that our hands are clean as well (First John 1:5-10)
3. Cornelius was a conscientious man, a Roman centurion who treated the Jews fairly and even tried to approach their God, for he knew Jehovah was true (Acts 10:1-4)
 - a. his prayers were heard, not because he was sinless or because God arbitrarily chose him, but because he was penitent and sincere
 - b. God answered his prayers with an opportunity to hear the gospel and decide what to do with Jesus
 - c. God can providentially answer such prayers today and lead the wanderer to his Rock

B. The Rock

1. when Jesus promised to build his church upon that rock, he spoke not of any frail man, a mere pebble in the foundation of faith, but his own glorified position as the chief cornerstone of the house of the redeemed—"that Rock was Christ" (First Corinthians 10:4)
2. some believe that you can be saved, right with God outside the church, but that is impossible, for without the church, you are building not on the foundation of Jesus, but the shifting sands of humanity and self (Matthew 7:24-27)
 - a. how often do we weep over friends and family who know that the Rock is Christ and yet cannot seem to reach him
 - b. like David, they need to be led—led over doubts and guilt and ignorance to reach safe harbor

C. God's Wings

1. David is able to trust in God in the present because the Lord had proven himself faithful and strong in the past
 - a. it is sad that we so often pray for certain things, receive them, take them for granted, repeat this for years, finally pray for something that we do not receive the way we want and are heard to complain against God that he is not listening or responding
 - b. how sad to accuse God of failure without considering that our own failure might be to blame
 1. perhaps we are praying for something we do not need or are better off without and perhaps we do not even know it
 2. perhaps our sins have separated us from God, our ingratitude has insulted him
2. Paul experienced such a thing, remarking once to Timothy that God had delivered him out of every persecution and affliction (see Second Timothy 3:11), but then writing in Second Corinthians 12:7-10 of a thorn in the flesh
 - a. sometimes the best thing God can do for us is the opposite of what we ask; he knows better than we
 - b. it is then that we must defer to his wisdom and resign ourselves that his grace is sufficient

D. Mercy and Truth Are Life Preservers

1. our wayward seaman has been attracted to the burning lower lights and now sees the Rock of his rescue at the other end of two life preservers—mercy and truth
2. accept mercy from God and extend it to men; submit to truth from God and share it with others (Jude 20-25)

Conclusion

Psalm 61 reminds us that you can go home again.

Psalm 62: My Soul, Wait Silently

Introduction

The sixty-second psalm is another work of the royal poet, King David, during a time of unknown, but clearly great hardship and persecution. If anything, this psalm shows exactly what it means to pray with faith. David prays and trusts that God will not fail, for he had never failed before. With that depth of faith, not only could David move mountains but he could learn to live with a few mole hills as well. Today, we will study Psalm 62 and try to borrow David's sense of faithful contentment and trusting prayer. [Read Psalm 62:1-12.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Truly, My Soul Waits (1-2)

1. on a breezy day, you can sit at your window and watch the mightiest tree in the yard swinging and swaying in the wind and yet at the base of the trunk and in the roots, it is holding firm and secure; it is not greatly moved

2. David says that his faith is like that strong tree, assaulted by powerful gusts, but never greatly moved because its roots have plunged so deep

a. I have talked to folks who apologize for their faith by claiming they are not sure there is a God, but just in case, they will stick with the church

b. that degree of faith is overripe for the picking to a tempter who can tell when diseased roots are exposed

c. such a one will be easily moved eventually (Matthew 13:3-8, 19-23)

1. three of four soil types will not prove a healthy incubator for faith, because the roots will not find honest soil

2. only that ground—that heart—which gladly receives the seed and wraps itself around it will stand the test of time

3. that kind of faith will grow like a mustard seed into the strongest of trees in the valley

B. How Long? (3-7)

1. unlike the mighty oak of faith that David was, a man not greatly moved by persecution, his infidel enemies are compared to a tottering fence and a leaning wall

2. such structures are victims of a weak foundation or the ravages of time; weathering has rotted away their stability which was built on the corruptible things of man

3. although they seem so strong in their glory days, one day they are reduced to shame and decay
a. such is the might of a man who would make himself God's enemy and wage war on the Lord's children

b. and such is our patient attitude toward those who deserve only our pity when they assault us

4. there is no need or value in contemplating revenge or seeking to return evil for evil, allowing our hearts to be overwhelmed by a lust for immediate justice, for God will topple the tottering wall in his time (Second Thessalonians 1:3-10)

C. Pour Out Your Heart (8-12)

1. prayer without ceasing is not our goal, it is to be our lifestyle

2. approaching the throne of grace in time of need should become instinctive (Hebrews 4:14-16)
a. we have a blessing then that David did not enjoy, for Christ had not yet sojourned on Earth as a man amidst corruption

b. now Jesus can sympathize with our plight, for he has lived in its way

c. his ear is open when we cry

1. but prayer led by someone else, while valuable, is not enough to protect the roots of our faith (Matthew 6:6-8)

2. prayer is a time for perfect honesty with God, for in no way can we deceive him (James 1:6-8)

II. Some Applications

A. Will Questions Move Us?

1. sometimes it is not direct persecution or sinful temptations that cause the tree to sway and the roots to be threatened with disease; sometimes it is doubt and waning zeal
2. Habakkuk was a man who sincerely doubted that God understood the plight of his people (Habakkuk 1:2, 5-6, 12-13 and 2:1)
3. even today, some Christians are so bombarded with atheistic messages from the media, modern science and society, that they begin to wonder if there really is a God
 - a. they will play it safe for now and go on like nothing has changed, but something has
 - b. if hope is the anchor of the soul and you no longer believe very strongly in the God of heaven, what will hold you in place when waves of trial crash upon you?
4. I honestly believe that most doubt of this kind arises from listening more to the commentary of unbelieving men than the simple word of God
 - a. reading the Bible reminds you of the nature of God, proves that it does not contradict itself, but establishes a pattern and theme of revelation that is scientifically unimpeachable and morally impeccable
 - b. putting prayer into practice and waiting on providence gives opportunity to perceive God at work; then we walk by faith and not by sight and yet our faith is real because God is real
 - c. doubt disappears when you reacquaint yourself with daily meditation upon the Bible's guidance, learning that its lessons are always best for you, even when it seems unlikely at first
 - d. even science cannot cast doubt on the truth when the Earth is examined objectively and evidence of design is witnessed
 1. could the human body have happened accidentally?
 2. could the arrangement and orbit of the heavenly bodies be randomly provided?
 3. could the Bible itself have been produced without divine direction and faith in Christ survive for 2000 years without authenticity?

B. Inward Cursing

1. it is always shocking when you discover that someone you thought was a friend or well-wisher has been criticizing you behind your back
2. it is painful to feel deceived and ridiculed, foolish for having thought an enemy to be a friend
 - a. part of what makes that weak wall lean and that falling fence totter is a lack of conscience
 - b. some will employ flattery to lull you into a false sense of security; flattery is beyond a compliment to the point of exaggeration and puffing up of arrogance
 - c. the Proverbs says that a flattering mouth works ruin and spreads a net for the feet, that flattering words are like honey dripping from a honeycomb, because we so want to believe they are true even when we know they are not
3. but we must also be careful not to become the kind of people who speak pleasant lies to gain another's favor, while inwardly cursing him (James 3:7-12)

C. The Only Psalm

1. this work is sometimes called "The Only Psalm" because of the six times the writer employs a word with that idea
2. the point is that when nature is unseasonable and friends fail and machines break down, God is there as a rock of strength and place of refuge
3. be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might (see Ephesians 6:10)
4. take refuge in the word, in prayer, in fellowship, in hope (First Corinthians 16:13-14)

D. Vapor and Vanity

1. like his son, David saw through the vanity of a life lived after the flesh, bent on earthly esteem even at the expense of eternal glory (Ecclesiastes 1:1-11)
2. one cannot put his trust in men, for they may fail, nor can he increase himself by trampling on others
3. even if one's material things increase lawfully, he must protect his heart against adoring them (Ecclesiastes 5:10)

4. better to say, “Give me neither poverty nor riches—Feed me with the food allotted to me; Lest I be full and say, Who is the Lord?” or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God” (Proverbs 30:8-9).

E. Twice I Have Heard

1. power belongs to God but it is tempered by unparalleled mercy
2. God will not judge a man based on someone else’s wrongs, condemning a stillborn baby for the appetite of Adam as the creeds teach
3. “each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor” (First Corinthians 3:8)
 - a. those who built their lives on the rock of Christ by submitting to the gospel and his will are bound to survive the storms of trial in this life and rise above the pettiness of infidelity
 - b. those who built their lives on the sands of doubt or even willful enmity against God and his people will find waves of retribution crashing upon them
4. God’s judgment is merciful, but you can refuse his grace if you choose, for his mercy is expressed in Christ—the way, the truth and the life

Conclusion

Psalm 62 separates the faithful from the faithless and reminds us that a doubting faith is no faith at all. Thomas and Habakkuk were doubters who gained a deeper faith when they confronted their concerns and overcame them. Are you ready to make up your mind about Jesus?

Psalm 63: O God, You Are My God

Introduction

From the context of this psalm, it certainly appears that the royal poet, King David, was writing while in exile from his son, Absalom. David describes a literal wilderness and desert around him, while basking in the goodness and pleasure of his heart loved by God. Despite all the reasons to feel forlorn and defeated, David understood that one man on God's side was victory defined. He rises from his place of flight and counts his blessings. Charles Spurgeon commented on this Psalm: "When the bed is softest we are most tempted to rise at lazy hours; but when comfort is gone, and the couch is hard, if we rise the earlier to seek the Lord, we have much for which to thank the wilderness. [Read Psalm 63:1-11.] We will try to apply David's attitude to our own, sometimes troubled hearts this evening. When all of life's highs and lows are tucked away in perspective, God is still our God and heaven our release.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Yearning For God (1-5)

1. the revolt of Absalom can be traced to his murder of his half-brother Amnon in retaliation for that man's raping Absalom's sister, Tamar
2. Absalom fled the city and although David longed to see him again, the son stayed away
3. when he finally returned home, he had grown handsome and skillful, but David now wanted him to stay away from the palace
 - a. they were briefly reunited but Absalom remained bitter against his father and began plotting to seize power for himself
 - b. he subverted the nation and caused David to flee from Jerusalem in disgrace
 - c. with his crown threatened and his home taken away and his dear son to blame, David took flight into the wilderness and fought for his very life (Second Samuel 15:30, 32; Second Samuel 17:27-29)
4. this is the dry and thirsty land of which David complains in Psalm 63; it is not a figure for the condition of his heart, which has found a way to be spiritually refreshed in the knowledge of God's grace

B. Following Close (6-8)

1. following too close is the reason the rear bumper on my truck is a little dented this week; some young woman learned a lesson
2. but David speaks of following close as a good thing and when God is in the lead, one can never follow too closely

C. A Portion For Jackals (Psalm 63:9-11)

1. judgment according to works is an unpleasant standard for those who sin against God and never turn back to him, and especially upon those who trouble the children of God, presenting themselves as destroyers and stumbling blocks on a path to glory
2. God will hold them accountable (Second Thessalonians 1:3-12)

II. Some Applications

A. O God, You Are My God

1. consider the greatness of saying to Jehovah in song or prayer, simply, "You are my God"
2. David uses that possessive pronoun, denoting a sort of ownership—"I am not afraid to own my Lord," as we sing today
3. God can be your God, but only if you seek him as David sought him (Matthew 7:7-11)
 - a. many people begin spiritual searches but do not ever obey the gospel by being baptized for the forgiveness of sins; what happens?
 - b. sometimes their spiritual quest gets distracted by material promises; they find a church that pampers their bodies and forget that they were looking for a balm for the soul
 - c. this is spiritual junk food, the social gospel, that induces men to believe that spiritual problems can be solved by fleshly ointments
 - d. it is not that God failed to deliver, but that they failed to keep seeking until they found true deliverance

4. owning God means not being afraid to confess him as God (Matthew 10:32-33)
 - a. David, although surely disappointed, was not afraid to say, “O God, you are my God”
 - b. it is sad that so many lose their faith at exactly the moment they need it most
 - c. something tragic happens and instead of blaming the devil for evil, they blame God and turn their backs on him, not realizing that they are rejecting the cure and embracing the poison in the process (Proverbs 24:10)
 - d. temptation separates the wheat from the chaff and tragedy only raises the stakes

B. Early Will I Seek You

1. David sought him early, which I take to mean early in the morning
2. an early search each day is a grand way to begin every day—devote some of the early moments to prayer and a little Bible reading to set the tone for what may be a trying day
3. but an early search in life itself can mean the difference between a useful life and one misspent (Ecclesiastes 12:1-7)

C. It Is Well With My Soul

1. one who, like David, owns up to God and finds comfort in faith despite hard times, can claim true satisfaction
2. Moses owned his God (Hebrews 11:24-26)
 - a. houses can be foreclosed, cars can be repossessed, boats can be wrecked, spouses can betray, children can disappoint, neighbors can die, but God is faithful without fail
 - b. as marrow and fat were the choicest delicacies on the Hebrew plate, so a relationship with God is to be craved and obtained at any cost; then it will be well with your soul
 - c. the disposition of earthly things will matter less and the hope of a mansion in heaven, transport by resurrection and ascension, marriage to Christ and childhood to Jehovah will matter more
3. we will possess every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus (see Ephesians 1:3) and know the peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:6-7)

D. You Have Been My Help

1. if, in your house, you are the last one to go to sleep at night, you understand how quiet it gets and how easy it is then to meditate and give thought to God
2. here we find David reflecting upon the help that God had been to him
 - a. remember he has not yet been restored to his throne, his palace is still the abode of a usurper and that enemy is his own son
 - b. in a potential desert of disappointment and disgust, David finds an oasis of trust and hope, for he has not given up and God has helped him just to stay alive while things are otherwise bleak
3. most people think that contentment is achieved only when you have everything you want
 - a. the trouble is that you will never have everything you want, somebody else will always have more, and the things you do have are prone to breaking down
 - b. the key to contentment is learning to live with and without (Philippians 4:11-13)

E. Following

1. on one occasion, Jesus met three men on a road who thought they wanted to be followers (Luke 9:57-62)
2. they were not like the fisherman apostles, who left their lucrative nets and became itinerant preachers, or the publican who walked out of the tax office with money on the table because Jesus said, “Follow me.”
 - a. the first man actually offers to follow without being asked, but Jesus wondered if he was really prepared to go where following would take him
 - b. the second man begged for time to tend to other matters
 - c. the third man wanted a chance also to look back
3. their commitment to following started well but was quickly turned aside by other considerations
4. following closely means training your eyes on the prize and giving the devil no opportunity to win by distraction and disqualify the runner whose confusion causes missteps (Matthew 16:24-27)

F. Swear By God

1. it is a serious thing to swear an oath and use God's name to lend it gravity and credulity
2. don't feel emboldened by this passage to go out and start saying, "I swear to God," as the heathen do, for such a phrase today denotes impiety more than true faith
3. this oath is a trust in God, not moved even in the midst of despair, but content to wait for a change (Isaiah 45:22-25)

Conclusion

Psalm 63 allows us to call God, our God. Have you never named the name of Christ to be your savior? Be not afraid to own your Lord; confess him today and be baptized for the remission of your sins.

Psalm 64: No Fear

Introduction

The phrase “No Fear” has become popularized on bumper stickers and t-shirts these days and I will confess that I do not know why. At some point, I got old and the young people quit telling me what they were talking about and so here we are. Honestly, though, there is something good about that phrase in the hands of a Christian, but it terrifies me to hear it used so loosely in this hedonistic culture of ours. “No fear” regarding the temptations of youth like drinking, drug experimentation, smoking and promiscuity in the heart of a Christian may be sound if he chooses abstinence. It seems, though, that many have no fear about committing sin, disobeying parents, breaking the law and ruining their lives and afterlives. There is no fear of God before their eyes. This likely is not true of you, and thank God, but it may just be true of those around you, to some degree, and their fearless attitude toward judgment can sometimes rub off. The sixty-fourth psalm is a work of David that deals with just such an association. A godly man who fears the Lord surrounded by people who do not, but will. [Read Psalm 64:1-10.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Fear of the Enemy (1-6)

1. after the latest round of school shootings, America spent about three days talking about the role that bullying had to do with the shooter’s motivation

a. probably all of us have dealt with bullying and other such trouble in school, but there have always been bullies, but there has not always been shootings

b. as wrong as the bullies are, the vengeful person who crosses a line and seeks to take from God his right to mete out punishment, is just as bad and due no sympathy

2. it is not possible that you will live a full life without making some enemies along the way, especially if you are a Christian!

a. Jesus had enemies and they killed him and if you live as he lived, you will rub some people the wrong way every once in a while as well

b. these then are enemies of the cross if they make themselves your enemies

3. you may recall that Abraham’s nephew, Lot, lived in Sodom and that one night some angels came to visit him

a. while there, the men of Sodom approached his home and demanded access to the visitors, that they might know them carnally

b. Lot refused and the Sodomites immediately responded, “This one came in to stay here, and he keeps acting as a judge” (Genesis 19:9)

c. Peter commented that Lot was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked, tormenting his righteous soul every day as he witnessed their lawless deeds (Second Peter 2:7-8), and obviously spoke out against them

d. those who want their deeds to remain unexposed hate the light of truth and will seek to discredit or silence anyone who shines a light of indignation into the crevices of their shame (John 3:18-21)

e. in exposing the error of the Galatian saints, Paul wondered, “Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth” (Galatians 4:16)?

B. All Men Shall Fear (7-9)

1. in the previous passage, David had identified his enemy’s methods—secret plots, rebellion and bitter words

2. he traced their willingness to engage in these evils to the fact that they had no fear, where fear was deserved

3. then David’s body was under attack and today it is the body of Christ that has been targeted by entertainers, journalists, bureaucrats and false teachers

a. faith is mocked, cast in a suspicious light, cornered by law and compared to the most wicked sect in all the Bible

b. even our own brethren are not above reproaching any who hold fast to the old paths

C. Trust in God (10)

1. with all this enticement to join the fray, it becomes difficult sometimes to remain chaste in these battles
2. but while all this is going around and begging us to join, we must simply refuse to participate
 - a. on the road, when someone drives dangerously, curses you and employs obscene gestures, you simply must refuse to participate
 - b. when bullied at work or school or on the playground, you refuse to retaliate or even to be emotionally moved
 - c. as children, we learn about sticks and stones and that words can never hurt us
 1. they can, however, if we take them to heart
 2. you overcome the evil when you shake off the suggestion
3. be righteous and upright by refusing to sink to the level of your enemy

II. Some Applications

A. Should We Fear the Enemy?

1. David's prayer was that his life would be preserved from fear of the enemy—not the enemy himself, but the debilitating terror of him that paralyzes the just and puts them to silence
2. the enemy today accuses the Christian like the Sodomites accused Lot, calling them judgmental, Pharisees or fanatics
 - a. some, out of fear of the enemy, have chosen to conceal their faith outside of the meeting house and home, lest the enemy set its sights on them
 - b. this may seem prudent and convenient, but the decision exposes in us a weakness of faith and ruins our potential to convert anybody out of the world
 - c. Paul told the Romans, "If God is for us, who can be against us" (8:31), even as he was in peril of Jew and pagan alike; he was preserved by prayer from fear of the enemy, even requesting that the Ephesians petition God for him that he would speak the word boldly as ought to speak it (see Ephesians 6:20)
 - d. we must not fear the enemy; we must speak the word boldly and live the word boldly or risk losing our identity and sinking in a whirlpool of weak faith like Peter did when he could no longer walk with Jesus on the water
3. instead of spending your time and energy on trepidation and pessimism, spend it on preparation and optimism (First Peter 3:8-18)

B. Meditation

1. David's meditation was set within the law and directed toward God with a pure heart and clean hands
2. an alternate rendering of the Hebrew word here is "complaint"
3. understand that David is not a complainer like the Exodus pilgrims, who whined about onions and leeks; his complaint is more of a legal brief against his own brethren who were given to evil
 - a. today our own brethren are besmirching the name of Christ by continuing to assert they form a church of his while trampling upon his will
 - b. we complain to them and about them, wishing for their repentance, and hoping that truth will shine on their error (First Peter 4:12-19)

C. Our Attitude Toward the Enemy

1. we know that we must love our enemies, but how (Matthew 5:43-48)?
 - a. must we love them like we love our children or our brethren or God?
 - b. no, we must love them like enemies, pitiable, misguided, sinful and doomed enemies
 - c. we love their fragile souls, who have so little time left to change before iniquity and judgment are sealed eternally
 - d. no matter how awful they treat us, we refuse to retaliate
2. with our enemies, we pursue the things that make for peace and holiness, not compromising either to obtain the other (Romans 12:17-21)

D. God Will Afflict Them

1. under the law of Moses, David could hate his enemies with a perfect hatred, but Christ demands that we love them with a perfect love

2. love that wicked soul into guilt and maybe it will be saved from fire (Jude 23)
3. every soul will eventually bow the knee to God, in this life while it can affect eternity, or in the day of judgment, when it will be too late (see Romans 14:11)
 - a. at some point, all men shall fear and declare the work of God
 - b. for those who refuse until compelled by angels at the bar on high, it will only be a prelude to torment (Second Thessalonians 1:9-10)

E. Be Glad and Glory

1. when we remain above the fray and without sin, we can be secure that God will sort it out in the end and we will be happy with the result
2. we must meekly trust in God to do all things in his time, faith like Esther who told the truth and trusted God to see her through the consequences
3. all things are possible to him that believes (see Mark 9:23)

Conclusion

Trust in God and you will have nothing to fear. When you go your own way, you will have nothing but the terror of the Lord ahead.

Psalm 65: Praise Awaits

Introduction

Psalm 65 is the victory song of a chosen man, who worships his God as redeemer, creator and provider. David sings, "Praise is awaiting you, O God," and speaks for all of spiritual Israel, the elect of God, in expressing thankfulness. We examine the sixty-fifth psalm with an eye toward its praise for God in his various benefactor roles toward mankind. Our praise should await God as he watches us awaken each morning and prepare to sleep each night. Our praise should await God at every moment of the day. [Read Psalm 65:1-13.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Redeemer (1-4)

1. all of this rejoicing and praising is occasioned by God's offer of redemption and atonement, a subject which we know infinitely more about than even the author of this psalm who lived a millennium before Christ

2. the writer takes note that God does the choosing when it comes to atonement and that God also does the causing when it comes to approaching him

a. but how does our God accomplish this, and does he do it arbitrarily, choosing and causing based upon divine partiality toward one over the another, with no objective standard?

b. the Bible says that there is no partiality with God (Acts 10:34-43)

3. this passage reveals the standard by which God makes his choice about who will belong to the elect, and also about how he causes men to approach him

a. it is not arbitrary at all, but God uses the preaching of the gospel to cause men and women to believe in him and become elect

b. consider also John 6:44-45

1. understand that many who heard these words rejected them and walked away

2. God was drawing men to him by the gospel words, but men with free will had the ability to approach him or depart

4. and so God chooses the saved and causes them to approach through the agency of the gospel (John 8:30-32)

a. remember God is no respecter of persons (First Peter 1:17-25)

b. everyone has the opportunity to hear and consider, for God desires that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (see First Timothy 2:4)

B. Creator (5-8)

1. David knows that God can do awesome things because he understands that God has done them before

2. make no mistake about it—the Bible claims that God created the universe and creation itself bears witness to the action of intelligent design (Psalm 19:1-4)

3. there is no happy harmony between the Bible and Darwinian macroevolution, the hypothesis that a big bang created the world and man evolved from microscopic ooze

a. such a view seeks to kill God and turn the human soul into vapor

b. but for the compromising Christian, it also undermines his faith and takes the comfort of the scriptures away from him

c. if Genesis 1:1 is myth, the existence of God and necessity of atonement are myths as well and we are among men most pitiable

4. logically, creation could not be an accident, anymore than a watch or jet airplane could be created accidentally

a. in truth, the invisible attributes of God have been clearly seeable ever since creation, rendering unbelievers without excuse (see Romans 1:20)

b. there is no reason to reject the Bible's creation account (Genesis 1:1-2)

1. the text goes on to describe God creating the world in six, consecutive, literal days; days as literal as the Sabbath day is since it descends from God's resting on the seventh day of creation week

2. we make this awesome deed less awesome when we impose upon God our weakness and think that the days must be ages instead or that God needed or used gaps between the days, rendering the week a meaningless chronology

C. Provider (9-13)

1. David gave just priority in this psalm to spiritual providence, but stops here to remember physical provision as well

2. God visits the earth like he instructs us to visit distressed widows and orphans—not just to see the spectacle of need, but to address the problem and lend assistance

3. while God may permit us to be tried as Job was tried by the devil, he will never tempt us himself, but is perpetually good (James 1:12-18)

II. Some Applications

A. The Blessing of Redemption

1. the reward of faith is a dwelling place in God's courts and the satisfaction of living in his house and being his children

2. there is a spiritual fellowship with the Lord, which is destroyed by sin and recreated by obedient faith, that the infidel cannot know

3. that house today is not any physical temple, nor even one to come, but it is the church, composed of the living bricks that are the redeemed (Ephesians 2:19-22)

4. in this temple, we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3), the privilege to approach the throne of grace around the clock (Hebrews 4:14-16)

5. and we have the contentment that comes from a purified conscience and a hope for eternity (Philippians 4:4-7)

B. Praise Him!

1. with true gratitude, we must offer him continual praise, but never trample upon his courts with the blemished offerings of self-service or hypocrisy (Isaiah 1:12-20)

a. are we living the words of our songs or singing judgment to our hypocritical souls?

b. are we giving as we have prospered with sacrifice and joy, or are we offering God the crumbs the world has left behind?

c. are we discerning the death of Christ when we eat and drink or are we fantasizing about the bigger meal to come?

d. are we communicating with the throne of heaven in prayer or are we passing the time with idle thoughts?

e. are we feasting upon the milk and meat of God's word when it is taught or are we whispering, sleeping and daydreaming?

2. a God like ours deserves higher praise than going through the motions; he deserves spirit and truth (John 4:24)

C. The Earth Is the Lord's (Psalm 24:1-2)

1. the theology called "Deism," held most notably by Thomas Jefferson, argues that God went idle after creation and became the world's and history's spectator

2. and yet his power in creation is presented here as evidence that he can still perform mighty deeds

a. God still answers prayer (James 5:16-18)

b. God nurtures the earth, sending rain on the just and unjust

c. God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20)

3. he enables us to march through the storms of tribulation by faith and to withstand the deluge of temptation and persecution when our house of faith is founded upon the rock of Christ

4. God created us and he knows us better than we know ourselves

5. therefore it is not within man to direct his own steps, but to learn from God and walk as Jesus walked (see First John 2:6)

D. Praise Him!

1. we can either glorify God with the physical blessing he provides or we can ungratefully mock him, like a child who receives the gift of some candy, but will not share, even with the one who gave it

2. we glorify God by being good stewards of his blessing, understanding that we have nothing on our own, but depend on him for our very livelihoods (see First Corinthians 4:2)
3. we glorify God when we put his blessing to good use and not evil, when we purchase goods and services which tend to enrich us spiritually, but not deprave us morally
4. we glorify God when we put his spiritual work first in our budgets and give him the choicest of our income, not the leftovers
 - a. consider the example of the Macedonians (Second Corinthians 8:1-5)
 - b. our attitude must be selfless and sacrificial (Second Corinthians 9:6-11)
 - c. we must be willing to share (First Timothy 6:17-19)
5. when we are stingy, we practically tell God that we cannot handle such blessing and that the best thing he could do for our spirits would be to remove the temptation that wealth is
 - a. let us examine the way that we are handling our blessings and giving back to God a portion of what he has given to us
 - b. then we will glorify God in word and in deed

Conclusion

If you are redeemed, then Psalm 65 belongs to you already, but if you have never obeyed the gospel, this wonderful work only serves to show you what awaits if you will but believe and turn away from sin as you are baptized for the remission of your sins.

Psalm 66: Make A Joyful Shout

Introduction

We have become quite accustomed to seeing the name of David and his unmistakable style affixed upon our psalms, but the sixty-sixth lacks his name and concerns a time long before his birth. This psalm is about the escape of Israel from Egyptian captivity, in which they crossed through a parted Red Sea to elude their pursuers. This song is the work of a people who had fled from slavery, only to face certain doom and be snatched away at the last moment. Psalm 66 is a valuable instructor to us in that it reminds of our own escape from slavery and exemplifies the kind of praise that ought to fill our hearts at the thought of an awesome God. [Read Psalm 66:1-20.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Awesome Doing (1-7)

1. back in the book of Genesis, a home in Egypt was a great blessing by God, for drought and famine had swept over the homeland of Abraham's offspring

a. Providence had sent Joseph ahead as an unwitting forerunner to prepare a place for his brethren and when food became too scarce, they arrived to barter and were persuaded to abide

b. but the Israelites stayed on, even as the political scene was changing and eventually, a new Pharaoh was crowned who did not know about Joseph or the former condition; the Hebrews were enslaved and prejudice grew against them (Exodus 1:8-22)

2. but divine providence was still at work and God was about to teach and emancipate his people (Exodus 3:1-12)

3. the daily existence of this people was to awake and go to work and to slave under the hot sun all day long and even as night fell and made it impossible to see

a. the government prevented them from worshiping as God would want and even threatened to exterminate their population

b. joy was a word with which they were unacquainted and that is why our psalm is so outstanding

4. after the passage of nine sequential plagues, God was prepared to end the captivity and rescue his people at last

a. the tenth plague dealt a stunning blow to the Egyptians and allowed the Hebrews to get a head start on them (Exodus 13:17-18)

b. and then the momentous event that occasions the sixty-sixth psalm occurs (Exodus 14:1-31)

5. the fifteenth chapter of Exodus records the songs of Moses and Miriam and we can only imagine the joy that follows a victory like this being snatched from the jaws of defeat

a. some were alive to see the ticker tape parades that followed World War II victories in Europe and over Japan and surely this celebration was low-tech but high joy

b. the naive would imagine that this exultation would carry Israel quickly into Canaan where faith would never be seriously challenged, but instead the same chapter that records these songs of victory also tells a darker tale (Exodus 15:22-16:8)

B. Out To Rich Fulfillment (8-12)

1. there is something pure and wonderful and untainted about the moment of victory

a. the analysts have not arrived to call it luck or chance and the devil has not come to find some loose thread by which he can try to unravel the joy and expose new defeat

b. like the moment when Naaman stepped out of the Jordan or when Joshua's troops savored the devastation of Jericho, the doubt and worry are all overcome by the joy of success

c. for that fleeting moment, it seems like anything is possible

2. every Christian here has experienced that splendid moment and one may as well

a. it is that moment when one is resurrected from baptism's watery grave and takes his or her first steps of newness of life

b. all the defeats of sin have been left behind in the water and the conscience is clean before God

c. there is joy in the assembly and rejoicing in heaven and anything is possible

3. zeal is at its zenith, doubt is washed away and growth awaits
 - a. that is the time to seize the day and press forward with a joyful shout like that of the Ethiopian eunuch who obeyed the gospel beside a deserted road

C. If I Regard Iniquity In My Heart (13-20)

1. worship is as much for man as it is for God; God does not have to have our worship to be the almighty, but we do have to give him our worship to be reminded that he is almighty
2. when Israel's zeal waned, her worship was corrupted as well (Hebrews 13:9-16)
3. people make promises and vows when they are in trouble; God rescues them and the people forget what they said
4. our prayers in hard times promise we will do better, but when relief comes, do we pay that vow?
 - b. at that moment, adulterers can cease to be adulterers and thieves can cease to be thieves, trading those unfavorable descriptions for terms like "disciples" and "Christians"
 3. make a joyful shout in your heart and treasure your zeal and fresh start like the precious commodities they are

II. Some Applications

A. Delivered Unto Rich Fulfillment

1. Paul describes our Exodus from slavery to emancipation so well in Romans 6:1-17
2. we start at baptism a journey toward the promised land, a better and enduring Canaan in the skies, becoming pilgrims as much as these were (Hebrews 11:8-16)
3. along the way, we enjoy all the spiritual blessings that are to be found in Christ Jesus—the purified conscience, the offer of mercy and the hope of eternal salvation
4. the richest fulfillment we know is that Christ the just has died for us, the unjust, and ever lives again to make intercession with his father for us (see Hebrews 7:25)

B. Yet Many Fell

1. we know, however, that most of the original pilgrims fell short of the promised land and never knew the destination of joy
2. a like fate can confront the Christian pilgrim along the path to Heaven and cause him to fall short, knowing the blessing of original emancipation but losing faith or perseverance short of the finish line (First Corinthians 6:9-11)
3. they complained and murmured and whined and fell; temptation likewise threatens to leave our carcasses along the road (First Corinthians 10:1-13)

C. Regarding Iniquity

1. although God has the ability to hear every prayer, he chooses to ignore the insincere and judges genuineness to be lacking when sin is hidden secretly in the heart (Isaiah 59:1-3)
2. God does not hear the impenitent but listens and blesses the seeker and the sincere
3. make a joyful shout that God will hear your prayer and answer it best and give those who need it a fresh start (Ephesians 4:17-24)

Conclusion

Our exodus is greater than Israel's and our Canaan is eternal. Make a joyful shout and apply your zeal to truth.

Psalm 67: Let The Nations Be Glad

Introduction

The sixty-seventh psalm is a song of thanksgiving, probably penned during Israel's harvest festival. Imagine a group of people staring at a bounty of crops and crediting not their own ingenuity or dumb luck, but a kind and loving God. That is the attitude that inspires Psalm 67. Still, the application the inspired writer seeks and that we must find goes beyond an agricultural bounty to the realm of spiritual increase, the harvest of souls that abounds when God is made known to the ends of the Earth. [Read Psalm 67:1-7.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Invocation (1-2)

1. the opening verses of Psalm 67 are sometimes known as an invocation, an opening prayer that pleads for a certain blessing

2. this particular invocation is heavily influenced by the one that God gave Aaron to pronounce back in Numbers 6 (Numbers 6:22-27)

a. with this kind of constant message and application, Israel would be able to put God's name on every child in the nation

b. Aaron's blessing then concerns the spiritual education and edification of every child of God, from infancy to old age, a practice that puts God's stamp of influence on the people and ensures continued fellowship

3. as a matter of fact, God spent much of his Old Testament relationship with Israel in setting up memorials to educate the generations after great events about what transpired

a. one such case is found in First Samuel 7:1-14

b. by the time Samuel lived, Israel had been through quite an ordeal, from the Egypt Exodus through the Canaan Conquests; all the while, God had watched over her and given her victories over enemies, including many battles she would have lost on paper

c. for all this help, God had been repaid with grumbling and complaining, and an unwillingness to exterminate the heathen nations and their idols

d. for 20 years during Samuel's life, the ark of the covenant was not even in Israel, but was exiled to Beth Shemesh and Kirjath Jearim, as the nation was threatened still by the Philistines, who terrified weakened Israel

1. "Ebenezer" is Hebrew for "Stone of Help," and carried for Samuel the significance of "Thus far the Lord has helped us"

2. he raised up that stone, not as an idol, but a memorial to God's supernatural care, thundering forth his protection of his children

3. the gratitude that Ebenezer stone expressed helped subdue the enemy, prevent future skirmishes and restore what had been lost

4. it is interesting that all this happened near Mizpah, for the patriarch Jacob had set up one of his own Ebenezers there long ago

4. all who could comprehend were required to learn when the law was taught (Nehemiah 8:1-3)

a. this implies to me that children old enough to learn were present as well, not exiled to some children's church, but embraced by the assembly and prepared to worship as adults when their time came

b. but this instruction would only supplement the answers parents must give when children raise questions of faith at home

B. A Righteous Judge (3-4)

1. if we had a judge sitting on the bench today who found every defendant innocent, we would be outraged

2. if the judge took an oath to uphold the law, but then ignored that standard every time, we would impeach him

3. and yet that mentality is transferred to God when universal salvation is believed and when Christians believe that certain things are necessary to salvation, but that God may bend the rules in the day of judgment anyway

C. Doxology (5-7)

1. a doxology is a refrain of pure praise and these verses surely qualify
2. the hope of the psalm is that people all over the world would come to praise God
 - a. for this reason, the apostles were told to travel into all nations and make disciples of every race and language and culture
 - b. this they swiftly did, so that the gospel was proclaimed in all the world within a few decades (Colossians 1:6)
 - c. in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, white nor black, Asian nor Eskimo, “for you are all one in Christ Jesus ... Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29)

II. Some Applications

A. The Lord Knows Those Who Are His

1. God has put his name on every Christian at the point of rebirth
 - a. as the Jews were born into the kingdom and then had to be taught to know God afterward, people today are first taught to know God and then can be reborn into his kingdom (Hebrews 8:10-12)
 - b. then we are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Second Timothy 2:19)
2. we are invisibly and intangibly marked for God’s discernment and yet the fruits of our discipleship are evident to all, for we have departed from iniquity and refuse to live anymore in it

B. Blessing On All Nations

1. this ownership by God of redeemed Gentiles answers the third prophetic promise that he made to the patriarch Abraham first in Genesis 12, to bring a blessing to all the nations through him and his seed
2. when Aaron spoke, only Jews were under consideration, but now those of every nation can be right with God (Ephesians 2:11-13)
 - a. the blessing that he heaps upon Christians, more spiritual and emotional than physical, tells a story of joy and hope to a world lost in sorrow and doom (Romans 15:10-13)

C. Heavenly Court

1. men and women tend to honor the word justice when it is being meted out to everyone else, but they want something other than justice when they find themselves indicted and tried
2. when it comes to our date with the heavenly judge at the end of time, justice would demand that we are all headed for the same verdict, for the wages of sin is death and all have sinned (see Romans 6:23, 3:23)
 - a. we certainly want some component to be added to justice that might give us hope and a better verdict than eternal torment
 - b. that component is provided in God’s grace, in that his own son satisfied justice and took the place of the guilty on a cross (First Peter 2:21-24)
3. when grace is the component that renews hope, it means that we seek the unmerited favor of God according to whatever process he decrees
 - a. the gospel promises the remission of wrongs to those who believe in Jesus and belief is displayed when sinners confess Christ, turn away from the sins that got them a death sentence to begin with, and are cleansed by his blood in baptism
 - b. the universalist believes that a loving God could not possibly condemn anybody and so emasculates the gospel by promising the false hope of salvation to all regardless of everything including atheism
 - c. but the Christian who claims that faithfulness is required but that God may bend his own rules in that great day is just a universalist in discrete attire
4. God will judge us according to our works, what we have done and left undone and his standard will not shift person to person, nor be overridden by the creeds of men and pleas for do-overs
 - a. if God should choose to throw out the New Testament and grant universal salvation or some measure other than grace, then he has forfeited his own claim to being just
 - b. being just means that you impartially administer the rules and when justice is served, evildoers are punished
 - c. don’t hope for universal salvation or that God will overlook what you chose to ignore; accept his grace and act upon it

D. Rewarding Faithful Obedience (Matthew 20:1-16)

1. one great aspect of grace is that its heavenly reward of eternal life is equal to all who seek it
2. the thief on the cross who made his restoration in the final moments of his life and never did another thing for Christ will have as much eternal life as the apostle Paul who suffered shipwreck and persecution for decades before meeting his maker
3. grace should cure envy, because our righteous judge has made clear that heaven is open to all any time so long as they obey the gospel

E. Yielding An Increase

1. now the gospel did not spread in the first century without the cooperation of the apostles and early disciples (First Corinthians 3:5-11)
2. it is indeed God who gave the increase to Israel at harvest time when the crops were brought in and the people rejoiced, but with God's help, they themselves sowed the seed and prayed for rain and sunshine
3. when we hope for spiritual increase in a harvest of souls, we must leave it to God to give the increase, but understand that what he is able to do is dependent upon what we do in sowing, watering and tending
 - a. sow the seed of the kingdom, brother
 - b. the fields are white to harvest (Matthew 9:35-38)

Conclusion

We conclude Psalm 67 with a reminder that the gospel is the seed of faith and that faith brings salvation and joy to the world.

Psalm 68: Let God Arise

Introduction

Various commentators have taken the mysterious words of the sixty-eighth psalm and applied them to both the conduction of the ark of the covenant and the end days of Judaism. Clearly, the psalm starts out with reference to the ark, but its message also reminds us that days of the Lord are always on the calendar and may be hastening toward us. [Read Psalm 68:1-35.] In this lesson on the sixty-eighth psalm, we hope to impress upon ourselves the power and might of our God who arises against his enemies and to preserve his children.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Ark of Safety (1-3)

1. the ark of the covenant is mentioned only once in the New Testament, but plays a tremendous role in the Old Testament; sadly all that many Christians know about the ark they learned from an Indiana Jones movie

2. the ark of the covenant was authorized by God in Exodus 25:10-22 as a repository for the testimony God would give them

a. thus the ark became more than just another box; it became the place that God communicated with Israel

b. the tabernacle and temple were ornate structures to house the ark of the covenant, the most important relic in Judaism

3. the ark was carried everywhere with Israel to symbolize and ensure God's protective presence; it was like a good luck charm only with true power

4. the opening verses of Psalm 68 reflect the speech made whenever the ark was carried out before a battle (Numbers 10:33-36)

5. Israel went nowhere without the ark and when it was eventually lost to the Philistines, their fortunes declined immediately

6. when Joshua prepared to cross the people into the promised land, the ark was there (Joshua 3:14-17)

a. the ark of the covenant was also carried when the walls around Jericho were encircled and toppled

b. after the defeat at Ai, Joshua approached the ark to inquire of God for the reason

7. the ark of the covenant, then, was more than just a wooden box, but it was Israel's insurance policy and reminder of God's will

a. divinely provided safety and communication were associated with it

b. the ark is used throughout scripture to describe similar circumstances among God's people

B. Dwelling In The Clouds (4-14)

1. as the ark traveled, God would lead Israel in a cloud that preceded them wherever they were supposed to go

2. his name is YAH, which is where the word Jehovah comes from and it means simply, "I AM"

3. the image of our God riding on the clouds indicates that he is omniscient and omnipotent and omnipresent

a. our God can look down upon us and know every thing that goes on in the open, in the corner and in our hearts

b. he can affect every man and every event

c. he is not limited by time or space, but is all powerful

4. Job said that God could do everything and Jesus said that with him, nothing is impossible

a. but he is also eminently approachable to the reverent and penitent (Acts 17:24-31)

b. Christians are given the privilege of approaching his throne of grace with confidence (see Hebrews 4:14-16)

1. our God rides on the clouds and knows our needs before we do; when we recognize them, we can take them to him

2. he knows when we need forgiveness even before we realize it, so it is silly to wait or procrastinate

C. Leading Captivity Captive (15-23)

1. when Israel conquered a nation, it was made captive and gave up its treasures to God's people
2. Paul uses one verse of this passage in the New Testament to show how Jesus took the powers of darkness captive and protected people of light with his gifts (Ephesians 4:7-16)
 - a. when Jesus overcame death and then ascended into heaven, he provided the means to beat Satan's best weapon—death, the fear of dying and eternal torment in judgment for sin
 - b. as he sits upon his throne, he strengthens his people to withstand Satan's remaining onslaught through waxing temptation (Luke 11:20-23)
 - c. Jesus took the keys of death and hades and now waits until the day he will return to ransom the faithful completely away from wickedness in heaven (First Corinthians 15:20-28)
3. evil was limited in Job's day and is so now even more that Christ has come and conquered
 - a. the gifts he has given his kingdom are both natural and supernatural
 - b. prophecies and signs validated the revelation of the New Testament before they ceased, but are still recorded for posterity that we might believe when we read
 - c. offices like elder and teacher and evangelist continue to proclaim that word and bring direction to God's fold

D. Blessed Be God (24-35)

1. we cannot praise God in this new covenant era like they did back under Moses; we have no authority to bring incense burning, animal sacrifice or the Sabbath restrictions into the kingdom
2. nor can we replace our singing or combine it with instrumental music or choruses without violating the authority of Christ
3. all the same, we are to bless God in his congregation of people here
 - a. as Jesus was expelled from Jerusalem and sacrificed upon a cross outside the camp, so we must leave the camps of Judaism and carnality to honor him as our savior (Hebrews 13:10-16)
 - b. this congregation must never change its mission or method to appease the evolving desires of men; it must always exist to magnify the name and will of God and confine its exercises to those things which he has pronounced pleasing to him
 - c. we cannot bless God in this congregation while trampling upon his authority with our innovations and amendments
 1. is God blessed in the congregation of Lutherans who decide that homosexuality is just as good as one man for one woman for life?
 2. is God blessed in the congregation that turns the living temple into a den of merchandise, running country clubs, daycares and bookstores under a tax-free umbrella?

II. Some Applications

A. The Ark of Noah

1. everyone knows the story of Noah and the great flood that occurred so long ago
2. Noah's ark was also a wooden box, but a great deal more because it also promised divine protection and communication
 - a. once Noah had constructed his ark by God's blueprints, he boarded the vessel that would separate him from the majority which would be drowned and lost eternally (Genesis 7:7-12)
 - b. God kept the righteous man from drowning as he purged the Earth and he led him through the waters to safety
3. the New Testament says that Noah was saved through water, that the same substance which destroyed the majority provided the means by which he could sail above the death and survive
4. when we ponder these two arks, we surely desire something similar today

B. The Ark of Christ

1. the ark of the covenant is called as typical of the salvation and communication that God has now provided through his son (Hebrews 9:1-27)
 - a. the ark of Christ is the greater of the two for it is the last and most effective at healing the deepest wounds man knows, those of his soul by sin
 - b. the ark of Christ perfects the conscience (verse 9), makes it clean and white like snow
2. it represents a new covenant with Jesus acting as its high priest, for he has borne our sins and made us ready for salvation when this life is terminated

3. Peter also compares the work and office of Christ to an ark, Noah's (First Peter 3:18-22)
 - a. Jesus was with Noah, that preacher of righteousness, when he rebuked the naysayers of his world, but Christ did not come in the flesh until it was time to inaugurate his covenant and provide for the cleansing of consciences (verse 21)
 - b. the NASV translates this passage in harmony with the rest of the New Testament, making water baptism an appeal to God for a good conscience (Colossians 2:11-13)

C. Answerer of Prayer

1. the fact that God knows our needs does not negate the purpose of prayer, which is to keep us in contact with God (James 5:16)
2. God needs to know that we know when we need mercy and help; like any father, he desires to be loved and needed and consulted and obeyed
3. and like any Father, he gives good things to his children (Matthew 7:7-11)
4. remember that every good and perfect gift comes from the father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning

D. Escapes From Death

1. that cloud above the traveling ark of the covenant showed the way and promised victory
2. God uses his new covenant to direct our steps likewise and give us paths of escape when captivity threatens our faithfulness (First Corinthians 10:12-13)
 - a. temptation is restricted to what you are able to bear
 - b. with every temptation, the way of escape also appears

E. Ascribe Strength To God

1. we know that the ark of the covenant became a item of superstition to the Hebrews who refused to destroy heathenism and instead learned to embrace it
2. the serpent that God used to save them became an idol and they worshiped it and the ark also was treated more like an icon than a reminder of the covenant and presence of God
3. but God is more awesome than his holy places and his power should be acknowledged by his people
 - a. spend some time meditating upon what God has done for us and you will probably not feel so weak, alone and unblessed anymore
 - b. you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you

Conclusion

Clearly, the psalm starts out with reference to the ark, but its message also reminds us that days of the Lord are always on the calendar and may be hastening toward us.

Psalm 69: Save Me, O God

Introduction

Only the twenty-second psalm is quoted more frequently in the New Testament than the sixty-ninth. Psalm 69 is a lamentation of David who thought himself to be in drowning waters up to his neck, but a number of the verses prophetically point to the suffering of the coming Savior. [Read Psalm 69:1-36.] In this lesson, we will examine the circumstances and attitude that cause a person to cry out, “Save me, O God!”

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Desperation (1-12)

1. I do not believe I have cried enough since I was a child to make my throat dry, but I remember well that awful sensation
 - a. usually then I was crying for some trivial reason or because I did not get my way, but for a grown man to cry so much, an awful thing must have occurred
 - b. only grievous sorrow or the death of a loved one could bring on such pain, we might think, but that is not the cause that David gives
2. in reality, we have all had that feeling that we are sinking in deep mire where there is no potential to stand again
 - a. problems at home, at school, at work, in the neighborhood, the community, the nation, the world can all come together to form what seems to be a torrent of anguish
 - b. is it possible then that the very first words out of David’s pen practically ensure that he will overcome?
 1. those words are not: “Why is God allowing this or doing this to me,” but “Save me, O God!”
 2. they are like the words of the apostle Paul (Second Corinthians 11:23-12:10)
3. it seems that Paul never wrote with the mood that David has here, but do you really suppose that he never felt a similar anguish?
 - a. like David, when he was weak, he was sure to be strengthened, for he turned not to trust in men or inwardly to self, but to God
 - b. while it is unwise to shut out your brethren in times of distress—theirs or yours—seeking God’s ear is the wisest course of action you can take
4. hardship is a teacher and it shows us that we do not have the knowledge, strength or endurance to face life alone
 - a. it is not within man to direct his own steps and following a course that relies less and less on God each day will lead to ruin
 - b. God’s grace is sufficient for you and his strength is multiplied when you need it the most and seek it (First Peter 1:3-9)

B. My Prayer Is To You (13-21)

1. as desperate as David is for relief, he still recognizes that God will only answer his prayer in his own time, and not according to the timetable of man
2. there are three reasons that your prayers may not be answered the way you want, when you want
 - a. what you have asked is not to your benefit
 - b. the timing you want is not to your benefit
 - c. your persistence in rebellion against God has turned his ear away from you (Isaiah 59:1-3)
3. God will never abuse us in our prayers and if we come to him in humility, penitence and trust, he will hear
 - a. like Paul’s thorn in the flesh, he may not answer the way we want and when we want, because certain thorns are teachers
 - b. but persistence in prayer also shows God how deep goes your trust in him (Luke 18:1-8)

C. Imprecation (22-28)

1. the imprecatory psalms always ring a little strange in our ears, for we are not accustomed to hearing a man who lived before the covenant of Christ wishing doom upon his enemies
2. while we are taught to pray for them and do them only good, David openly wishes for quick and decisive action against their very lives
3. we should follow after Christ while not faulting David for expressing the emotion of his time in his way (Romans 12:17-21)

D. I Will Praise (29-36)

1. when prayers are answered, remember to say thanks
2. our very meals are sanctified by thankful prayer (First Timothy 4:4-5)
3. every gift should be answered with praise and thanksgiving (Philippians 4:1-7)

II. Some Applications

A. Hated Without A Cause

1. people who hate you because of your faith do so without cause, for your faith is no threat to their persons
 - a. in fact, your faith protects them in that it prevents you from thinking or doing them any harm
 - b. others might follow the code of this world and put self first, but you will look out for other's interests as much as your own
 - c. you won't lie, cheat or steal while others may rationalize and compromise their ethics as it suits their own pleasure
2. still, some who are comfortable in sin and intolerant of anything that might make them feel guilty, will consider you an enemy of their complacency (First Peter 4:12-16)
3. Noah was the enemy of all his generation, for he preached righteousness and built an ark while a complacent world basked in the hideous glory of sin (see Second Peter 2:5)
 - a. suggesting today that there is an objective standard of morality, right and wrong in the lives of actual people, you will become another "ark-itect," labeled judgmental and Pharisaical by the very people you only want to see climb into Christ
 - b. do not be discouraged when you are hated without cause; it merely puts you in the company of Elijah, the apostles and Jesus

B. Zeal For God's House

1. the house of God in this last age is the church of Jesus Christ (First Timothy 3:14-16)
2. in the previous age of fading Judaism, it remained the tangible temple in Jerusalem and Psalm 69:9 was applied to the devotion that Christ had to the house of God (John 2:13-17)
 - a. as every Jew in Jerusalem would claim zeal for the house of God, but disdain for the way Jesus showed it, so millions today will claim to be zealous for the church, but displeased with the way you show it (Romans 10:1-4)
 - b. zeal for God's house means recognizing that there is one church and that it was purchased with the blood of Jesus, who became its only head and lawgiver, thus meaning it should submit to his authority and image and not create its own mission out of human opinion and objectives (Ephesians 3:8-12)

C. Reproach Has Broken My Heart

1. in this state of persecution by men or the devil himself, it is best to remember that you are not the first to be tried
2. verse 21 of this passage is a messianic prophecy about the crucifixion of Christ (John 19:28-30)
 - a. this was the final indignity and the last prophetic utterance he needed to fulfill before his pain could be ended
 - b. as low as we are brought sometimes, bearing crosses is usually only figurative in our discipleship
3. do not let reproach destroy your faith (Acts 5:40-42)

D. Blotted Out of the Book of Life

1. the ultimate punishment upon those who sin is not a jail cell or the gallows, but to be blotted out of the book of life (Exodus 32:30-33)
2. the book of life contains the names all those who are in Christ, whether they lived before, during or after Jesus, and whether they perished as innocent children or were redeemed from sin by Christ's blood (Revelation 20:11-15)

E. God Will Save Zion

1. when all is said and done, God's zeal for his own house will lead him to preserve it until the day of judgment arrives
2. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth."
3. we hope for new heavens and a new Earth, for these around us exist only until the return of Christ; our new home—our new atmosphere and hemisphere is the mansions Christ prepared for us in glory

Conclusion

God will save us!

Psalm 70: Make Haste, O God!

Introduction

The seventieth psalm sounds much like many of the others in David's lyrical collection. Perhaps a little bit too much like the others, for you see it is an almost carbon copy of the last five verses of the fortieth psalm. No doubt, this theme of deliverance from enemies occupied David's mind throughout his reign and words that were comforting before certainly can be again. The seventieth psalm is a plea for immediate assistance and one that we can be heard to repeat often as we feel beleaguered and hopeless. [Read Psalm 70:1-5.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Deliver Me! (70:1)

1. I suppose we have all been in circumstances in which we thought God was not responding to our pleas quickly enough

a. it is impossible to see behind the divine curtain and only a little less difficult to speculate as to our Lord's foreknowledge and wisdom in answering prayer

b. that sometimes makes for frustration, for in our human shortsightedness, the proper remedy can seem clear when in fact, it is not

2. David finds himself once again in that kind of situation, desperate for deliverance and perhaps a little unsure that God grasps the severity of his condition

a. and yet we must remember that God has witnessed ten thousand years of human history and seen everything that has resulted from the introduction of sin into this world

b. he has seen the spread of disease, the hurt of iniquity and the evil that false religion does
c. he has seen, in short, how awful people can be to one another and how merciless and hateful they can be

d. he has seen your condition a thousand times and then some without becoming insensitive to it

e. yet where we are tempted to overreact, God treads calmly, compassionately and with deeper insight as to the future

3. remember in the Old Testament the occasion when Samuel was late in meeting King Saul and the ruler and his people panicked?

a. King Saul unlawfully took Samuel's place as priest and brought the entire kingdom down around him

b. deliverance was on its way, but human impatience and situation ethics defeated it

B. Let Them Be Ashamed (70:2-3)

1. David's enemies not only fought against the king of a mighty nation, but the God who put him upon its throne

a. today, enemies of the cross fight against the citizens of the kingdom of Christ and are no less deplorable than those who troubled David (Philippians 3:17-21)

b. if you live your faith secretly, no one will bother you much about it, but if people know that you are a Christian, you will become a target for the unfaithful who love to find inconsistencies in the faith they despise

2. the key is in living consistently

a. you must never condone in yourself the works you condemn in others

b. when you demand that others show book, chapter and verse for their practices, you must be ready to do the same

c. when no one is looking, your behavior must be as chaste as it would be onstage before the world

C. Rejoice (4-5)

1. no matter what happens day by day and how much evil advances and righteousness is assaulted, the children of God can go to sleep each night secure in Jesus and hopeful of heaven

a. the government can take away your earnings, terrorists can take away national peace, and rivals can take away your prospects, but no one can take away your hope (John 10:27-29)

- b. you can take flight on your own if worldly pressures convince you that God's way is too strait, but no one can steal your faith, so be glad
- 2. every prayer we utter should give praise to God; "Let God be magnified" (Ephesians 3:8-12)
- 3. do you love salvation and look forward to the return of Christ?
 - a. be glad that our new heavens and Earth will be devoid of temptation, death and even tears
 - b. be glad that we are on course to enjoy heaven through God's grace

II. Some Applications

A. Such Urgency

- 1. we do not then dissuade God's people from urgency in their prayers, nor would we recommend they pray less frequently, especially concerning the issues that burden their minds
 - a. prayer should be as daily as Daniel's and as sincere as Christ's
 - b. yet remember that Daniel did not have to increase his prayer pattern to three times daily when he was threatened; he had been that prayerful even in good times, which served to make the hard times more bearable
 - c. whether our savior was praying in the garden or just teaching about prayer on the mount, he was convinced that God was listening and not ignoring his servant
- 2. there is nothing wrong with urgency in our prayer so long as we manage to factor patience into it as well
 - a. faith and prayer should not be damaged when the reply is not quick enough in coming to suit us (Hebrews 4:14-16)
 - b. true, solid faith means trusting that God is attendant to us (First John 5:13-15)
- 3. just remember that sometimes the kindest thing that God can do for us is to say no (Second Corinthians 12:7-10)
 - a. as a parent, you know this well, for you often deny your children's ardent requests because your greater wisdom tells you that it will turn out badly
 - b. sometimes you even allow your children to bear the consequences of their mistakes so that they will learn not to repeat them
 - c. our Father in heaven treats us like his children and sometimes he cannot answer our prayers affirmatively or urgently lest we miss the benefit of overcoming temptation or hardship

B. Turning Them Back

- 1. can we pray that our enemies would be turned back and confused?
- 2. well, certainly, we can pray for our enemies (Romans 12:17-21)
 - a. if they are headed down the wrong road, turning back is the only wise choice they could make and so praying for that is to their benefit, not their harm
 - b. should we wish those who desire our hurt to be confused?
 - 1. after all, they are already confused if they are seeking to harm a saint
 - 2. I think the idea here is to bring their unrighteous plans to nothing and thwart their sinful intentions and that is certainly something to hope for
- 3. we are not wishing for the eternal condemnation of their souls while they are still living and amenable to the gospel call, but praying that evil might fail and that good might prevail (First Peter 3:8-17)

C. Do Not Delay

- 1. we hear David's confession of need: "I am poor and needy"
- 2. how little do we associate those adjectives with the spirit in this age of prosperity and ambition!
 - a. yet the very first beatitude promises the kingdom of heaven to the poor in spirit
 - b. poverty of spirit is the realization of human frailty and the need for divine mercy and guidance; only that realization allows a person to seek salvation beyond this earth
- 3. have faith that God will deliver you and make that allay your fears in the shadow of overwhelming hope (Second Peter 3:10-13)

Conclusion

The seventieth psalm is a plea for immediate assistance and one that we can be heard to repeat often as we feel beleaguered and hopeless.

Psalm 71: In You, I Put My Trust

Introduction

The author of the seventy-first psalm is not identified, beginning a trend that will take us away from the obvious pen of David to the songs of others. This particular work is the lament of a man who prevailed over evil in his youth, but now faces unexpected challenges in his old age. [Read Psalm 71:1-24.] Psalm 71 is a valuable reminder to us that final victory is not secured until God's verdict is pronounced in the day of judgment. The devil will not give up assaulting our souls and neither can we give up fighting back.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Trust (1-6)

1. the psalm begins with immortal words: "In you, O Lord, I put my trust."
 - a. we put our trust in people all the time (airplane pilots, doctors, bankers, spouses, etc.), but never do we trust people with our most valued commodity
 - b. our souls we hold back from such perilous investment, instead reserving them for the stronger hands of God
2. psychologists like to teach physical trust by having a subject fall backward freely into the waiting arms of another, but it is when a person is plunged into the watery grave of baptism that a more implicit trust is shown
 - a. a message is believed and followed; one's eternity is staked upon it (First Thessalonians 2:13)
 - b. baptism is putting one's trust in God (Colossians 2:11-12)
 - c. it says to God it is not within me to direct my own steps and my sins surely prove that and you are ready to quit kicking against the goads and to become submissive to him now
3. such a faith will never be put to shame (Second Timothy 1:8-12)

B. God Is Our Hope (7-13)

1. the psalmist bases his trust on a simple fact—God is his hope (verse 5)
2. the unbeliever lives this life devoid of hope, having no hope for a divine ear to hear his pleas or preserve his soul
3. but no matter how troubled the Christian's life is, hope can burn bright (First Peter 1:3-13)

C. Perseverance (14-24)

1. our psalmist is a graybeard in modern parlance; he has fought many battles and grown closer and closer to his reward, but he is only in the stretch run and the finish line is yet ahead
 - a. to his surprise, the devil has decided to insert hurdles into that stretch run, and nearly exhausted, he must now bound obstacles he thought were all behind him
 - b. I tremble to think of how many Christians have lived faithfully until their old age only to find their strength so sapped that they begin to compromise with error in an attempt to avoid the hurdles they feel unprepared to leap
2. old age gives us the occasion to lay down our arms in exhaustion or anticipation of the end, making us a prime target of the adversary (Hebrews 3:12-4:10)

II. Some Applications

A. God Will Not Fail

1. if that trust is total, it will be assured, but if it is incomplete, it may gradually dwindle to dangerously low levels
2. even Christians can be tempted to reserve a part of their spirits for something in this world
 - a. some lose their faith because of the influence of weak or unbelieving spouses
 - b. others drift away because the cares of this world begin to outweigh eternal glory in their estimations
 - c. some find their trust in God damaged by the hardships of life, blaming him for the work of the tempter
3. when our trust is diminished, it is we who have failed (Hebrews 13:5-6)

4. we are forfeiting eternity when we cease to trust God as implicitly as the psalmist did (Hebrews 10:35-39)

B. Maintaining Trust

1. saving your trust in God from the whispers of the tempter is about keeping your perspective on life farsighted and spiritually-focused
2. we have to learn to put Satan behind us (Mark 8:33-38)
3. if we end up dying with nothing but our souls in tact, we are merely leaving life the way we entered it, and we are fit to return to God forever

C. Hope Continually

1. the psalmist promises in verse 14 to hope continually and to increase his praise
2. if you were out teaching about Jesus and suddenly you were assaulted or maybe thrown into jail and then you sat there for hours with thieves, rapists and murderers, would your hope in God endure (Acts 16:19-25)?
 - a. the apostles' hope was rewarded and divine providence can be a powerful rescuer in this age as well (Philippians 1:19-21)
 - b. as much as we may yearn for release and wish our hope to be fulfilled immediately, perseverance is required (Romans 8:22-25)
3. beyond the seventy-first psalm, the entire Old Testament is useful as a manual on hope's fulfillment: "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).
 - a. Noah's ark, David and Goliath, Samson and Delilah all give us hope
 - b. but they also teach us about the role of faithfulness in maintaining hope (Colossians 1:21-23)

D. Persevering

1. persevering requires that you remain active into your Social Security years
 - a. if you give up all exercise and physical effort, your body will comply and weaken; if you give up mental exercise and study, your mind will comply, and if you introduce a spirit of surrender to your heart, it will comply as well
 - b. do the good deeds you have always done until you just cannot do them anymore; don't be deterred if you do not do them as well as you once did
2. do not grow weary in well-doing (see Second Thessalonians 3:13)
3. seek the Lord and his strength that you may continue (First Chronicles 16:7-13)
4. press on (Philippians 3:12-15)

Conclusion

Psalm 71 reminds us to be faithful until death, to be hopeful always and to place our trust in the Almighty.

Psalm 72: Give The King Your Judgments

Introduction

The seventy-second psalm is the final song of the second book of Psalms. Its immediate application was to the royal court in the day in which it was written, but it also has very clear Messianic overtones. The reign of the Messiah is anticipated by the psalmist for the purity and compassion that contemporary kings never exhibited for long. [Read Psalm 72:1-20.] As we consider this psalm, our minds must be impressed with the kingdom prophecy that we see fulfilled in the church today.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Character of the King (1-4, 12-14)

1. only three kings reigned over the united kingdom of Israel before it divided to create the sovereign state of Judah

a. Saul, David and Solomon sat upon that one throne before Solomon's death allowed Rehoboam and Jeroboam to split the kingdom

b. for the remainder of its existence, Israel had exactly zero kings out of 20 whom scripture describes favorably, instead following murderers, traitors, cowards and usurpers into oblivion at the hands of the Assyrian armies in 721 B.C.

c. Judah was more fortunate, for hers was the stock of David and eight of her 20 monarchs are remembered as being good; yet even they had considerable foibles and weaknesses

2. still, the people of God were never intended to have an earthly ruler in the first place, but they demanded one (First Samuel 8:1-22)

a. Samuel was offended, but it was God who was being rejected by a nation now bent on looking like all the other godless states on Earth

b. even warnings that their king would tax them into poverty and conscript their children into bureaucracy and battle did not dissuade the will of the people

3. we discover then that the kings behaved as God predicted

a. Saul became paranoid and brutal once the battles of his youth were won

b. David indulged his lust and concocted a wicked cover-up to conceal his sins while the young men were risking their lives

c. Solomon turned the palace into a bordello

d. subsequent kings, especially in Israel, introduced idolatry and turned the throne into a dictatorship; even the good kings were unwilling or unable to rid the nation of the high places of Baal and Ashtoreth

4. God's ideal was to continue ruling over them personally, but the simplicity of that pattern was discarded

B. Scope of the Kingdom (5-11)

1. the psalmist describes a kingdom that would not be broken and a king who would reign for as long as the sun and moon did

2. he would number his subjects from every corner of the globe

3. his power would be insurmountable

C. Wondrous Things (15-20)

1. way back in Genesis 12, God made three promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3)

a. that he would make of the man a great nation, which Israel certainly was

b. that he would give him the land of Canaan, which he certainly did

c. that through him all the nations of the Earth would be blessed, which occurred when Jesus brought the light to Jew and Gentile alike (Romans 10:10-13)

2. we, who have lived in the last 2000 years and all who will live until the coming of Christ, reside in the last days of this planet and this process

II. Some Applications

A. The Messiah

1. the seventy-second psalm is billed as coming from the pen of Solomon and almost certainly he did not realize how the people would plead for a merciful king in the years to follow his demise

2. his words indicate a futile hope for a fair earthly king, even as we pray for a godly president today, but the words of this psalm also foretell the reign of the Messiah

a. the Messiah is the king's Son who would rule with righteousness, justice and peace (Jeremiah 23:1-8)

b. the monarch they awaited would sit on the throne of David over a restored kingdom and rule according to the principles of godliness, not self-service or carnality

3. he did not come for hundreds of years and when he arrived, those waiting for him did not recognize him anymore, but he did come

a. he is righteous (Hebrews 7:25-28)

b. he is just, as both Peter and Ananias taught about him in Acts 3:14 and 22:14

c. he brings peace with God to men (Luke 2:8-14)

4. compassion was to be a hallmark of his rule (Isaiah 61:1-3)

a. and indeed Jesus Christ was compassionate (Matthew 9:35-38)

b. his kingdom is not "eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17)

B. We Have Such A Kingdom

1. Daniel spoke of the same kingdom and even pinpointed its establishment during the time of the Roman Caesars (Daniel 2:44-45)

2. Jesus, the Messiah, came preaching the gospel of the kingdom with a mission to establish it (Matthew 4:13-17)

a. Jewish resistance and Roman might did not deter him and at his death, he said to his father that he had completed all things that had been given to him to do (see John 17:4)

b. the nature of the kingdom caught most off guard, for it was not something like ancient Israel or contemporary Rome; it was the church of Christ (Matthew 16:15-28)

3. her citizens are conveyed into the kingdom from every nation on Earth (see Colossians 1:13) and it will not be shaken (see Hebrews 12:28)

a. this kingdom will stand until the sun and moon are destroyed on Judgment Day and the redeemed enter into a new heavens and Earth beyond the clouds

b. even now, Jesus sits at the right hand of God, King of kings and Lord of lords

C. Filled With Glory

1. this final king to sit on David's throne does wondrous things (Ephesians 3:14-21)

2. with thankfulness in our hearts, we should fill this world with his glory

Conclusion

What a wonderful king we serve and what a remarkable kingdom we comprise.

Psalm 73: Truly God Is Good

Introduction

Like the questions of Job and Jeremiah and the conclusions of Solomon in Ecclesiastes, the seventy-third psalm considers the matter of why the wicked prosper and the righteous are troubled. The writer, one of David's chief musicians, Asaph, confesses that he had nearly stumbled spiritually because of the apparent contradiction in divine law, but then he came to understand the mirage crafted by material life. [Read Psalm 73:1-28.] In this installment of our series, we are reminded that this life is not about this life; it is primarily and overwhelmingly about the next. What seems to be prosperity in this life is only temporary and the real reward is waiting in the judgment.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Wicked Prosper (1-17)

1. Asaph begins with a proverbial statement, "Truly God is good to Israel," which seemed to be contradicted by his own experience and observations about life

a. he considered Israel to be good, if for no other reason than that they were Israel, and when he saw her or her people afflicted by evil without and within, he could not comprehend how God permitted it to continue

b. human reasoning concludes that the pure in heart should receive the most bountiful blessings on Earth and that the wicked should be instantly chastened for every transgression, and yet it does not but rarely happen that way

2. Asaph was trying to live a good moral life, but he saw his neighbors cutting corners, taking advantage, bending the rules and assumed that the people who lived on the hill had gotten there in spite of or because of their own wicked plots

a. he became envious of those proud people, so prospered in iniquity and unconcerned about the alleged spiritual consequences

b. Asaph got to a point that many still reach when they see that punishment is at least deferred, if not eliminated—he nearly went past envy to emulation

c. and all this happens because men assume that God must use this life to sort out the sheep and the goats, when in fact, he has promised to accomplish that in the moments just beyond this life

B. Then I Understood Their End (18-28)

1. houses burn, cars rust, boats sink, money is spent, youth is fleeting

2. all the things that seem so tangible and permanent to us are in fact transitory and little more than a dream

3. we judge God and base the depth of our faith on the level of physical prosperity rather than spiritual and thus end up with neither in the end

4. the prosperity of the wicked is a slippery slope, for trust in riches disappoints

5. pride still goes before a fall and when that last trumpet sounds upon the wicked, the accounts will finally be settled and in a way that will surely satisfy the righteous man who made do with only two cars in this hard life

a. now it is not impossible for a rich man to be right with God, but riches are a terrible temptation to resort to spiritual self-sufficiency because of material ability

b. some yearn to get rich and when they get rich, all they think about is staying rich and getting richer and not much time is left over for weightier matters of a life that is yet to come

c. if the early disciples could see us now, they would think that we are all rich and we might become suspicious in Asaph's former consideration

d. are we on that slippery slope and don't even know it?

II. Some Applications

A. A Faith-Altering Question

1. "Why do the wicked prosper" is a question that has concerned mankind since his inception, and which was reinvigorated by the atrocities of Sept. 11, 2001

a. when Job was afflicted by Satan, his friend, Bildad, assumed that Job was being punished for some transgression, that the wicked man was finally being exposed and chastened (Job 8:1-7, 20-22)

- b. Habakkuk could not believe that God would use the more wicked Chaldeans to punish the somewhat less wicked Hebrews, but he did (Habakkuk 1:12-14)
- c. even the early disciples of Christ believed that a man born blind was suffering a punishment either for his own prenatal wickedness or his parents' wrongdoing, but they were wrong
- 2. now today, we continue to witness the prosperity of some wicked and the hardship of some righteous, but it is not as unbalanced as we like to think
 - a. the seeming disparity is exacerbated by our tendency to exaggerate and dramatize; many righteous are prospered and many wicked face great hardship
 - b. still, we also tend to want swift and powerful justice, at least upon people other than ourselves, and when it does not seem to come, we wonder why

B. The Arrogance of Success

- 1. it is the arrogance of success (James 5:1-8)
- 2. Asaph saw it in his wicked, prosperous neighbors and it bugged him; he wanted either to see them without their gain or himself with it, preferably both, and his faith was hanging in the balance
 - a. it seemed that the wicked all lived to a ripe, old age and died of natural causes, not from poverty, hunger or wasting disease
 - b. it seemed that every day, he had some trouble to handle, but that they lived carefree
 - c. although God had condemned oppression, pride and violence, they exercised both with impunity, not even fearing God a little
 - d. their eyes bulged with abundance, their barns burst the roof and their closets could barely contain all their possessions
 - e. the lack of immediate, apparent consequence influenced others to buy into this hedonistic philosophy; they began to wonder blasphemously and shortsightedly, "How will God know?"
- 3. now Asaph has seen so many go over to that side that he is beginning to wonder if he was living clean in vain; is it perhaps possible to violate God's law and be rewarded for it without consequence (Mark 10:23-31)?
- 4. but just then, he does a wise thing, perhaps as a last resort—he goes to God, like Habakkuk, Jeremiah and Job did and gets his answer
 - a. the whole duty of man is to fear God and keep his commandments and we should not presume that the importance that we attach to material things is imposed upon God as well
 - b. we must not demand that he parcel out his material blessings as if they were the truest reward for good living, or we are slowly sacrificing the attitude that leads to good living
 - c. there are things more important than big houses and third cars (Luke 12:8-34)
 - 1. in the midst of a beautiful message about the Holy Spirit and discipleship, this fellow interrupts because he wants his brother to share an inheritance with him
 - 2. do you see how obsessive and foolish that is, but also how often it is repeated, when spiritual concerns take a back seat to physical ones and we judge God based upon how he grants material gifts?
- 3. God causes rain and sunshine to fall on both the just and the unjust and it is not our place to demand that he tip those scales in our favor or else, we'll walk; the judgment is coming

C. God Is My Strength

- 1. without falling into the arrogance of spiritual wealth, we ought to rest easier when we possess all the blessings of Christ Jesus in faith (see Ephesians 1:3)
- 2. we shall dwell in heavenly mansions, walk streets of gold and bask in the reward of a life lived well, lived by faith and not by deceptive sight (First Peter 1:3-9)
- 3. despite our doubts and curiosities about such matters, we can return to stability and genuine trust in God and he will embrace us like always

Conclusion

Why do the wicked prosper? Who cares? Their prosperity is brief and deceptive; ours is eternal and genuine.

Psalm 74: Why Have You Cast Us Off?

Introduction

Commentators are much divided over the circumstances behind the seventy-fourth psalm. Some ascribe it to a prophet named Asaph speaking of the future fall of Jerusalem, while others go ahead and attribute it to a contemporary of the Assyrian war in Israel or the later Babylonian invasion of Judah. The particular mood of the psalmist is not altered by any of these accounts; he is forlorn and forsaken for he feels that God has cast his people off without hope of redemption. [Read Psalm 74:1-23.] Psalm 74 teaches a difficult lesson about the consequences of apostasy, the injustice of blaming God for them and a plea for mercy's renewal.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Petition (1-3)

1. whatever disaster preceded the writing of this psalm, it was not God's fault, but that of the Hebrew people who forsook him and tempted him and broke his patience
 - a. yet Asaph describes them in the most benign of terms, like sheep grazing innocently in the pasture until God Himself unleashed a wildfire upon their precious carcasses
 - b. now the survivors wander and wonder why God has torn down the fold and dried up the brook
 - c. it does not occur to some even after a prophesied disaster has occurred that their sins are responsible
2. and it is easy enough for the saints today to mock and malign these wayward Hebrews, who had seen so much from God and turned to the devil anyway
 - a. the trouble with such arrogance as that, however, is that we have seen more through the ministry of Christ and the revelation of the Comforter
 - b. if we deem them to be without excuse, we are more so and yet instances of covenant abandonment are more than unknown to our blessed generation (Second Timothy 4:9-10a)
 - c. if bowing down to Baal was a crime worthy of death, crawling back to the Adversary is even worse (Hebrews 10:19-39)
3. and yet Asaph's language—"Why have you cast us off forever"—also bears the exaggeration and dramatization common to man
 - a. it may have been so bad that a few days felt like forever, but a man's entire life is not even a fraction of forever
 - b. dramatized exaggeration is man's attempt to make the worst of a bad situation
 1. he cries out, "I wish I had never been born," or "I wish I were dead," or "my life is over"
 2. in reality, his suffering may be deep, but it cannot be as thorough as that of the Hell he is flirting with in his self-defeating, self-pitying discussion
 3. in hell, the worm is never satisfied and the fire is never quenched, the punishment truly is forever
 - c. if we find ourselves feeling cast off, or cut off from God's fellowship, the solution is not to abandon hope, but to renew it by returning to our first love (James 4:1-10)

B. Complaint (4-11)

1. Isaiah had heard the worshipers sing "Holy, Holy, Holy" in the temple, but now it was the sound of enemies roaring, trampling and desolating
2. this was Asaph's truest evidence that God had forsaken them and the only way the Lord could prove his love would be by removing the invaders
3. in his shortsightedness, Asaph could not see how God was using the invaders to punish and purify his nation so that it could become useful again

C. Trust (12-23)

1. right on cue, Asaph is reminded of God's bounty in years gone by—his creation and his majesty and authority

2. he pleads for God to respect the covenant in verse 20, but God had never failed to respect the Mosaic covenant with Israel

a. the day did come in which the Jews' infidelity compelled God to divorce them and the covenant was terminated by their sin, however (Hebrews 8:6-13)

b. yet when Jesus came to mediate this new covenant, many Jews began to feel as if they had been cast off forever, despite their own engraved invitation to accept the new covenant of Christ

1. in Romans 11, Paul speaks to the Gentile signatories to the new covenant and tells them to pray for the addition of as many Jews as can be converted, but at the same time, not to become arrogant to the point that they forget the possibility of their own apostasy (Romans 11:17-23)

2. Paul's heart's desire continued to be the salvation of Israel, but that could only be accomplished through the preaching and acceptance of the gospel of Christ

II. Some Applications

A. This Mount Zion

1. Asaph speaks of verse two of the Mount Zion of old, where God communicated with ancient Israel; he uses the place as a metaphor for the nation which he figured God had forgotten about

2. that Mount Zion was attacked and afflicted and annihilated by 70 A.D. and God has had no special relationship with her since

3. if there is a Mount Zion on God's mind today, it is spiritual Israel, the church of Christ (Hebrews 12:18-29)

a. again, we are put on notice that we are blessed to a greater degree than the characters from which we learn so much about apostasy, and, therefore, we are responsible for so much more

b. Jesus said, "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48)

4. that unwelcome, unpleasant sensation that tells us that God seems to have cast us off may be indicating a declining zeal or a flirtation with worldliness, but in the end, both will put us on a road toward a consuming fire

B. The Trouble With Shortsightedness

1. the real trouble with shortsightedness is the ability to forget the blessings of the past and the promises of the future while being buried under the temporary burden of the present

2. shortsightedness causes faith to stagnate and stunts its growth (Second Peter 1:2-11)

3. our shortsightedness places awesome importance on matters of minutia every day, and sometimes we fail to see the blessing that can come through perseverance

4. Paul's thorn in the flesh was not immediately removed because ultimately this weakness reminded him of his humility and dependence upon God; it made him stronger in the long run

a. our shortsightedness makes it hard to see the benefit from God's chastening us as his children (Hebrews 12:11-14)

b. it is hard to count it all joy when falling into various trials, but hopefully afterward, we can persevere and gain greater power of endurance

C. Hoping For The Promises of the Future

1. before he puts down his pen, Asaph renews his petition for deliverance in verses 22-23

2. God has a stake in the affairs of his church and his people and they will not be disappointed

3. yet the worst thing we can imagine is being cast away from God forever (Second Thessalonians 1:3-12)

4. our earthly affairs may suffer at times, but if we can confidently say that we are going to heaven, they should be easier to bear

Conclusion

Psalm 74 teaches a difficult lesson about the consequences of apostasy, the injustice of blaming God for them and a plea for mercy's renewal.

Psalm 75: We Give Thanks

Introduction

The seventy-fifth psalm is yet another from the pen of Asaph, who almost appears to be trying to compete with David for most prolific poet. After so many Davidic psalms and so many common themes, it is refreshing to analyze the works of a different perspective. It is also rewarding to reach the halfway point of this long series after six and one quarter years. [Read Psalm 75:1-10.] The seventy-fifth psalm is somewhat difficult to classify, but its meaning is made clear in the opening verse. Asaph is expressing the gratitude of a people who humbly submitted themselves to God and were rewarded with rescue from the arrogant and seemingly invincible enemy. Asaph then provides a reminder to modern generations of the wisdom of serving God in faith and thankfulness.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Salutation (1)

1. the absence of God's audible voice in burning bushes or quaking mountains causes so many people to doubt his existence and even some Christians to question his presence or interest in them
2. it is dissatisfying to resign oneself to the fact that God now speaks to man only through his inspired word, and that is a shame
 - a. when we listen to those who claim a modern direct line with the Almighty, their reports are either fantastic, out of harmony with scripture, or both
 - b. being led away by modern day tongues speakers and prophets is a path to error and apostasy
3. but, no doubt, everyone of us has a desire to know with certainty that God is real, present and interested in our affairs
 - a. the psalmist claims that the wondrous works of God declare his proximity and affection for his children (Psalm 19:1-6)
 - b. indeed, David understood the marvelous design of creation to be unimpeachable evidence of a masterful designer (Psalm 8:1-4)
 - c. the apostle Paul concluded that the evidence of design in creation made every man accountable for the search for its designer (see Romans 1:20)
4. creation does not tell us what God's will is, but that God is
 - a. by virtue of his fingerprints upon the Grand Canyon, the tree in your front yard and even the complex systems of your body and mind, we must know that God is near
 - b. but if it is true that the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much, then the answer to our prayers is a silent, but divine communication
 1. the trouble we encounter when we hope for some sign of God's interest is that we listen for a mighty, rushing wind or an earthquake and completely overlook the still, small voice that God uses in gently answering prayer and providentially supplying all of our needs and some of our wants
 2. how many times, for instance, do we discover exactly the answer that we need in our Bible reading or find relief in the arms of a fellow disciple?
 3. God is real, is present and is interested

B. Stiff Necks (2-8)

1. we sing the song "In his Time," but I wonder how many of us sing it hypocritically
2. we are frequently dissatisfied with God's timing in the present, but blessed by it in retrospect
3. Israel was dissatisfied with God's timing when it came to the journey to Canaan, for they wanted to be there immediately, but in their state of weakened faith, they were unprepared to fight the Philistines and unfit to trample upon the promised land
4. it took God 40 years to find the time right for a conquest, but by then, Israel was ready

C. The Horns of the Righteous (9-10)

1. why do some Christians lose their passion for worship?
 - a. not only have they overlooked the physical blessings of creation, but the daily blessings of food, clothing, shelter and benign diversions

- b. moreover, the selfless sacrifice of the son of God upon an anguished cross has lost its appeal
 - c. heaven either seems like a universal inevitability or an impossible illusion
2. while such a decline is lamentable, it is made worse by the opinion of God (Hebrews 10:24-31)

II. Some Applications

A. Thanksgiving

1. our communication with God should be completely tangible and it should be marked with thanksgiving (Philippians 4:4-7)
2. it is not silly to be thankful for the blessings of God's creation for whatever man has done to pollute them with sin, they remain a beautiful expression of his power and glory
3. there is enough in every day to be thankful for that there would hardly seem to be enough hours to express it, but we ought to try anyway

B. Lifting Up The Horn

1. Asaph describes the proud as "lifting up the horn on high ... with a stiff neck"
2. an animal's horn was raised in those days to signify power and pride, which usually spilled over into abuse of power and arrogance
3. the stiff neck results from holding one's nose in the air and looking down upon the rest of humanity as inferior (Deuteronomy 10:12-22)
 - a. when we fall into the trap of envying the prosperity or pleasure of the wicked, it is helpful to remember that such things are but imaginary and temporary, anchors in sand and silt
 - b. God declares himself in the execution of his word, which promises to sort out the righteous from the wicked in the last day
 - c. but his word also warns that rejecting his wisdom in this life will lead to spiritual decay, moral bankruptcy and even physical affliction and who can argue when it becomes clear that following his will would prevent the heartbreak of divorce, the abuse of our children and deadly diseases like AIDS?
4. when it seems that God is not granting our petitions as quickly as we would hope, know that he is only protecting us, not provoking us (Second Corinthians 12:7-11)

C. Exaltation

1. that arrogant stiff neck is often directed at people of faith and the gospel (Acts 7:51-60)
2. not only can lives be threatened in certain parts of this world, but anywhere popularity, livelihood and academic standing can be made pawns in the devil's assault on the faith he despises
3. we might look for relief to the idol of compromise, but it is a holy God who puts down evil and exalts the humble, not some convenient idol (James 4:1-7)
 - a. few of us are familiar with drinking the dregs of wine, but many of us have had the unpleasant experience of drinking a cup of coffee in which the grounds have settled
 - b. what an awful moment to find those dregs upon our tongues and lodging in our throats!
 - c. that is the bitterness of the moment we find ourselves enemies of God and facing his wrath when we could have remained faithful and found victory instead

D. Horns

1. Asaph closes by quoting God who promises to remove the horns of the wicked and exalt those of the righteous
2. a bull with its horns removed is suddenly much less terrifying than it was before, for it is humbled and weakened
3. "And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:12).

Conclusion

Baptism is not often enough seen as an act of ultimate humility, but it is. We give thanks to God for our savior and then humble ourselves in his mighty hand by submitting ourselves to his plan, a plan held up to ridicule by billions of people. True gratitude for the offer of grace does not wait for some more convenient day but expresses itself in immediate obedience.

Psalm 76: God Is Known

Introduction

Dovish Christians sometimes bristle at songs like “Onward Christian Soldiers,” hating the notion of war and perhaps not realizing that every saint is called to a battle, not against men or nations, but against a tempter with no leanings toward peace. Psalm 76 is a poetic reaction to God leading ancient Judah to military victory; hers were physical and ours must be fought upon a spiritual plane with physical ramifications. [Read Psalm 76:1-12.] In this installment of this series on the Psalms, we will take a look at our battle and find renewed resolution in God’s record of victory.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. God In Battle (1-3)

1. the early history of the Old Testament is all about battle, conquest and defense, as the infant pilgrim nation of Israel set out to enter the land God had promised their patriarch, Abraham
2. Israel learned that when she followed God’s law and fought by faith, victory was invariably hers; but when she tried to cut corners or craft battle plans on her own, she lost
3. Israel learned that no victory was won without God on her side (Judges 7:1-8, 19-25)
 - a. the original size of Israel’s army may have been enough to convince the people that they had won the battle without God, so the Lord reduced their size to a ridiculous level
 - b. first, God eliminated everyone who really did not want to be there anyway and the number of cowards reached 22,000 who returned home
 - c. then, God eliminated everyone who was willing to sacrifice vigilance for a drink of water by putting down their weapons to drink and only 300 men remained
 - d. there is no way short of a miracle that 300 Hebrews could defeat the 120,000 member Midianite army

B. The Wrath of God (4-10)

1. earlier in Israel’s history, while Moses still led the people, God’s anger had burned hot against them because they distrusted him and tested him with sin and idolatry
2. eventually, his anger compelled him to punish them with disinheritance (Numbers 32:10-15)
3. God’s anger was not expressed in this extreme way at the very first, but he patiently persevered through Israel’s sin until it became clear that they would never repent
4. God’s anger burned against Lot’s wife very quickly because she disobeyed a command with immediate consequences attached to it; Ananias and Sapphira met with a similar fate, but today, the wrath of God is difficult to identify, except that it is being stored up for the day of judgment

C. Making Vows (11-12)

1. the psalmist closes with an admonition to make vows to God and pay them
2. this is an admonition that can be abused by money hungry preachers, but if we can learn anything from it, it is that in view of God’s blessing upon us until now, we ought to commit ourselves to him completely
3. God is so committed to us that he sent his son to die in our stead and now it is our turn to vow faithfulness to him in all that we do
4. confession, repentance and baptism form a promise to walk by faith, to rise above temptation and to maintain one’s purity in life (James 1:22-27)

II. Some Applications

A. Our Battle Is Pitched

1. we must get over our aversion to battlefield analogies and calls to fight, for they are not intended to bring harm to mankind but to defend ourselves against a wily adversary (Ephesians 6:10-13)
2. Jesus, after all, is the captain of our salvation, a military rank putting him in authority over our redeemed company
 - a. we are not to be cowardly soldiers, nor lacking in personal vigilance but few and mighty like Gideon’s light brigade (Second Timothy 2:1-4)

b. we must be brave and vigilant because our enemy is wily and merciless, and we cannot defeat him on our own

1. some claim that they can overcome this world without being an active part of a local church, but that is the same as walking away from the battlefield at the first opportunity

2. others believe that their salvation is so secure that they need not pay it any attention and so they give up any vigilance about temptation and false teaching, just like the soldiers who put down their arms to drink water

3. such actions always disqualify the Christian soldier from profitable service

3. our battle is often with ideas, notions and theories that lead men into sin and the church into apostasy and if we sue for a truce on “sub-scriptural” grounds, we become the devil’s prisoners of war (Second Corinthians 10:3-6)

4. instead, we ought to be armed and armored for spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:14-18)

B. In Judah, God Is Known

1. the people were to tell and retell stories like this one and we are wise to review them as well, that we might understand the power of our God

2. in order for God’s name to be great in your house, it will have to be used—in prayer, in song, in conversation, and never in vain (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

C. The Wrath of Man and God

1. the psalmist says in verse 10 that, “surely the wrath of man shall praise you”

a. the things that make God angry should inspire us passionately as well

b. Jesus cleared out the temple on two occasions upon finding it turned into a den of merchandise because he was angry

c. but going overboard on trifling matters does not make our anger praise him (James 1:19-21)

2. but the psalmist also acknowledges in that verse that with the remainder of wrath, God will prepare himself

a. this old world is being prepared for God’s wrath against man’s corruption of it (Second Peter 3:1-13)

b. you only separate yourself from the object of God’s wrath by renouncing the perversion of life and the Earth in the blood of Christ, but be careful, for a day will come when repentance will no longer be possible (Hebrews 12:14-24)

D. God Is Awesome

1. the psalmist concludes by arguing that even the kings of the Earth will recognize the power of God

2. the wise ones will and the foolish ones will try to reign on their own, believing they can be effective without divine counsel and providence

3. we, as rulers over so many blessings, must reign wisely also, submitting our lives to God’s wisdom and using our talents and gifts to greater glory than self-promotion (Romans 12:3-8)

Conclusion

Psalm 76 is a call to arms. Let every saint put on the whole armor of God and be prepared to stand fast in truth and righteousness.

Psalm 77: I Cried Out

Introduction

The seventy-seventh psalm is another in a series of poems by Asaph. Like the one before it, Psalm 77 appeals to God's history with Israel in strengthening this man's personal resolve to press on in life despite current hardships. It is a different work, however, in that the author pines away for several verses in apparent abandonment before realizing that God is yet present and concerned for him. [Read Psalm 77:1-20.] Psalm 77 is for every person who has ever lay awake on his bed at night, unable to sleep and uneasy about the day to come. It answers the complain of every person who has ever poured his heart out to God in hopes of immediate widespread relief, only to find that more perseverance is still required.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. An Overwhelmed Spirit (1-3)

1. the New Testament encourages fervent prayer and Asaph's cries had the quality of fervor
2. he is a man pleading first for only an audience, but having received that, he now needs the answer he craves
3. Asaph is in bad shape, for his soul cannot be comforted, remembering God only troubles him and his spirit is constantly overwhelmed
 - a. perhaps there is a wrestling match inside his mind, with alternate theories exchanging the upper hand
 - b. for a while, he is content to wait for God's answer and strengthen himself in the process, but a little time later, he is racked by worry again, worry that his perseverance will never be rewarded with relief

B. Eyes Wide Open (4-6)

1. so troubled is Asaph that he dreams of a better, former time, when his nights were filled with merriment and contentment
2. now his eyelids will not close because of the terror of the coming day
 - a. he is guilty of the process that troubles many of us, the overanalyzing, micromanaging of every issue that arises
 - b. his spirit's diligent search may be a reason for his pain or a solution to it, but he has already temporarily rejected the cure, the comfort a soul receives from its God and from the knowledge that this world is not all that there is

C. Will the Lord Cast Off Forever? (7-9)

1. has God forgotten to be gracious?
 - a. we would honestly have to admit this sickening feeling at times in the past, when happiness was temporarily replaced by despair
 - b. did we really expect to receive only good things from the Lord and not experience some hard times as well?
2. it is our inability to count our blessings effectively that causes us to minimize God's providence in our lives and to go through these episodes of feeling forlorn
 - a. a person who has enough food to eat and a place to sleep and even fine companions can end the day in complaint because there was not more
 - b. God has not forgotten to be gracious, but into every life a little pain must come; it is not forever unless you make it so!

D. Declaration of Strength (10-15)

1. here is why reading the Old Testament so wonderfully augments the study of the New Testament—the true stories of God's power over nature and evil and through good is played out in inspiring drama
2. in the midst of his despair, the psalmist is able to consider God's deeds in Israel's history books and take courage from the past, for God changes not
3. we can read of Noah and Jonah, of Samson and David and see how faith overcomes

E. Like A Flock (16-20)

1. our inspired writer closes with images of God's flock traveling to Canaan behind his presence
2. he led them like his flock behind shepherds like Moses and they received the land of promise
3. when gloom threatens, remember the promises and that God will not fail; if you are part of his flock, the land of promise is ahead and there is no good reason to shrink back

II. Some Applications

A. God Hears The Penitent

1. David wrote in Psalm 55:22: "Cast your burden on the Lord, And he shall sustain you; he shall never permit the righteous to be moved."
2. in sleepless night or anxious day, we can boldly go to the Lord and seek comfort (Hebrews 4:11-16)
 - a. no problem is too great or too small, if it is really troubling us, to take to the Lord, bearer of burdens, whose yoke is easy and who gives rest to men's souls
 - b. Christ can sympathize with our weaknesses for he was also tempted, yet knows better the way to overcome such anxieties
3. when you are feeling forsaken, it may be past time to examine your discipleship for genuineness (Second Corinthians 13:1-6)
 - a. the Bible says that God will never leave or forsake you
 - b. make certain that sin has not caused you to forsake him and to lose the right of prayer until you are restored (Isaiah 59:1-3)

B. Things Written Before

1. Asaph discovered the value of historical scripture in bringing encouragement (Romans 15:3-6)
2. those stories in the old book are fantastic, but true, and the theme is always divine, providential blessing upon the children of God
3. there is always an objective that is beyond this world, that can only be destroyed if an individual complies with the tempter
 - a. acquaint yourself with the scriptures so that you can identify with certain characters or events depending upon your own character and circumstances from time to time
 - b. when feeling reluctant, learn from Jonah; when feeling depressed, learn from Elijah; when feeling doubtful, learn from Sarah

C. Perseverance

1. once you have remembered some of those things in God's past, it is time to forget some things from your own (Philippians 3:1-15)
2. I find myself from time to time recognizing my own current character flaws or lamenting the mistakes of the past; one I can do something about and the other I cannot
 - a. once you have learned from your own history, it is time to let it go and move on
 - b. the past can be a destroyer once it ceases to be a teacher and becomes a pessimistic burden
3. you have need of perseverance and the devil wants to destroy that in the process of trial (First Corinthians 15:1-2, 58)
 - a. while God is trying to increase your faith through allowing it to be tried, the devil will whisper the things that Asaph heard: "God is not listening; God does not love you; God does not care."
 - b. know that he is the father of lies and resist him (James 4:7)

D. Leading The Flock Home

1. like the flock of Israel traveling to Canaan, we are a band of pilgrims just passing through (Hebrews 13:20-22)
2. with such an objective as an eternal Canaan, we can never be led astray by the trials of life or by doubts that God can deliver on his promise (Hebrews 6:13-20)

Conclusion

Remember Psalm 77 in times of despair, even upon your sleepless bed at night.

Psalm 78: Give Ear to My Law

Introduction

The seventy-eighth psalm provides a fitting succession from its predecessor, in which the suffering psalmist, Asaph, had rediscovered trust in God's providence by rehearsing his history with his people. Psalm 78 reviews the history of Israel with God from enslavement in Egypt to the reign of King David. The reader is encouraged to avoid rebellion and give ear to God's law and his promises. [Read Psalm 78:1-72.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Psalmist's Purpose (1-8)

1. Old Testament parables differed sometimes from their New Testament counterparts, in that they illustrated truth with a narrative account instead of a natural observation

2. the parable that Asaph begins here calls upon the testimony of God's historic dealings with Israel as evidence of his power

3. he sets a precedent of using these narratives to teach the children and the young of every generation to "set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments" (verse 7)

4. at the same time, Asaph acknowledges that his own generation has not always succeeded in those objectives, making the task of teaching the young all the more vital, but difficult

B. God's Care In The Wilderness (9-41)

1. Asaph stands astounded in the southern kingdom of Judah that his brethren in the north had disavowed God's covenant and rebelled in spite of the wonders they had seen at his hand

2. they had trudged through the parted Red Sea and followed a cloud by day and fire by night, receiving manna from the sky and water from sundered rocks along the way

3. with all this evidence of God's abiding presence, it would be stunning to see much apostasy and yet the falling away was actually widespread, as the fathers tested God and doubted him

4. his fury was kindled at what amounted to their unbelief and finally he punished them

5. still they sinned and the only repentance they could muster was a halfhearted flattery

C. Egyptian Plagues (42-53)

1. the plagues should have been enough to prove God's love, but Israel resisted and wanted more

2. even the distinction that he made between Egypt and Israel in the Red Sea did not convince

D. The Judges Period (54-72)

1. they soon reverted to idolatry and built altars to the heathen gods

2. God cast off the northern kingdom and pinned his plans in the South, choosing David out of the fields to shepherd his people toward the coming of grace in Christ

II. Some Applications

A. Telling To The Generation To Come

1. some parents today believe that it is best to withhold religious instruction from one's children and simply permit them to commence their own search when they reach young adulthood

a. that sounds sweet and politically correct and it is just what the devil would you to believe

b. the truth is, all people should and most people will make their own religious decisions, but if you withhold doctrine from them in their youth, it will not create a harmless spiritual void ready to be filled by the right thing when they become teenagers

2. the devil will seize the opportunity created by your inactivity and fill the void with a message twice as ugly as the one that caused you to withhold instruction

a. the devil will not respect your decision and insistence that your children be exempt from moral decisions until you think they are ready

b. wisdom says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

3. fathers are commanded to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of Christ and giving the devil and this world a decade-long head start is spiritual neglect
 - a. Timothy was a young man of integrity because his mother and grandmother had schooled him in the scriptures from the time he was a youth (see Second Timothy 1:3-6)
 - b. if you are not engaged in the spiritual and moral instruction of your children, it is time to make up for lost time (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

B. Forgetting God's Works Is The First Step To Apostasy

1. never in history has so rich a generation felt so poor
 - a. the pilgrims actually wished to return to slavery, so materialistic was their thinking
 - b. when we discount the blessings which God has given us and demand more and better every day, we make ourselves out to be no better than they
2. you are where you are today because of a thousand blessings upon your head; if you are in the grace of God, then you are better blessed than the richest sinner in town
3. forgetting to count your blessings is often the first step toward apostasy (Second Peter 1:2-4)
 - a. there are a million people who would gladly trade places with anyone here and exchange their poverty and misery for what you mistake for hardship
 - b. if your lot in life bothers you so much that you consider forsaking God over it, then you are not ready for anything better yet anyway (Second Peter 1:5-15)
4. Asaph commented that the pilgrims had been fed angels' food in the wilderness and if you have partaken of Christ, you have enjoyed a delicacy far superior; why would you risk that?

C. Craving Can Kill You

1. the pilgrims were daily troubled by their cravings for the meager sustenance of slavery as they tired of the daily provision of God in the wilderness
2. that craving for Egyptian leeks and onions became one of the first traveling idols that Israel carried with her to Canaan
3. a craving that makes us complain to or about God is an idol, a rival (Proverbs 30:7-9)
 - a. can you be content and satisfied with what you have now?
 - b. if not, you are not ready for anything more and I hope you don't get it
 - c. if so, whether or not you increase in this life's riches will be immediately and ultimately inconsequential and you will know the peace of Christ that surpasses understanding, especially the understanding of those trapped in the rat race

D. False Faith

1. when Israel was punished for her cravings, she felt compelled to answer with penance, but all she could muster was a false flattery and incomplete conversion
2. we have seen enough fake sorrow and incomplete conversion among those calling themselves Christians to readily recognize the Lord's disappointment with it
3. their hearts were not steadfast with God and they quickly returned to unfaithful behavior, trying the patience of God until it was exhausted at last
 - a. there is a difference between godly sorrow and being sorry you got caught (Second Corinthians 7:1-13a)
 - b. God is sharp enough to recognize the difference and withhold reward from those who are merely going through the motions with their hearts detached from their efforts

E. Skillful Guidance

1. Asaph's psalm ended on a positive note, as the scheme of salvation rolled forward with the aid of faithful men and in spite of the complaints of Hebrews living this life for the sake of this life
2. God promised them faithful shepherds like David and he was simply typical of the Chief Shepherd that was coming to bring grace to Israel and beyond (First Peter 2:21-25)

Conclusion

Through his parable, Asaph warned the old and young in Israel to avoid the rebellion and indifference that cursed their fathers. We, too, are warned to extol God's will day and night and to follow in it with genuine and zealous faith.

Psalm 79: O God The Nations Have Come

Introduction

Psalm 79 is in some ways the sequel to the seventy-fourth psalm in which Asaph and the people of Israel were troubled and worried about invaders. This latter work finds that God has permitted them to be punished in the starkest of ways, even allowing his temple and sanctuary to be defiled by infidels. Again, the psalmist wonders how long God intended to permit this indignity to exist. [Read Psalm 79:1-13.] In essence, this psalm is one man's complaint about his nation's demise and his hopes for restoration. Perhaps it provides us with a reminder that righteousness exalts a nation, but sins bring reproach upon it. Even the kingdom of God can be assaulted by sin and must conquer it.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Complaint (1-4)

1. Asaph is one man, but he is writing as Judah's poet laureate during her darkest times
 - a. the nation that divided into Israel and Judah had been reduced when her idolatrous ways caused God to divorce Israel at the hands of the Assyrians
 - b. now a century later, Judah had followed suit and the Babylonians had been selected by God to effect another divorce of an unchaste bride
2. Asaph, however, is a righteous man and he writes as one of the innocent bystanders in this mess, like a child in a nasty custody fight today
 - a. as evidence of this collateral damage, he takes note of the fallen temple and the rotting corpses of the saints
 - b. moreover, he says that Judah's desolation has given her detractors reason to gloat and doubt the reality of Jehovah
 - c. now, God's pride is not stung by any of this, for he has no need that men should serve him, but Asaph is beside himself
3. sadly, all this could have been averted (Second Chronicles 36:14-21)

B. Prayer for Mercy (5-12)

1. Asaph's words bleed off the page and begin to sound like those of a child whose father is angry and who will not be appeased by remorse
2. the psalmist accepts that God was angry, but expects him to relent and restore Judah for another chance for Jehovah's name's sake
 - a. Moses had saved Israel from instant destruction once before with such a plea, but this time, God has no intention of making her a great nation all over again
 - b. the land and nation promises to Abraham had been fulfilled and the Seed promise would come through Christ and a smaller remnant province in Judea
3. writing as a man, who, like Jeremiah, was faithful in the midst of great iniquity leading up to the Chaldean invasion, Asaph asks God to avenge his like-minded brethren who had perished at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar
 - a. under a different law and different circumstances than we face, pleas for vengeance upon other human beings were heard
 - b. vengeance, however, has always belonged to God and in our time, we have no authority to seek it by our hands

C. Promise (13)

1. on behalf of his comrades, Asaph promises that if Judah receives a second chance, things will change
2. the idolatry and spiritual fornication that occasioned this divorce would not be replicated ever again; Asaph says that Judah has learned her lesson
3. sometimes, hitting bottom is all that will teach such a lesson, but even then, quick relief can bring spiritual amnesia

II. Some Applications

A. Disgrace

1. lately, many preachers and pastors have been plucking passages out of the Old Testament and applying them to America, in the wake of her sorrow in 2001
 - a. it is confessed that such passages were addressed to ancient Israel, but it is then suggested that somehow America fills the modern place of that fallen land
 - b. one such passage gaining prominence was a message to Solomon (Second Chronicles 7:12-16)
 - c. insofar as these efforts attempt to cause Americans to ponder the will of God, they are harmless, for we have often quoted Proverbs 14:34: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."
2. but in the eyes of God, borders on maps are meaningless and national divisions are not recognized; the church of Christ is his chosen nation and people (Ephesians 2:11-18)
 - a. America can be disgraced by impeached presidents, poor showings at the Olympics and terrorist attacks within our borders, but the church's disgraces are more serious when they come
 - b. God's nation is disgraced by infamous sin within its population and the same kind of spiritual fornication that led the Lord to divorce both Israel and her sister, Judah
3. the congregation in Corinth followed their wretched examples and disgraced the new kingdom (First Corinthians 5:1-13)
 - a. for this reason, we are warned not to bring dishonor to the kingdom (First Peter 4:15-16)
 - b. we are warned not to play the harlot with the devil (James 4:1-5)
4. speeches like the one in Second Chronicles and the Proverbs are more powerful when they are applied to the church, in an attempt to remind her of her loyalty and obligation to her King of kings

B. Second Chances

1. I love giving people second chances, but I hate giving them third chances
 - a. a second chance acknowledges that many failures result from naiveté, inexperience, momentary lapses and regrettable compromises
 - b. a need for a third chance means that nothing was learned from the previous mistake and suggests that a fourth chance may prove necessary as well
 - c. thus error and sin enter into a cycle and become custom and both the sinner and the forgiver become perpetually wed to misery
2. God had extended to his people numerous chances and had shown them more patience than any of us could have mustered, but eventually the extension of extra chances becomes an enabling mechanism for abuse
 - a. that leaves us in a challenging position, for we are commanded to forgive a person who wrongs us seventy times seven
 - b. forgiveness, however, does not obligate us to extend our emotions and capital repeatedly, allowing an insincere sinner to abuse our good nature
3. Paul had been disappointed when John Mark proved unreliable on a previous mission and although he forgave him the wrong, he refused to take him along on the next trip (see Acts 15:36-41)
4. a man may forgive his wife of her adultery, but still refuse to return to the marriage bed with her, especially if she repeats her sin (see Matthew 19:3-9)
 - a. still, like God, we ought to delight in giving our children, our spouses, our friends, our parents and our brethren a second chance, for one day soon, we will find ourselves requiring another chance as well (Matthew 18:21-35)
 - b. "Judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13)
5. vengeance is God's (Romans 12:14-21)

C. Restoration

1. God is the great and patient giver of second chances, permitted even those who spat upon his wounded son the opportunity to be forgiven and to join him in heaven
2. the soul that is restored to such a loving and merciful God should be overwhelmed with gratitude, an abiding force that helps him avoid temptation and seek out good to be accomplished
3. no day should pass without an expression of thanksgiving and worship

- a. if those notions are reserved only for Sundays, they will quickly lose their power and the third chance will suddenly be required for the downtrodden apostate
- b. never forget at what price your second chance was purchased (Second Timothy 2:8-13)

Conclusion

Every Christian here is the beneficiary of God's patience, but like his relationship with ancient Israel, eventually, patience is expired and judgment arrives. If you are still delaying your appointment with the Savior, delay no longer, for tomorrow may be too late.

Psalm 80: Restore Us, O God

Introduction

Asaph begins to sound like a single-minded psalmist as we consider the eightieth song in this lesson. Repeatedly he has lifted his pen to record thoughts and pleadings about the fall of his nation. This particular work is a community lament, though, begging God both for deliverance and restoration in the face of an ongoing national insult. [Read Psalm 80:1-19.] Psalm 80 is divided by a recurring refrain, the theme of the work, “Restore us, O God of hosts; / Cause your face to shine, / And we shall be saved.” Part one contains Asaph’s heartfelt supplication in verses one through three Part two in verses four through seven is his complaint. Following that are nine verses dedicated to a metaphor of the vineyard (8-16) and then three verses which vow commitment to God (17-19).

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Stir Up Your Strength (1-3)

1. God’s position between the cherubim suggests the mercy seat in the tabernacle where God was to meet his people and hear them (Numbers 7:89)
2. Asaph invites him to sit there once more and to hear Israel’s complaint as her Shepherd, a reference to better times when David wrote the twenty-third psalm and Israel felt as though she was being led by still waters
3. now Israel is suffering a thirst of her own making and it seems the Shepherd has abandoned her to misery; Israel had committed spiritual adultery with every idol and false god in Samaria and now she was suffering from a divine divorce
 - a. because Asaph mentions the northern tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh, commentators believe he is writing about an attack not on Judah, but her sister, Israel
 - b. as bad as Judah became, Israel arrived there much sooner
 - c. the united kingdom of Saul, David and Solomon had been divided upon Solomon’s death because of his son’s inability to govern wisely (First Kings 11:41-12:33)
4. after all that brazen rejection of God, the people now see their error and beg for salvation, but if it comes too quickly, they may just as quickly revert to their idolatry, and so God must bless them by patiently allowing them to learn how deep was their sin and his suffering
5. Asaph recalls again a happier, more faithful time that the people had eventually rejected in their lust for this world (Numbers 6:24-26)

B. How Long (4-7)

1. like a child whose father has spanked him, Israel cries out, “How long will you be angry?”, wanting it to end quickly
2. like an exasperated father who wonders if his child has learned any lesson yet, God remains silent and waits for evidence of true repentance and spiritual restoration before doing anything toward physical and emotional restoration
3. their problem is not only the physical deprivations of being a defeated nation, but the emotional distress that comes when one’s pride is deflated
4. in truth, the northern kingdom which fell in 721 B.C. at the hands of the Assyrians, would never be the same again, but whomever survived that awful time could be restored to God personally

C. The Vine and Vinedresser (8-16)

1. if it this passage is an appeal to God’s pride, it will not succeed, but perhaps it is an attempt at confession, a recognition of his power and history with Israel, a denial of idolatry that goes all the way back to the work of Aaron, that molten calf that was credited with bringing Israel out of Egypt
2. Asaph uses the familiar metaphor from the New Testament of a vine and its dresser to recount Israel’s past and plead for a renewed future
 - a. Israel had cast out the Canaanites and then ascended over their land, only to have her enemies regroup and return like a board to uproot the nation like a weakened vine
 - b. Asaph asks God to return to tend to his vine like old times, to remove his rebuke once it has been acknowledged and fulfilled

3. the same comparison is made regarding the New Testament church and the Christians who compose her; our relationship with God makes him our vinedresser and what became of physical Israel can likewise happen to spiritual Israel

D. We Will Call Upon Your Name (17-19)

1. Israel was God's right hand man on Earth until she found a different master who delivered immediate pleasures and apparent association with other peoples

2. when those immediate pleasures lost their luster and God began to remove his favor, his right hand man was left ignorant and lost

3. Asaph's hope for restoration centers around genuine repentance of that spiritual adultery and a promise never to turn back on God again

4. "Revive us and we will call upon your name" implies a vow of faithfulness in the future no matter what the enticement to follow after the world

II. Applications

A. Rebellion and Regret

1. the words of the twenty-third psalm ring true even today for faithful Christians who do their best to avoid the kind of spiritual immorality that convicted Israel (Psalm 23:1-6)

2. yet even we have our moments of rebellion and perhaps entire periods in our lives when our zeal wanes or our focus suffers

a. how we live to regret falling out of the habit of daily prayer and Bible reading!

b. how we regret skipping services for this or that!

c. how we regret telling white lies, cutting corners and treating others mercilessly!

3. when our spiritual strength has atrophied from disuse, we are left to call out to God, "Stir up your strength and come and save us!"

a. God, however, will not be mocked and if we are trying to take advantage of his grace and feign remorse every time we hit rock bottom, God will wait until we are genuine before answering (Proverbs 1:20-33)

b. this Proverb actually personifies the intangible qualities of wisdom, teaching that turning one's back on God's wisdom will make it very hard for that wisdom to return to you later on

4. repentance will have to be even more genuine than the rebellion was (Isaiah 1:2-3, 12-20)

B. Emotional Restoration

1. the psalmist writes on behalf of a people deep in depression, wounded and humiliated by the consequences of sin

2. not all suffering, however, is the result of sin; sometimes it comes from marital distress, job loss, illness or others' deaths and a million other reasons

3. still, it is wise to seek God out in those times and trust that he can lend comfort (Second Corinthians 1:3-11)

a. Paul and his associates despaired of death because of human persecution; the devil's persecution of God's redeemed works in concert with wicked men to test their faith and push it to its breaking point

b. in our bleakest moments, God is still there to shepherd his sheep and return the wanderer to the fold

4. rejecting a sinful or spiritually complacent lifestyle should be a joyful victory (Second Corinthians 7:6-11)

C. We Are Attached To The Vine

1. when we became Christians, God grafted us into his son, the true vine (John 15:1-8)

2. we became part of that vine, as its fruit, and subjected ourselves to the work of the vinedresser who nurtures and prunes his vine to strengthen it

a. through the discipline of his word and works, God prunes away that which is unfruitful and makes room for that which is (Galatians 5:16-26)

b. we cannot then complain to God when he does his pruning, although it may seem painful in the present, for that pruning may have the effect of removing people from our lives, activities that we enjoyed and even things that we depended upon for pride and prosperity

3. as part of the vine, we are also warned that we can be grafted out as easily as we were grafted in (Romans 11:19-22)

D. Calling Upon God's Name

1. if you find yourself in a crisis like the one that gripped Asaph, it is time to face reality, take responsibility for yourself and vow to do right

2. calling upon God's name is not reciting the rosary or saying the "Sinner's Prayer;" it is throwing yourself before his mercy seat and accepting his will as sovereign and your own as malleable to his

a. this Saul of Tarsus did after he saw Jesus on the Damascus Road and was told by Ananias to arise and be baptized, calling on the name of the Lord (see Acts 22:16)

b. this you do afterward by daily prayer, study and meditation, never falling out of such good habits

Conclusion

The eightieth psalm provides a lesson for every Christian who suffers from the effects of sin or from life's hardships and is seeking relief. Prostrate before God's mercy seat is where your answer will begin.

Psalm 81: Sing Aloud to God Our Strength

Introduction

The eighty-first psalm seems to commemorate the occasion of one of Israel's feasts, events that had both a religious and agricultural element. At once, Israel recognized the harvest season and the fact that God had provided for them this year and always. Asaph calls upon his audience to sing joyfully to the Lord and to realign their lives to match his will better. [Read Psalm 81:1-16.] Psalm 81 begins with a hymn of praise to man's provider (verses 1-7) and then turns to a prophetic oracle concerning the idolatry that would lead to his demise (verses 8-16). If we can manage to allow Asaph's words to inspire us to deeper faith and to dissuade us from apostasy, we will not be able to help singing praises to the God who makes salvation and providence possible and plentiful.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Asaph's Hymn (1-7)

1. it is the mention of the moons and feast days in verse 3 that causes commentators to think of the feast of tabernacles, a harvest festival and the anniversary of the beginning of the wanderings in the wilderness

a. for most of us, the notion of a harvest is but quaint and symbolic, for we buy every fruit and vegetable we want at the grocery store year-round

b. for these ancient Jews, harvest was the culmination of a long year of working and waiting, hoping and praying

c. for us, the harvest season is symbolic of the second coming of Christ, but the gravity of that symbol is rooted in the literal reaping of crops upon which all men continue to depend

d. the Old Testament law very clearly specified a number of feast days and observances such as the Sabbath for Israel to observe, as verse four indicates

e. the passover, feast of tabernacles and Sabbath were not manmade holidays, but part of the voice of God (Leviticus 23:39-43)

2. on this occasion of gratitude and religious reflection, Asaph calls on Israel to worship God in song, accompanied by musical instruments

a. the harp, lute and timbrel were advocated by God for worship under the law of Moses, just as were Sabbath-keeping, incense burning and animal sacrifice

b. that worship in that different time had a very different quality to it, not less religious or more, but different

3. the wilderness wanderings began in Egypt, of course, when God stunned the nation by killing its firstborn in a single night, allowing his own people to escape a Pharaoh who would not let them worship properly

a. that Pharaoh was also a wicked and brutal taskmaster, who enslaved the descendants of Jacob and made their burden heavy and unbearable

b. in that instant, God removed them from their daily brick making and pyramid building

c. Jehovah heard his peoples' cries and answered from Heaven in the thunder of chariots and javelins as Egypt plunged into the Red Sea

4. God's loyalty to the family of Abraham was not repaid, however, for at the first threat, Israel began to doubt him (Exodus 17:1-7)

B. Prophetic Oracle (8-16)

1. Israel had been commanded to cut off the heathen from the land they were conquering, but they thought they knew better than God, and allowed both them and their idols to continue there

a. at first, the idols may have been perceived as wicked, but gradually they became curiosities and then the curiosity was satisfied as Israel dallied with idol worship

b. actually, it was while still on the way to Canaan that Israel, for the first time, molded a calf and began to refer to it as the god who had rescued them from Egypt

c. Israel saw the blessing and knew it was supernatural, but had not the faith to attribute it to the only true and living God who was speaking to Moses on the mountain

2. the joy and solemnity of the feast are interrupted by this prophecy of apostasy, as much as Joshua's final speech must have disturbed his people when he remarked on the same problem (Joshua 24:14-28)

3. Israel's affinity for Baal and Molech proved to be unstoppable and so God sadly promised to give them over to their stubbornness

a. they selected their own fate, earthly and eternal, and God simply acknowledged the selection by removing from them his fellowship

b. their stubbornness and idolatry led them into deeper apostasy, but still God yearned for their repentance and promised spiritual and national restoration to follow

4. Israel's idolatry caused the northern kingdom to fall to Assyria and the southern kingdom to be destroyed by Babylon

a. if they only could have listened to Joshua or Jeremiah, they might have saved themselves and their nation

b. God would have fed them again with the finest of wheat and honey from the rock, a reference to the song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32:13-14)

II. Applications

A. Sing Aloud

1. although worship has changed from old covenant to new, singing has remained a special way of expressing joy and solemnity

2. we are not commanded to take up harps, timbrels and lutes, but we are commanded to sing (Ephesians 5:15-21)

a. just as we eschew the blood of animal sacrifices because it is unauthorized in the new covenant, so we refuse to take up musical instruments to worship God

b. we do so out of respect for his authority and will, allowing him to tell us what he wants in our worship without imposing upon him what pleases us or the masses

3. singing should come naturally, for we have even more than fruits and vegetables for which to be thankful (Hebrews 13:10-16)

B. Holidays

1. holidays like the passover and feast of tabernacles were common and annual observances in Israel under the law of Moses; they were specifically commanded by God and could not be forsaken without inviting his wrath

2. the new covenant, however, extends beyond a single nation and carries no such holidays and observances, save for a weekly commemoration of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ

a. churches and religious leaders have attempted to insert new holidays into Christian worship and onto a "church calendar" but have never been able to find Bible authority for imposing such things upon God

b. in his commentary on Psalm 81:3-4, Baptist Charles Spurgeon wrote, "Those who plead this passage as authority for their man-appointed feasts and fasts must be moonstruck. We will keep such feasts as the Lord appoints, but not those which Rome or Canterbury may ordain When it can be proved that the observance of Christmas, Whitsuntide, and other Popish festivals was ever instituted by a divine statute, we also will attend to them, but not till then. It is as much our duty to reject the traditions of men, as to observe the ordinances of the Lord" (400).²

3. Christmas, Easter, Catholic mass and every other church holiday are attempts to impose man's will upon God, diminishing the importance of the simple Lord's day observance of the body and blood his son shed for us (First Corinthians 11:20-26)

C. Escape From Egypt

1. Israel after the passover is an example of the old expression, "Be careful what you wish for because you just might get it."

2. so weak was their faith in the wilderness that mere thirst caused them to long to return to the punishing slavery of Egypt where water flowed freely

a. Israel was unwilling to sacrifice, to wait patiently, to believe in a sense larger than accepting God's reality, but which personally embraces his will

b. many of us have come to our own waters of Meribah, having escape the pollution of the world through the grace of our Lord, only to question his goodness and compassion when our wallets are a little thin, our relationships are strained or our prospects seem somewhat dim

3. we contend with God, spit on his son and accuse him of indifference, when his sacrifice at the cross should be sufficient even if he never blessed us further again

a. when our souls wonder, "Is the Lord among us or not?", we expose the weakness of our own faith; it is time then to seek new strength (First Peter 5:6-11)

b. doubting God now is shortsighted and forgetful (Second Peter 1:5-11)

D. No Foreign God Among You

1. Israel's idols were tangible and of their own making, but ours take on less obvious forms; still they are no less insulting and problematic

2. self is the most ubiquitous idol of all, for every one of us can be tempted to put self ahead of God and others, making our earthly pleasure a priority over eternity

3. this idolatry of self always leads to sin and immorality (Second Timothy 3:1-5)

4. commitment to God leads to selflessness (Luke 9:57-62)

E. Stubbornness

1. you will choose your own fate, and if it is self-service and stubbornness, God will not save you against your will (Second Thessalonians 2:8-12)

2. you may be among those who need to begin listening to God like you have never done before and before it is too late

Conclusion

Psalm 81 reminds us of God's providence and goodness, but also that we cannot accept his gifts and reject him without serious consequences.

Psalm 82: God Stands In The Congregation

Introduction

The eighty-second psalm marks a change in themes for its writer, Asaph. Formerly, he has written to beg God into activity as pagan nations troubled his own. Now, Asaph extols the certainty of such a judgment on all those nations who behaved unjustly toward the vulnerable. [Read Psalm 82:1-8.] Verses 1 and 8 provide the commentary of Asaph, while the verses in between communicate God's judgment of this wickedness. What we learn from the psalm is a lesson about acting justly and doing righteousness, even and especially for those who have no other redress.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Congregation (1)

1. the church of Christ had not been established by Asaph's writing and so the congregation he discusses is not the Lord's body
2. instead, he has reference here to an assembly of politically powerful people, called "gods" in many translations, but probably better described as "mighty ones" or "princes" or "judges" as in other translations and lexicons
3. it is God who has instituted all legitimate forms of authority on Earth and it is within his right to judge when they are not worthy of continuing; this congregation had failed its mandate and would be judged

B. Showing Partiality to The Wicked (2-7)

1. the crime of which he accuses them is abusing the poor, the widow and the orphan in the name of enriching the powerful and wealthy
2. Israel had very strict laws regarding the treatment of those in such vulnerable estates and the nation that Asaph is accusing was guilty
3. the American ideal of blind justice and equal treatment under the law derives from this godly policy of recognizing the humanity of every person; God is no respecter of persons and he demands that we overcome our prejudices as well
4. indeed, a nation will be unstable where injustice is allowed to persist
5. in verse 6, God reminds these earthly princes that they were put into power by his hand and can be removed by it as well

C. Inherit All Nations (8)

1. Asaph, like Habakkuk and Jonah have sometimes yearned to impede the judgment or mercy of God, but in this psalm, the writer is behind the Lord's message
2. he calls on God to judge his planet, for it is his

II. Some Applications

A. Authority

1. God has ordained and delegated authority among mankind since he created Adam and Eve and made him the head of their household
2. as humanity multiplied and society developed, God created other forms of authority, including that of parent, nation and congregation
3. while none of these authorities is infallible, it is incumbent upon those under authority to respect them and heed them within the framework of God's will
4. rebellion against divinely ordained authority is sinful
 - a. the husband is the head of the wife (Ephesians 5:22-25)
 - b. mothers and fathers have authority over their children (Ephesians 6:1-4)
 - c. civil governments have authority over citizens (Romans 13:1-7)
 - d. pastors have authority over the flock (Hebrews 13:7, 17)
5. until this authority is used to violate God's will, it is necessary to heed it, lest we be marked for rebellion

B. Treating The Vulnerable

1. the parable of the good Samaritan defines our responsibility to our fellow man, especially when he is in trouble (Luke 10:30-37)
2. Christians are commanded to visit widows and orphans in their distress (see James 1:27) as a form of pure and undefiled religion
3. without the church setting up old folks' homes and orphanages, we have the power individually and collectively to come to the aid of such people within our midst (First Timothy 5:1-16)
4. neglecting or abusing people in these states is the same sin that caused Asaph to ask God for judgment
 - a. we have today religious organizations that use orphans as religious props and use widows as cash machines and surely Asaph's words are not dead
 - b. our only interest in such people should be doing right by them, as Boaz aided Ruth and Naomi under the Old Testament

C. Showing Partiality

1. we know that God does not ever commend anyone on the basis of his race, nationality or wealth, for he is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35)
2. in the church, this must be true as well (Galatians 3:24-29)
3. showing partiality to your race, your nationality or to the wealthy makes you something God isn't and that is prejudiced and carnal in your reasoning (James 2:1-9)

Conclusion

Instead of dishonoring the widow, the orphan and the poor and crippled, we should be making certain that they are cared for and given as much respect as anyone else.

Psalm 83: Do Not Keep Silent, O God

Introduction

Psalm 83 marks the end of Asaph's long sequence of psalms, but it continues his usual theme of pleading with God to confound Israel's enemies and to restore her to security. In a way, Asaph speaks for a church that it surrounded by atheism and materialism and a devil intent upon destroying her through infiltration. [Read Psalm 83:1-18.] We will consider the text and then make applications on the security of the sheltered ones.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Sheltered Ones (1-4)

1. Asaph begins his community lament by acknowledging to God Israel's frail position in the midst of her enemies
 - a. despite having access to the awesome power of the creator of the universe, Israel consistently limited him by having fellowship with idols and sin
 - b. what God might have done are only suggested by his victories at the Red Sea and Jericho
 - c. Israel was bothered by enemies in Canaan simply because she refused to deal with them according to God's warning and plan
 - d. it is very sad, but quite instructive, to listen to the children of Israel begging God to save them from their own folly
2. Asaph writes on behalf of the sheltered ones, a reference to the people of God who have sought refuge in the arms of their Lord
 - a. our society tends to speak ill of people who are sheltered because we feel they are not exposed to enough of the world, but after considering what the world has offers, shelter seems good
 - b. really, God is like a beacon to a lonely mariner and a dry roof on a rainy night; his shelter is spiritually provided, but also physically reassuring

B. The Confederacy (5-8)

1. sometimes the sheltered ones take their shelter for granted and such was the case in Israel
2. God's shelter had been predicated upon doing his will, removing the idolaters from Canaan and ruling the land according to the law of Moses
 - a. while she was glad to receive blessings from God, she was reluctant to obey his commands
 - b. a lack of heart to finish the battle and a curiosity about the manners of people outside God's fellowship caused her to maintain talismans of temptation all through Canaan, and that is why she was eventually ruined
3. this confederacy of ten nations is not actually mentioned in Old Testament history, but probably has a metaphorical reference to the plight Israel created by surrounding herself with enemies

C. The Pastures of God (9-12)

1. the faithful must be Bible historians to know what their God is capable of doing; Stephen and Paul were and so is Asaph
2. he reminds God of his track record, of what he had done through judges like Gideon and Deborah, and what he can do now in Israel
3. the Judges era actually points out the folly of faithful people in taking their spiritual shelter for granted, thereby forfeiting it over time
 - a. the Judges oversaw Israel after the death of Joshua and before Israel demanded a king like the nations around them; it could have been a time of uninterrupted prosperity, except for one thing (Judges 2:11-19)
 - b. moral relativism and selfishness overwhelmed the once faithful nation (Judges 21:25)
4. Deborah and Gideon were among the judges who led Israel back into divine shelter, but Israel's restorations never lasted longer than a generation or two
5. for restoration to be effective, it must be matched by perseverance

D. That They May Seek Your Name (13-18)

1. in all of Asaph's war talk, an interesting theme develops—a hope that Israel's enemies would seek the name of Jehovah
2. that message is wrapped up in pleas for their destruction, but it introduces the concept of converting one's enemies rather than just conquering them
3. we have no authority to conquer our foes today save for attempts at converting them into friends through the gospel

II. Some Applications

A. Christians Are Sheltered Ones

1. people worry all the time about paying the mortgage and buying clothes, but I can't help but believe that God is able to shelter us even beyond those apparent necessities (Matthew 6:25-33)
2. God's shelter is not just from the elements of nature, but from the trials and temptations of life; there is a lower light burning for every traveler wearied by hardship and sin
3. entering that shelter is up to you, as Israel often chose to brave life outside it (First Peter 5:5-10)
4. the church itself is the household of God and provides shelter from the cares of this world, as well as help in time of need (see First Timothy 3:15)
 - a. your brethren exist to meet your urgent needs and to provide God's shelter in times of sorrow
 - b. if you are feeling unsheltered, it is not because God has failed you, but because you have forgotten to huddle inside his arms

B. Christians Are Still Afflicted

1. shelter does not become unnecessary the moment you seek it
2. the Israelites in the Judges period thought so and they began a cycle of apostasy that would last the rest of their history
3. seeking shelter in God will not stop temptation, death, pain or disappointment, but it will make all those things easier to bear (First Peter 4:12-19)
4. the rain will continue to fall and storms will even arise, but you will be in place where your faith can hold firm, by the power of God and the assistance of committed brethren (Romans 12:1-8)

C. History

1. I wonder how many of us know enough Old Testament history to illustrate the joys and disappointments of our lives with scriptural precedent
2. everything that you face has occurred before and God's people have met the challenge, sometimes successfully and sometimes not
3. yet even in your history, God has proven his abiding presence more than once
 - a. God has a track record in which he never lets us down, certainly not as we let him down, and trust should develop over the course of discipleship to where anxiety becomes a foolish choice
 - b. if God was there for you yesterday, even when you thought he would not be, why do you doubt he will be there today (Romans 8:31-39)?

D. That They May Seek God's Name

1. the church has foes like Israel did and Christians have enemies like the Hebrews did, but our goal is not to conquer them militarily, but instead spiritually
2. the weapons of such an objective are quite different (Romans 12:14-21)
3. instead of doing unto them before they do it unto us, we turn the other cheek and overcome their evil by being surprisingly good to them (Matthew 5:43-48)
4. we are always ready to practice self-defense, to describe the reasons for the faith that is within us, but we always speak the truth in love, not bitterness
5. our goal is to cause them to be our brethren, that they may seek God from a faithful heart

Conclusion

Asaph reminds us of the folly of choosing to surround oneself with danger, only to beg God for rescue. We cannot create a cycle of apostasy and expect not to be harmed by it. Let us seek shelter in God at all times so that we will be prepared for the inevitable storms of life.

Psalm 84: How Lovely Is Your Tabernacle

Introduction

The sons of Korah were a priestly family known for their love of praising God. It is they who, in Second Chronicles 20:19 stand “up to praise the Lord God of Israel with voices loud and high.” The sons of Korah were charged with keeping the gates of the temple because of the risk associated with such valuable materials as those that composed the house built by Solomon for God. Because of their position, they had every day to examine and appreciate the loveliness of that ornate tabernacle. [Read Psalm 84:1-12.] For some Christians, the presence of God and residence in his house, the church, loses its appeal over time as it is taken for granted. In the sons of Korah, we see an example of the kind of endless zeal which we need to cultivate and maintain to carry us through life into God’s house not made with hands in the heavens.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. My Soul Longs For The Courts of the Lord (1-4)

1. although tabernacle is the English word chosen here by the translators, the psalmists used Hebrew words indicating “God’s dwellings”

a. their reference is not to the tent that Israel traveled with during its long pilgrimage from Egypt to Jerusalem, but to the grand temple that Solomon constructed for God

b. the sons of Korah spent their days at the thresholds of that temple and observed with awe what its beauty represented

c. it was an early time in God’s relationship with man, before the coming of Christ and the church, and tangible evidence of power and beauty were preparing man for the greater, but less tangible presence of God through Jesus Christ in the age of the church

2. one gets the feeling that the sons of Korah spent their off days longing to return to work, as an art lover might yearn to return to his work at the museum or an historian might long to return to his artifacts

a. the sons of Korah understood what it was like to have zeal for God, without gradually losing it over time as marvels became mundane

b. we do not anticipate to create such a feeling today with ornate edifices, but with the omnipresence and compassion of a God of grace, over his house, the church

3. although the sons of Korah were regarded for their song writing and singing abilities, they themselves envied the sparrows and swallows which nested in the crooks and crannies of the temple house

a. God was not just some distant, dictatorial deity to them, either; he was their personal and chosen King and God

b. that implies more than resignation to the will of God, but joy in it as well

B. Blessed Is The Man Whose Strength is In God (5-9)

1. the lawful thrice yearly pilgrimages to the temple could be arduous, but for one with a heart for worship like the sons of Korah, those travel challenges were sacrifices made for a loving God (see Exodus 23:17)

2. more than likely, the writers have an image in mind that goes beyond a journey to Jerusalem from some distant part of the nation

a. they write of passing through the Valley of Weeping and turning it into a spring of fresh water and of traveling from strength to strength to appear before God

b. so many of us live or perceive our lives by markers of times of weakness—living in between illnesses, financial downturns and other disappointments like divorce and abuse

c. the sons of Korah lived their lives from strength to strength instead

3. when God is your shield through answered prayer, why should weakness occasion every new chapter in your life?

C. A Day In Your Courts (10-12)

1. some of the Israelites who made the trip to the temple out of a sense of unpleasant obligation may have pitied the doorkeepers with nowhere else to go and no real liberty to pursue the flesh

2. the sons of Korah, however, would not have traded their places as servants of God for all the passing pleasures of sin on Earth
 - a. they weighed things in the balance and found fellowship with God to be a much richer experience than fellowship with the flesh
 - b. a tent of wickedness had been the dwelling place of their namesake, Korah, who rebelled against Moses and was swallowed up by the Earth (see Numbers 16)
3. from that dark beginning, this family learned to see God as a sun and a shield, the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning

II. Applications

A. Cry Out For The Living God

1. would someone attending a Christian worship here for the first time perceive from our songs that we long and cry out for the living God?
2. if the sons of Korah were present, would their few voices drown out our entire number, simply because of their zeal and passion?
3. our worship is to be in spirit and in truth, lawfully practiced and emotionally motivated
 - a. the songs on the pages should enter our minds, pass through our hearts and emerge with a glorious tone, regardless of our ability to make technically pretty sounds (Ephesians 5:17-21)
 - b. gratitude for grace, for renewal, for redemption should give us such joy that we come to see singing as an opportunity to vent that overwhelming sense of relief and hope as the sons of Korah did
4. our songs are the fruit of our lips, a sacrifice to God worth more than all the burnt offerings of the Old Testament, but we must be careful not to blemish them through disinterest and indifference

B. Finding A Home

1. the sons of Korah and the swallows and sparrows had found a home in the temple courts of Jehovah
 - a. one species was nesting there physically and the other spiritually, but both were comfortable and protected
 - b. our friends, relatives and neighbors who seem to flit from one disaster to the next often do so because they have neglected to seek a nest in God's courts
2. Paul says that the church is both the house of God and the temple of God under the New Testament (see First Timothy 3:15, First Peter 2:9)
 - a. pilgrimages to Jerusalem or some other city like Rome or Salt Lake City are never demanded
 - b. the house and temple of God are wherever Christians assemble and work (Ephesians 2:19-22)
3. like a mother hen, God desires to clutch us under his wing, to nourish and protect us, if we are willing and submissive enough to seek and accept a home with him
 - a. when you are longing for a place to belong, never forget that the one who created you has already created it
 - b. you can be his child and his son's brother, and find a spiritual family on whom to lean in the church of Christ (Romans 12:9-13)

C. Pilgrimage

1. our pilgrimage as Christians is not geographical, but spiritual, through deserts and jungles, over mountains and down valleys
2. both the highs and lows of life can be threats to our faithfulness, for great blessings can bring apathy and self-reliance while deep despair can bring turmoil and doubt
3. the greatest threat to our place in God's temple, however, is from the temptation to sneak out for a moment and see what the devil has to offer (First Peter 2:9-12)
 - a. there the pilgrimage takes a wicked turn, loses its compass bearings and begins to wander like the company of Moses (First Corinthians 10:1-13)
 - b. Israel could have avoided most of their wandering simply by shunning temptation and trusting in God and while your faith may not keep you from every illness of disappointment, it will keep you from apostasy and condemnation (Hebrews 11:13-16)

D. A Sun And A Shield

1. as the sun brings light and warmth and life, a shield provides defense and assurance
2. one who hides himself from the sun becomes sick and one who refuses the protection of the shield is pierced through
3. the sons of Korah are content in the light and life of God, like Moses who chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked to the reward” (Hebrews 11:25-26)
4. part of our armor is that shield of faith, by which we can deflect all the fiery darts of the tempter who wants to lure us out of the light and into the darkness of separation from God (see First John 1:5-10)
5. better to live in the light and behind the shield

Conclusion

The sons of Korah wrote eleven or twelve other psalms, but the eighty-fourth shows their love for God at its highest. We are pilgrims, too, and bound for the courts of God beyond the clouds. May we travel from strength to strength.

Psalm 85: Revive Us Again

Introduction

It is probably impossible to tell for certain, but in the eighty-fifth psalm, it appears that the melodic sons of Korah are waxing poetic over the Hebrew return from Babylonian captivity in the sixth century before Christ. This was the era in which Haggai, Zechariah and Zerubbabel led the people back to Jerusalem to reconstruct their city and their faith. This restoration, however, was not as complete as many expected—Solomon’s splendor did not return fully to the second temple—and complaints arose from the ashes of remorse. [Read Psalm 85:1-13.] The eighty-fifth psalm contains a healthy message of pleading for a revival of divine fellowship and confidence in the Lord. The theme of this work proves helpful today also when Christians find themselves in need of restoration and renewal. Psalm 85 begins by discussing the exile (1-3), and then makes its plea to God (4-9) before ending on a note of confidence (10-13).

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Prayerful Lamentation (1-3)

1. the latter histories of the Hebrew nations reads like a modern tragedy
2. Israel was ruled by 20 evil kings who guided her into idolatry and iniquity, in spite of God’s warnings that he would punish them; in 721 B.C., the Assyrian armies laid Israel to waste, nearly driving all the way to Jerusalem, where the nation of Judah should have waited in terror and hope (Second Kings 17:5-18)
3. Assyria’s near total victory over both Israel and Judah should have served to warn the latter not to follow in her wicked sister’s idolatrous path, but the lessons of terror and near death did not last long (Second Kings 19:35-36, 21:1-9)
4. Judah was warned by prophets like Jeremiah to turn back from idolatry and confederations with heathens like the Egyptians, but she would not listen and she paid the ultimate price in 586 B.C. (Second Kings 25:8-13)
 - a. both the divided kingdoms are obliterated, the choicest sons of Judaism have been carried away to Babylon, the temple is in ruins, the sons of David are separated from the throne
 - b. for 50 years, Jerusalem lies in ruins until King Darius the Mede, who inherited power after the fall of the Babylonians, issues a decree that returns the Jews to their home
5. it is likely that the sons of Korah are writing about this limited, but joyful restoration to former times in Psalm 85
 - a. during this period, prophets like Haggai and Zechariah encourage the people to rebuild Jerusalem, while Zerubbabel and Joshua act as their tireless foremen
 - b. after much delay, due to the resistance of squatters in the land and selfishness in the Jews, the city and temple are restored, but on a smaller scale than before the fall (Haggai 2:1-5)

B. Restoration (4-9)

1. the realization may have come upon them suddenly, that the present was not like the past
 - a. what else could account for the psalmists’ otherwise conflicting statements in verses three and four—“You have turned from the fierceness of your anger” followed by “Cause your anger toward us to cease”
 - b. the revival felt only half accomplished because things were so much more humble now
2. all this was part of God’s plan to replace arrogance with humility and to spend several generations preparing his people for the coming of the Messiah (Haggai 2:6-9)
 - a. the temple of greater glory would not be the one that Herod built to replace this one, nor even a restoration of Solomon’s structure, but the arrival of the Messiah, whose body would be killed and then resurrected three days later and in which, figuratively, his followers could abide and worship in freedom
 - b. little do they know, but the sons of Korah are living in the foreshadows of the son of David, but Judah will never be fully restored physically
3. the psalmists have brought their complaint to God and like Habakkuk now resolve to wait for an answer

C. The Lord Will Give (10-13)

1. God's answer is a promise of revival, which must be met and maintained by a human response of submission
 - a. God provides the mercy, which man must receive with truth, or faithfulness
 - b. man strives to replace iniquity with righteousness, which God answers with peace
2. the psalmists see no inherent conflict between grace and obedience, arguing that the two actually kiss when they meet together
3. the restoration becomes better than what they recalled in former times, for it leaps over physical kingdoms to moral restoration, creating a path of piousness to walk all the way to Heaven

II. Applications

A. Backsliding and Restoration

1. like the Jews of old, Christians today sometimes find themselves slipping back into old habits or developing new ones which are borrowed from a worldly lifestyle and have no place with the saint
2. if allowed to persist, these bad habits become the stuff of backsliding, a gradual and then hasty drift away from righteousness and toward shortsighted selfish, sinful paths
3. we are not really discussing the isolated and regretted event or the sin done in ignorance and disavowed at first knowledge, but the sometimes subtle choice to transgress God's will and seek comfort in sin, rather than escape from it
 - a. this is friendship with the world (James 4:1-10)
 - b. backsliding can lead to increased unfaithfulness (Hebrews 10:35-39)
 - c. unfaithfulness can lead to complete apostasy, for which there may be no remedy (Hebrews 6:1-6)
 - d. in such a state, it would be better if the Christian had never known Jesus at all, than to turn his back on him and return to the devil's side (see Second Peter 2:20-22)
4. know that apostasy usually begins with an innocent sounding surrender to the slightest of temptations and is usually accomplished without knowledge of anyone but God and self
 - a. take sin seriously in the early stages, so that the later stages might never come
 - b. for Israel and Judah, the early stages were ignored and belittled until it was too late

B. Revival

1. if you find yourself either in the midst of that kind of process of degradation and devilish reclamation or simply declining in zeal, you cannot do better than to seek immediate revival
2. on its own, your spirit will not improve; you must plug yourself into the Master and let his strength begin coursing through your veins again (Hebrews 10:19-25)
3. strength and peace and hope are of the Lord (Philippians 4:4-9)
 - a. giving your heart and your mind to things that tear down morality will not resurrect you from a pit of backsliding or apostasy
 - b. only by radical recommitment can you be revived
4. repudiate your sin, confess it to someone else and resolve to throw yourself into God's work from then on and you will be restored (Revelation 3:1-3)

C. Listen!

1. the sons of Korah make their plea and then sit down to wait for God's answer
2. I don't mean to imply that God will speak to you as a voice in the night or a disembodied hand writing on the wall, but know that God will answer your prayer and direct you in the right way; the real challenge is in learning to listen
 - a. the scribes and Pharisees remained lost because they had forgotten how to listen
 - b. the readers of the book of Hebrews were wasting time because they had become dull of hearing
 - c. you may be blaming God and accusing him of not hearing you because you are not tuned in to listen to him
3. "He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"
 - a. churches besides the one specifically addressed were instructed to hear what God had said to that one as well
 - b. listen to God as he answers your questions through the Bible—most people who feel like God has abandoned them are simply not studying their Bibles for his answers

c. listen to God as he answers your questions through the preaching and teaching at every service; your answer may be delivered on the very night you choose to stay home!

d. listen to God as he answers you through your friends, neighbors, brethren and in the minutia and magnitude of every day

4. do like the psalmists—shut up and listen (Ecclesiastes 5:1-3)!

D. His Footsteps, Our Pathway

1. I marvel that the majority of Christendom and even some in God's church take issue with the necessity of total submission to God's will, deeming it to be the enemy of grace or a leech that drains faith of its lifeblood

2. the psalmist said that, "Truth shall spring out of the Earth, And righteousness shall look down from heaven."

a. mercy and truth are lovers and righteousness and peace can kiss

b. faith is not faith if it is satisfied with low standards, transgression and trampling over the Master's example

3. faith says that his indelible footsteps through human life are my pathway, wherever they take me, for they lead back to Heaven (Hebrews 12:11-15)

Conclusion

When you find yourself becoming less than what God wants you to be and less than what you are capable of, it is time to seek restoration. Make your address to God and then listen for his direction. He calls the sinner to put on Christ and the drifting Christian to return to him.

Psalm 86: Teach Me Your Way

Introduction

Asaph and the sons of Korah put down their pens for a while in order that David can return to the Psalmist stage. In the eighty-sixth psalm, the King of Israel laments about his need for divine mercy and his hope that God would endeavor to teach him a better way. [Read Psalm 86:1-17.] In a state of persecution and emotional distress, we find David crying out to God for mercy, strength and instruction. Although he calls himself holy, he recognizes that he yet falls short of perfection. David calls upon God to guide him closer to glory and to rescue him from the depths of Sheol. His confidence is an encouragement to us when we feel bowed down all day long.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Trust (1-7)

1. David begins his Psalm as we might expect, expressing his smallness before God and his confidence that the Lord will both hear him and answer him
2. he describes himself as a holy servant of God, but one who is poor and needy
 - a. material poverty is not his meaning, nor is sinless perfection
 - b. instead, David is describing himself as afflicted and miserable, while a sincerely religious seeker of right
 - c. his position is one that is familiar to us, although we are unlikely to want to admit it
3. David suffered throughout his reign with anxiety and possibly, even depression, as his psalms reveal
 - a. his time on the throne of the greatest nation on Earth was filled with temptations, failures and disappointments, interrupted as they were by great successes and the constant attention of a loving God
 - b. his greatest turmoil came when his son, Absalom, rebelled against him and usurped the throne, until he was assassinated
 - c. yet throughout his reign, David was fixated on the naysayers and enemies who tramped through his court
4. on occasion, today, as we reign with Christ, we find ourselves bowed down with self-doubt or outside persecution and wonder why our sincerity is rewarded with intensifying challenge
 - a. David's solution to the quandary should be ours—to renew our trust in the Almighty and resolve to remain his servant
 - b. in prayer, we must remain confident that God can rejoice our souls—make them glad—by attending to our supplications in the day of trouble

B. God Is Great (8-10)

1. David's kingdom, like ours, was surrounded by lesser and false deities, which the others worshipped most happily
2. the idols and false gods had a tangible quality which Jehovah sometimes refused to match
 - a. their adherents could hold their deities in their own hands because they were made from wood or stone
 - b. or they could travel to some altar and see a gigantic rendering of their deities and call them by awesome names
3. David, however, was not fooled by the pompousness of these displays and continued to invest himself in Jehovah, whom he had witnessed doing great things
 - a. Moses asked, "What god is there in heaven or in earth that can do according to your works?" (Deuteronomy 3:24)?
 - b. you have also witnessed your God doing great things, but it is possible that you are largely unaware of it
 - c. Jehovah answers prayer today in the wisest way and responds to our supplications with the best solutions, no matter how difficult it is for us to comprehend in that moment
4. the false gods of this modern world are many, but the one true God excels them all, even if he refuses to get down on their level and compete according to the flesh

C. Teach Me Your Way (11-17)

1. when David asks God to teach him his way, he is asking for something that may prove painful and expensive in the process
2. the most valuable lessons of life are rarely free and for that reason, our Savior demands that we count the cost before enlisting in his company
3. David asks for a united heart, implying a confession that often his loyalties were divided and he was tempted to obey the flesh and disregard all he had learned thus far
4. when we think on what God has done for us, we ought to be inspired with the same kind of gratitude as David, who promised the Lord all of his heart and praise for the rest of his life
 - a. if God never blessed us a whit after the sacrifice of his son, he has done more than anyone ever will, more than we will ever deserve, and more than we will ever be able to repay
 - b. deliverance from Sheol may have been a rescue from some grave political threat, but it hints at God's promise to resurrect the faithful from the grave and give them a crown of eternal glory
5. David finishes by asking for a sign of God's goodness
 - a. this is not necessarily a request to see a miracle, but to perceive some tangible evidence that God has heard and will respond
 - b. the sign is not even so much for him as it is for his enemies to realize that God will bless him

II. Applications

A. The Sincere Servant

1. David is the holy servant, submerged in anguish, expecting an answer from God because he trusts in him
2. just how much can we expect from God on the basis of our covenant with him?
3. God owes us nothing, but has issued certain promises based on his grace and dependent upon our faithfulness to the covenant (Second Peter 1:2-4)
 - a. the continued availability of his grace is chief among those promises, as is heaven rather than hell for all those who are deemed faithful when this life is over
 - b. we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places through God's wounded son (Ephesians 1:3) and spend no day on Earth without an answer to our most pressing questions about eternity
4. David's holiness, like ours, is not formed in sinless perfection, but in sincere striving according to God's will (First Peter 1:13-19)
 - a. a person of holiness labors to eliminate his sins, and when he does sin, he yearns for mercy and finds it in repentance
 - b. a person of sincerity makes no pretense about religion, but kneels before God with openness to his will
 - c. sincerity, while no substitute for righteousness, is a valuable commodity nonetheless and is a big part of the spirit of our service to God
 - d. one can be insincere and go through the proper motions of Christianity but he will never have the relationship with God that David did

B. God Is Great, God Is Good

1. the creation of the universe testifies to the greatness of God, but not his goodness
2. the morality of his law testifies to his goodness, but not his grace
3. the sacrifice of his son testifies to his grace, his goodness and his greatness
4. the emotional David would have been overwhelmed and his pen would have run dry had he seen the grace that we have experienced in the blood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:14-16)
 - a. we think that we have so much to complain about in life, but as long as we are redeemed, we are in possession of all that really matters
 - b. take care never to forfeit the blessings of God's nature (Romans 11:22, 33-36)

C. Teach Me Your Way

1. we sometimes ask God to guide, guard and direct us, but did you ever stop to wonder just how he might go about doing that?
2. if David really expects God to teach him his way, he must have some understanding of how God would accomplish such a thing

3. God teaches as a father instructs his children, through direct instruction, living examples and painful correction

a. meditation upon the Bible and attendance when the flock is fed during worship and Bible study are God's attempts at teaching us his will through instruction (Second Timothy 2:15-16)

b. the examples of Jesus, the patriarchs and other Old Testament worthies and the early disciples are God's instruction through human example, as are the lives of faithful Christians around us (Philippians 2:4-7)

c. and God chastens us through the consequences of our decisions and the affairs of life (Hebrews 12:5-11)

D. A United Heart

1. the commentator suggests that David's words mean, "Bring my heart into unison that it may be wholly fixed on thee" (*Pulpit Commentary*)

2. no person is so conflicted as the one whose loyalties are divided

a. the man who vacillates between his wife and a mistress is an awful excuse for manhood

b. the traitor who betrays his nation to extort riches from another is a pariah

c. the Christian who prays to Jehovah but flirts with the devil is caught in a deadly game (Romans 7:14-23)

3. loyalty to God is often divided with idols, such as self, ambition and popularity, but no man can successfully serve both God and mammon (Matthew 6)

4. only by reconciling the side of our hearts which seek after the flesh with the side that seeks after the spirit can we be in unison (Mark 12:28-34)

a. heart, soul, mind and strength

b. emotions, expectations, thoughts and abilities

E. Seeking A Sign

1. why did David ask for a sign?

2. it was not so much for him, but for others, for he trusted in God completely

3. this passage should not encourage us to follow our neighbors who beg God for a miraculous sign of his desires before every choice

4. such is a lack of faith, when the sign is required for self (Matthew 16:1-4)

Conclusion

This psalm is actually considered by critics to be one of David's least poetic, but its message is as vibrant as any other. Those who trust in God will never be alone or doomed, so long as their faith leads them beside his still waters.

Psalm 87: His Foundation Is In The Holy Mountains

Introduction

The sons of Korah return to write another psalm, the eighty-seventh, in which they extol the virtues and loveliness of the city of Jerusalem during their lives. The special relationship that God had both with the city of the temple and the Jewish religion centered there caused his glory to emanate from the hills around her. Today, Jerusalem is a divided city, with Christians, Jews and Muslims occupying it. The temple lies in ruins and worshippers of Mohammed occupy its suspected site. God's fellowship is also no longer reserved for one people, but is open to those of every race who come to the feet of his son, Jesus Christ, and become disciples. Still, Jerusalem holds special meaning in those Bible greats that walked there, even if the predictions of Premillennialism for Jerusalem are misguided. [Read Psalm 87:1-7.] Psalm 87 extols Jerusalem in verses 1-3 before turning to the envying position of those outside of her in verses 4-6. The final verse allows the temple musicians and dancers an opportunity to add their amens.

Discussion

I. Jerusalem of Old

A. City of Peace

1. very near the cradle of civilization in Mesopotamia, the history of Jerusalem can be traced by archaeologists back to the earliest days of prehistoric mankind
2. before the city was called Jerusalem, it was simply known as Salem (Psalm 76:1-3)
3. by the time an historian begins recording events there, a man named Melchizedek is the king of Salem, the name of Jerusalem that prevailed before the Canaan conquests (Genesis 14:17-20)
 - a. Salem means peace but the peace of that city can only be interpreted spiritually, as the place where the gospel would begin, for Jerusalem has been a city of war and conflict throughout its history
 - b. although Melchizedek was a priest of God, the city fell into heathen hands after he disappears from the Bible stage and became an Egyptian province
4. after Joshua led the people of Israel across the Jordan and through Ai and Jericho, the king of Jerusalem began to feel threatened with the loss of his city as well (Joshua 10:1-27)
5. the city, however, was not taken for Israel until after Joshua's death (Judges 1:1-8)
6. far from being a complete conquest, the Jebusites who had inhabited the city were not driven out (Judges 1:21)

B. City of David

1. after he had reigned as Israel's second king for seven and a half years at Hebron, David determined to conquer Jerusalem completely and make it his capital
2. in about the year 1000 B.C., David succeeded (Second Samuel 5:6-12)
3. the city that David conquered was compact, but he extended its reach remarkably during his reign and that growth only continued during the reign of his descendants
4. Jerusalem is very much identified in the Bible as the city of David, for it was there that Israel gained prominence as a nation of the world

C. City of Solomon

1. Solomon was chosen by God to construct his temple in Jerusalem and to protect the city, he also built walls of defense around it (First Kings 8:1-13)
2. Solomon, however, was more pragmatic than pious and also made room in Jerusalem for the idols of the people Israel had not driven out of Canaan (First Kings 11:1-13)
3. upon his death, the kingdom was plunged into a leadership crisis and eventually divided into two, like North and South Korea today
 - a. the northern kingdom of Israel was led further astray very quickly
 - b. the southern kingdom of Judah occupied Jerusalem and managed to hold on to the covenant for a century longer

D. City of Babylon

1. Jerusalem fell into widespread idolatry after the fall of Israel and in spite of reforms by good kinds like Hezekiah and Josiah, who restored the temple and the law in Jerusalem, but could never do much about the people's hearts
2. God decided to divorce Judah and permit the Babylonians behind King Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the city and the temple
 - a. Jerusalem was first spoiled of its riches and its finest citizens were made slaves in Babylon
 - b. a siege wall was erected around the city to keep food and supplies out until the Jews surrendered (Second Kings 25:1-10)

E. City of the Remnant

1. Jerusalem passed through the hands of the Babylonians to the Medes and Persians a few decades later and Cyrus permitted the Jews to return and rebuild the city and the religion, as is discussed in the books of Haggai and Zechariah
2. Ezra and Nehemiah returned in the fifth century to rebuild the walls of the city and the religion practiced inside them
3. when Alexander the Great conquered the city, she passed into Greek hands, but upon his death, Jerusalem became a vulnerable city in the middle of the Egyptians and Greeks
4. before the birth of Jesus, the Romans had ascended as a world power and taken control of Jerusalem, allowing the Jews to worship with a small measure of autonomy, but always under the watchful eye and heavy hand of Roman governors
5. temples were constructed in Jerusalem and then destroyed without ever approaching the magnificence of Solomon's house
6. finally, Jerusalem was laid waste by the Romans in A.D. 70 following a fiery Jewish revolt that got Caesar's undivided attention (Matthew 24:1-16)

II. Jerusalem Today and of the Future

A. The Gospel Went Forth From Zion

1. the last important phase of Jerusalem's relationship to God was to be the proclamation of the gospel (Isaiah 2:1-5)
2. for this reason, Jesus admonished the apostles to remain in Jerusalem until they were endowed by the Holy Spirit with supernatural powers (Acts 1:4-12)
3. there, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit fell upon them and they began preaching the gospel of a risen savior
4. thousands were converted and the church of Christ was established in the city of Jerusalem
5. conflicts with the Jewish elders, however, led to disorder in the city, until the illegal martyrdom of Stephen compelled many disciples to flee into other parts of the empire, taking the gospel with them to Jews abroad and to Gentiles (Acts 8:1-4)
6. so long as the apostles dwelt in Jerusalem, that city was prominent among the churches as a repository of authority in earthen vessels
7. the fall of the city in A.D. 70, however, brought that period to a close

B. Jerusalem in the Future

1. the fanciful doctrine of Premillennialism holds that the plans of God for Christ's mission were mostly failures
 - a. Jesus was to lead the people in reestablishing the earthly kingdom of God with its throne in the city of Jerusalem
 - b. the church was merely a contingency when it became apparent to God that the Jews were rejecting Jesus instead of exalting him to David's throne
 - c. today, we wait for Jesus to return and try again
2. in fact, the plan all along included Christ's death (Luke 24:17-27)
 - a. the Jewish rejection was far from a surprise to God, but answered the prophecies of Isaiah and Zechariah perfectly
 - b. the church was not a contingency, but is in fact the form the kingdom was to take (Colossians 1:13)
 - c. Jesus was crowned to sit upon David's throne by his victory over death and ascension back into Heaven (Acts 2:29-33)

3. yet because of Premillennialism, political and religious doctrines continue to prepare that city for a special role in the second coming

a. American legislators pour billions into Israel because they are loyal Premillennialists who feel they are doing God's will

b. denominational preachers excuse the continued rejection of Jesus by the city's Jewish inhabitants on the basis that the second coming will grant them alone a second chance

4. actually, Jesus is never predicted to set foot on Earth again, but will return in the clouds to receive the righteous up to himself to dwell in Heaven eternally (see First Thessalonians 4:13-18)

5. Jerusalem, like every other city on Earth is slated for a final elemental destruction after that (see Second Peter 3:9-11)

6. all men, Jew or Gentile, will be judged based on their acceptance or rejection of Jesus while they lived (Romans 1:16 and 11:22-26)

C. New Jerusalem

1. the former glories of earthly Jerusalem are borrowed to exemplify the eternal perfection of New Jerusalem, our heavenly home (Revelation 21:1-5)

2. the registration of names described in Psalm 87 will be complete—the book of life will be finished and all the names of all the saved will be inscribed

3. is yours?

Conclusion

Psalm 87 is a wonderful paean to Jerusalem, but truly New Jerusalem is deserving of even more praise. Are you ready to go there?

Psalm 88: Incline Your Ear to My Cry

Introduction

Psalm 88 is another song by the sons of Korah, a musical guild that operated in Jerusalem during the Old Testament. This particular work is a contemplation of Heman the Ezrahite, probably a leader of that company, and is considered the saddest of all the psalms. Unlike the other works which question why God has not replied to man's prayers quickly enough, this one never blunts the lamentation with the customary expressions of trust and praise. It is truly a heartbreaking echo of a man feeling forlorn by God. [Read Psalm 88:1-18.] What can we make of this psalm? Surely all of us have felt as if God was not attending to our prayers in the cooperative way we desired. Some of us might even have drifted to the edge of repudiating our faith because of the same sick feeling the sons of Korah lamented here. Hopefully, we can learn from this psalm that God's grace is sufficient for us and that he will answer prayer in the wisest way and in his time.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. First Complaint (1-9)

1. the psalm begins promisingly enough by addressing the "Lord, God of my salvation," but from there it immediately descends into a pit of despair and disappointment in God
2. every child has complained to his parents at one time or another that they don't understand his pain, or that they are unsympathetic to her tears; the psalmist is feeling just that way as he breaks down in the presence of God and says I have cried day and night, but now please hear me
3. it is unlikely that his problems are physical in nature, but his emotional and spiritual complaints are sapping the strength from his weary body
 - a. depression, anxiety and worry may be products of the mind, but they afflict the body and can kill it as surely as any other poison
 - b. Heman's problems have reached the saturation point and he feels like the walking dead
4. the psalmist believes that he is suffering as a result of God's wrath, but he never tells us why he should be facing such punishment and he never tries to confess a sin
 - a. not only does he feel punished by God, he also feels isolated from his friends and incapable of looking at things clearly anymore
 - b. some have suggested that leprosy might be the cause of his suffering, since verse 8 says that he was shut up and could not escape
5. whatever the source of his complaint, it is severe and he holds God responsible for not removing it as he asked

B. God's Silence (10-14)

1. the psalmist fears that he will not receive an affirmative answer to his prayer before he dies, that he is wasting away and Jehovah is wasting time
2. the series of questions in verses 10-14 all anticipate a negative answer and complaint that God's silence is costing Heman the last moments of his life
3. like Job, the essence of his questions is "Why do I suffer?"
 - a. the answer to such questions is rarely an easy one to accept, but the will of the tempter and the consequences of sin—sometimes personal and sometimes not—is key to understanding suffering
 - b. human suffering was not the will of a God who put man in Eden or who allowed his son to die on Calvary
 - c. the solution to human suffering is his objective, but man's free will creates obstacles in that path and delays its force
 - d. suffering then is both inevitable and invaluable, for God uses it to teach and train and call

C. Second Complaint (15-18)

1. like most sufferers, Heman feels as if he has suffered his entire life; such anguish quickly clouds one's judgment and makes the good times seem distant
2. his faith is shaken because his prayer has not been answered according to his will and he is terrified that a God so powerful could watch passively as he suffers; he no longer reveres God, but he is tormented by him

3. he concludes his complaint in darkness, waiting for an answer that will come, but his conclusion only leaves us with more questions

II. Applications

A. Why Do We Suffer?

1. we suffer because of the presence of evil, but that does not necessarily mean that we are suffering due to our own sins
 - a. a child born with AIDS is not suffering for her own sins, but those of her parents
 - b. yet sometimes we do discover that the way of the transgressor is hard and we suffer as a direct result of our own sins
2. the world of God's creation knew no suffering at all until humanity went astray from God's user manual and ate of the forbidden fruit
 - a. Satan gained power when that temptation succeeded and he has been exercising and increasing it ever since
 - b. death, the chief of all human suffering, came to mankind as a direct result of being cut off from the tree of life after Eden was corrupted by one transgression
 - c. soon innocent blood was being shed, lies were being told, adultery and prostitution were becoming common and human suffering was multiplying
3. yet none of this is the fault of a God who created man good and placed him in Paradise
 - a. people suffer physically because mortality is a fact of life and every attendant disease and distress is part of that process
 - b. people suffer emotionally because of the guilt and hurt that results from selfish and shortsighted choices
4. people suffer not because God afflicts them, but because man anointed another creature as the prince of this world in Eden and the process of divine reclamation is not yet finished (Ephesians 2:1-7)

B. Why Does God Not Grant Our Every Wish?

1. God does not answer our every prayer affirmatively because sometimes we ask for things that would not actually benefit us in the long term
 - a. we don't mean to ask for the wrong things, but we don't know any better, simply due to our shortsightedness
 - b. and so we are overruled sometimes and thank God (Romans 8:23-27)
2. sometimes our petitions to God are self-serving and an affirmative answer would require that harm be done to someone else; how is God to decide which of his children is blessed and which is not?
3. we may also ask God for carnal tools that could destroy our souls; many a man has prayed for wealth, only to find that it became the curse that ruined his soul (James 4:1-3)
4. there are times when we assume the will of God must be one thing and we assume God will answer our prayer that way, but it turns out we are mistaken
 - a. so we pray, "Thy will be done" and we anticipate things, "Lord willing"
 - b. all else is the sin of presumption and pride
5. then, too, human suffering is an invaluable instructor (Second Corinthians 12:7-10)

C. Can We Be Angry With God?

1. as secular psychology has collided with Christianity, a treatment has arisen in which it is supposed that it is all right for people to get angry at God and to tell him off when they suffer something especially painful
 - a. if your father abused you, tell God off
 - b. if your child died, yell at God and get it out
 - c. if you broke a fingernail, let the Lord have it
2. surely, we find people in the Bible getting angry with God, but does the Bible ever justify their attitudes (James 1:12-18)?
 - a. was Elijah appeased or rebuked when he thought God had abandoned him to Jezebel?
 - b. was Habakkuk applauded or corrected when he thought God was erring by allowing the Chaldeans into Jerusalem?
 - c. was Heman correct in attributing his suffering to Jehovah, simply because it endured longer than he anticipated?

3. if it is the devil who causes human suffering and God who both can cure it and use it to teach man a better way, could it also be that the premature relief of suffering might end up costing us a valuable spiritual lesson?

- a. God's grace is sufficient for you (Second Corinthians 11:23-30)
- b. if God never does another thing for you, the sacrifice of his son is already more than you will ever do for him and that gift of grace is enough
- c. if you are holding your faith conditionally upon something more, you are in need of some hard lessons that you probably will not appreciate

D. Should We Be Satisfied With Emotional Sin?

1. in the twentieth century, many things which were formerly sinful became the tolerable and excusable results of sickness or disease

- a. drunkenness became alcoholism—a disease not a sin
- b. homosexuality went all the way from sin to psychosis to alternative lifestyle choice in one short century

2. and many Christians have made up their minds that worry, anxiety and depression are untreatable parts of their personality and that they will do nothing to counteract them

- a. while we do not deny the biological root of some depression, there is usually a parallel spiritual battle to be fought also
- b. medication may salve the biological wounds, but it cannot heal the spirit which must stand before God

3. we must work to overcome the kinds of complaints that Heman issues through learning to be content, looking beyond today's hardships to tomorrow's glory, and refusing to permit ourselves to worry when every burden can be shared by Jesus (Philippians 4:4-7)

- a. turn it over to Jesus, for his yoke is easy and his burden is light
- b. don't tolerate a spiritual condition that leads you into sinful thoughts; fight!

Conclusion

Psalm 88 is indeed the saddest of the collection, for it ends in such darkness. You don't need to end up in darkness, though. Trust in God, in whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

Psalm 89: How Long, Lord?

Introduction

The eighty-ninth psalm is no more a pleasing read than the one that preceded it. Here, Ethan the Ezrahite, picks up his pen to remind God of his past goodness and covenant with Israel and the royal house of David. Ethan's ploy, however, is to show God how that covenant had failed since the throne of David and the nation were being threatened by others. Ethan seems to couch his complaint in a promise to be faithful no matter what, yet still he pleads for an answer as to how long God will take to restore a descendant of David to the throne. [Read Psalm 89:1-51.] The fifty-second verse is actually not a part of this psalm, but a doxology for Book Three of the Psalms collection. That is why it seems so out of place at the end of this sad lament.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. God's Faithfulness (1-4)

1. Ethan begins by earnestly promising to sing of God's mercies forever, that is, even when they are somewhat less than apparent

a. like the modern wedding vow of loyalty for better or worse, in sickness and health, good and bad, Ethan's vow is to be true to God even when hard times afflict his nation and his house

b. this is when faith is tested and God cannot prevent all of these hardships without causing us to suffer a spiritual decay

2. all this loyalty was constructed around God's promise to bless the house of David forever, but the psalmist cannot foresee anything beyond the fact that with Judah's demise, David's descendants are losing their prominence and power in the world

a. does this mean that God has failed his promise?

b. while the psalmist fears it does, he is laboring under certain misunderstandings

3. "After Zerubbabel, no prince of the Davidic house sat on the throne of David, or had temporal sway over Israel. The descendants of David sank into obscurity, and so remained for five centuries. Still, however, God's faithfulness was sure. In Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, the true King of the everlasting kingdom was raised up—every pledge made to David was fulfilled. 'Messiah the Prince,' eternal king of an eternal kingdom, appeared as the true 'Seed' intended, and began his spiritual reign over the spiritual Israel, which still continues, and will continue forever" (*Pulpit Commentary*).

a. Ethan could not see into the future or the mind of God to understand the rich blessings that would one day come through the throne of David

b. nor could he comprehend the depths to which the descendants of David had violated God's covenant through sin and compromise with idolaters

B. Mercies of the Lord (5-18)

1. these are the most powerful words in the psalm, considering the angelic praise of God that goes on in heaven and describing God as worthy because of his power over creation

2. moreover, that power is not corrupted, for it is coupled with character—righteousness, justice, mercy and truth

3. Ethan confessed what many of his countrymen had truly forgotten—that the might of Israel was in the God standing above the throne, not the man sitting upon it

C. Covenant with David (19-37)

1. the vision that Ethan remembers is likely the one given to Nathan after David decided to build a temple without God asking him to (Second Samuel 7:4-17)

a. David's presumption is rebuked, although his pure intentions are recognized

b. God is capable of reproving us when we mean well, but stray from truth, by lovingly redirecting our energies back to his will

c. it is when zeal gets ahead of knowledge that such errors often occur, but they reveal no willful impurity of the heart or rebellion of the mind; the rebuke should not discourage, but instruct

2. although David would not build the temple, his son would, and the throne of David would be a message of hope for all men

3. Ethan perhaps misses the import of his own words here, that God reserved the right to punish David's princely descendants for their iniquity; what he was witnessing in the demise of Judah was just that, not the dissolution of the throne altogether

D. Last Gasp (38-45)

1. zeal without knowledge, foreknowledge or patience overcomes Ethan's wisdom and restraint
2. he cannot foresee that the throne of David would one day be occupied by the Messiah, who would be the son of God and savior of Israel
3. perhaps it is Jehoiachin or Zedekiah about whom the psalmist writes here; those kings were among the last to reign in Jerusalem because God was divorcing Judah for the sin of idolatry
 - a. Jehoiachin was captured by Nebuchadnezzar (Second Kings 24:8-16)
 - b. Zedekiah was evil as well (Second Kings 24:17-20)
4. prolonging the reigns of such evil men would simply have prevented God from bringing Christ to the throne; their removal was in perfect keeping with his covenant

E. Appeal (46-51)

1. Ethan's prayer for deliverance punctuates his inability to judge the future
2. but before we condemn his shortsightedness, let us understand how often we have blamed God for failing our prayers when the passage of time proved his abiding care in not giving us what we wanted, when what we wanted would have turned out bad for us

II. Applications

A. Seeing Into God's Mind

1. despite his confidence and best effort, Ethan was unable to see into the mind of God and discover what we know today
2. as much as we might try to discern why Jesus has not yet returned, why faith is losing its influence in the world or why God has not granted this petition of ours or that, we can learn from Psalm 89 to be patient and confident in a God who will not be hastened into action before the time is right
3. beyond our knowledge of scripture, it is impossible to see into the mind of God (Isaiah 55:8-9)
 - a. had Ethan known more about Jesus, he would not have complained so bitterly to God when wicked men like Jehoiachin and Zedekiah were removed from power (First Corinthians 2:6-16)
 - b. if we could see into our own futures, we would likely silence all our own complaints about life and God, for eternity would eclipse the bitterest moments of today
4. scripture gives us just enough insight into the future and God's mind that contentment ought to result

B. Godly Character

1. perhaps Ethan feared a conflict was arising between God's covenant with David and the divine character
2. the men that Ethan was supporting were anything but righteous, just, true and merciful; the real conflict was between them and that covenant
3. here are four elements of godliness, which we are wise to adopt if we would see God
 - a. righteousness is living life obediently and according to Christ's example and God's law
 - b. justice is dealing fairly with all men, caring for the vulnerable and not putting self first
 - c. truth is honesty and light, eschewing lies and walking in the light of Christ's glory
 - d. mercy is a willingness to offer forgiveness to offenders and to come to the aid of those in need
4. for this cause, we are to exercise ourselves toward godliness (see First Timothy 4:7), consent to doctrine which accords with godliness (see First Timothy 6:4), pursue godliness (see First Timothy 6:11) and reflect godly character in our lives every day (see Second Timothy 3:5)
5. between the example of Christ and the words of the Holy Spirit, we have all things that pertain to this objective (Second Peter 1:2-8)

C. The Throne of David

1. Ethan was witnessing the removal of the last kings who would sit on David's throne over Jerusalem on Earth

- a. when they were gone, the seat would remain vacant for 500 years while Judah was ruled by various other states and God silently emphasized the need for a new kind of king and deliverer
- b. slavery to sin and spiritual liberation became themes of the age and especially when John the immerser came onto the scene
- 2. the miracles of Christ suggested that he might be the one to regain David's seat, but his ministry focused so much on the spirit and so little upon the nation that its leaders rejected him
- 3. at the cross, it seemed that he had failed to be the messiah, and even the devil rejoiced in his shortsightedness, but his resurrection lifted him into David's seat and multiplied his power and realm beyond the borders of Israel to all the world (Acts 2:29-33)
 - a. if only Ethan could have seen beyond himself to what we see, things which angels and prophets desired to look into and to know, but were denied
 - b. a gospel that surrounds and envelopes us and ultimately saves us (Galatians 4:1-7)

D. The Reproach of Christ

- 1. the pride of life bothered Ethan in a way that it did not bother God
 - a. like Moses before him, the writer reminds God that if something bad happens to Israel, the worldly people will mock them and God, too
 - b. God seems not to have minded, for he had permitted his children to be spanked by the world before, when they needed it
 - c. he even allowed his son to be mocked, beaten and killed while the devil laughed, only to reserve the last laugh for himself in the empty tomb
- 2. as Christians, we may likewise bear the reproach of Christ when it seems to unbelievers that God is not responding to us, but we will enjoy the last smile when the last trumpet sounds and atheism is abolished by sight (Hebrews 11:24-26)
- 3. the shortsightedness of Ethan is a malady often repeated today, but faith and understanding can prevent it (Second Peter 1:9-12)

Conclusion

Ethan's eighty-ninth psalm is a challenging one, for his shortcomings are so often ours. May we learn to see beyond ourselves to eternity.

Psalm 90: Teach Us To Number Our Days

Introduction

The fourth book of psalms begins with the ninetieth of the collection, a poetic prayer attributed to Moses, the man of God. Because most of the psalms are identified with David or those who lived after him, the ninetieth psalm is considered among the oldest. It lends emotional insight to an era of Israel's history that was both thrilling and frustrating, as the nation made its pilgrimage from Egyptian slavery to Canaan freedom. The trip was frustrating, though, for it took 40 years and most of the adults who began did not finish because of their rebellious attitudes. [Read Psalm 90:1-17.] Although Psalm 90 is subtitled as a prayer, only the last six verses stray from the genre of adoration and community complaint. Here is Moses reflecting on the unkindest fact of life, death, and the frailty and futility of man's inventions.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Reflections (1-6)

1. as the mountains are perceived to be the oldest reminders of God's creation week, Moses reflects upon their stately stature as but infants compared to the everlasting nature of God himself
 - a. God is not part of creation, a figment of man's imagination or the work of some natural force, but he is the agent of creation
 - b. moreover, Moses recognizes that God is Israel's dwelling place, an illustration of true fellowship and the pilgrimage that life really is, from cradle to grave
2. his eternal nature overwhelms every generation of man, for God witnesses the passage of one generation into the next, as people return to the dust from whence they were created
 - a. he has no intellectual limitations of time and even a thousand years pass by him as if they were all one day
 - b. time passes for God as quickly as a night's rest does for a weary man
3. the point is that although our life spans are the only thing by which we can gauge the passage of time and the importance of events, with God, there have been many generations before us and there may be many that follow
 - a. each one has possessed spiritual ambitions clouded by the futility of material aspirations
 - b. each generation has come to an end and the things it possessed were passed on to the next and men and women were left with their spirits to appear before God

B. Complaint (7-11)

1. the book of Job proves that it is often difficult to establish that one's suffering is directly due to his unrighteousness
 - a. we know that God chastens us, but in Job's case, his suffering resulted not from his sin, but his goodness
 - b. in the case of Moses's generation, however, they were suffering through 40 years of wandering precisely because they had brought pain upon themselves through ingratitude and rebellion
2. their public iniquities and secret sins were exposed in God's sight for judgment and a generation that had wiped Red Sea spray from its brow was gradually filling the newly dug graves of the desert (Deuteronomy 32:1-18)
3. in the end, not even Moses himself crossed over Jordan into the promised land; only Caleb and Joshua represented the adult population that began the Exodus 40 years earlier
 - a. far from finishing life with a shriek of joy, most died like a sigh, their seventy or eighty years remembered only for labor and sorrow and the ultimate disappointment of falling short
 - b. what a waste of time to spend an entire life or even a single moment outside of God!

C. Prayer (12-17)

1. Moses now entreats God to teach his people to number their days to gain a heart of wisdom
 - a. that they might take to heart the lessons that the brevity of life would teach (12)
 - b. that God might cease from his anger and relent from punishing them (13)
 - c. that he would renew his mercies upon them and replace their affliction with gladness (14-15)
 - d. that he would prove his fellowship to them and their children (16)

- e. that he would let his beauty alight upon them (17)
- f. that he would bless their efforts and approve them with prosperity (17)
- 2. God is not man that he should repent and yet he can regret the results of his kindness and relent concerning his intentions to punish or bless
 - a. his message to the wayward is ever, “Return to me and I will return to you,” but I cannot enter sin where you dwell now
 - b. if you would dwell in God, you must leave iniquity and journey to peace, for to exist in his beauty is to espouse his character

II. Applications

A. Creation Foundation

1. in the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin made it fashionable to cast scientific doubt upon the Bible’s creation account; 140 years later, believing anything but Darwinian evolution will leave you ostracized by intellectuals and possibly even expelled from schools of higher learning and academic circles
2. the tyranny of the hypothesis attacks faith at its root and argues that even the evidence of intelligent design in the universe is an accidental byproduct of natural forces
3. Moses, who lived closer to the dawn of time than any other psalmist or scientist, credited the I AM with creating the universe and all that is in it and he feared not the Egyptians or infidels who disagreed
 - a. it was Moses who recounted the creation week in Genesis 1:1-31
 - b. where creation shows evidence of design, we have the fingerprints of God (Psalm 19:1-6)
 - c. God answers the doubter, especially among his children (Job 38:1-11)
4. the creation record is instrumental to the establishment in the Bible of God’s identity; to render it as mere allegory or cultural fable is to rock the very foundation upon which the Bible exists
 - a. modern science has yet to answer the question of how design exists without a designer or where the building blocks for a big bang would have originated
 - b. those are questions that cannot be answered by observable phenomena, but by faith

B. Dwelling in God

1. there is a faith so strong and persuaded that its owner comprehends himself to be dwelling within God
2. when he sings, “This world is not my home,” he is serious, for all his choices and ambitions are prioritized according to his eternal hope and the influence of the Almighty within him
3. when could Israel have been said to dwell in God—when they walked by faith or when they complained and sinned?
 - a. it is when we walk by faith that we can say we are dwelling in God as well (First John 3:18-24)
 - b. dwelling in God sounds like a terrific abstraction to many people, but it is a relationship that can be measured and identified, for it is established by faith and obedience (First John 2:6)
4. for some, dwelling in God is strictly something they feel and as long as their consciences seem clear, they feel okay, but consciences can be deceptive and residency in God can be known

C. I’ll Fly Away

1. “The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years,” Moses writes
2. but then man dies like a sigh and his body returns to the soil as his spirit flies away
3. the relative brevity of human life is a lesson which is most often learned only after it is too late to make any difference
 - a. parents and children waste away their years and then attempt death bed reconciliations, but it is too late for picnics and birthdays
 - b. a man or woman procrastinates on one of life’s goals like traveling to Italy or building a dream house and then suddenly it is too late
 - c. but are human reunions, vacations and houses what Moses means?
4. to the contrary, they are the ultimately insignificant priorities of life which tend to distract from what really matters (Ecclesiastes 1:11)

a. even now, many of us are so caught up in doing our jobs, eating our meals, paying our taxes and building sand castles that eternity is but a gossamer abstraction

b. winning souls is somebody else's work and our own spirits are on hold, too (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

5. soon life will be cut off and we will fly away

D. Return, O Lord!

1. let the beauty of God be upon you when he returns to you as you flee from sin and selfishness to find refuge in his son (James 4:7-10)

2. his compassion is contained in the blood of Jesus Christ, which cleanses the penitent sinner of his shame and animates the believer to walk in the light toward an eternity worth flying away to when seventy or eighty years have passed

3. like the prodigal son's father, God's arms are open if you are willing to come back from the mire of rebellion

Conclusion

Are you ready to fly away today?

Psalm 91: In God We Trust

Introduction

The ninety-first psalm is either ascribed to the pen of Moses or to his inspiration in the previous song. Because it bears a resemblance to his words in Deuteronomy 32-33, many commentators believe that Moses himself wrote Psalm 91 many years before most of the collection was produced. The ninety-first psalm is a composite of a wisdom poem and a divine oracle, with messianic undertones. Ultimately, it is an ode to the security that believers find while dwelling in their God, a secret place, a shadow, a refuge and a fortress. [Read Psalm 91:1-16.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. In God We Trust (1-2)

1. the writer uses four metaphors to describe the state of living by faith—God’s secret place, the shadow of his being, a refuge and a fortress
 - a. not all Christians comprehend what the writer means by dwelling in such close association with God, for some are more likely to scurry there only when threatened by life and others visit only on Sundays
 - b. this spiritual sanctuary is a dwelling place to those believers who truly know God and the ways of his son, who are so thoroughly filled with the Holy Spirit that their lives read like Bibles
2. think of Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25-38)
3. recall the words of Paul: “For to me, to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21)
4. “In God We Trust” is the unlikely, no longer applicable motto of the United States, but it must ever be the philosophy of the Christian who would know sanctuary in his God

B. Surely He Will Deliver You (3-8)

1. a voice then answers back with a message of security to add to a dwelling in God
2. like a mother hen, God will guard him night and day and protect him from the evils that abound
3. evil assaults the believer through the hardships of life, the temptations of the flesh and errant convictions that either doubt God or alter his will
 - a. truth is our protection in every case, for it is a shield and a buckler, able to deflect the fiery darts of Satan and to defend against any attack on faith
 - b. no matter what the tempter throws at you, you will be defended if your abode is in God

C. You Made The Lord Your Dwelling (9-13)

1. just as you chose which house, apartment or wigwam in which you would live your life at this present time, so you are permitted to choose whether or not you will dwell in the Most High
2. but understand that some who would fancy themselves Christians never make that choice
 - a. they get wet, say the right words and show up on time, but they continue to live their lives after the ways of the world and detached from the Holy Spirit enough that their perspective is entirely warped by what goes on here
 - b. the passage does not mean that true believers will never suffer on Earth, but that

“the most crushing calamities can only shorten his journey and hasten him to his reward. Ill to him is no ill, but only good in a mysterious form. Losses enrich him, sickness is his medicine, reproach is his honor, death is his gain. No evil in the strict sense of the word can happen to him, for everything is overruled for good. Happy is he who is in such a case. He is secure when others are in peril, he lives where others die” (Spurgeon 93).

3. this is the way that Paul lived his life, for he said that, “to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21)
4. here the psalm turns messianic, for the words of verses 11-12 are used by Satan against Jesus during his temptations in the wilderness (Matthew 4:5-7)
 - a. from this we learn that the security of Psalm 91 is not physically absolute, for Jesus himself suffered more than anyone

b. we also learn that it is wrong to put God's providential care to a test by purposely putting oneself in harm's way

D. God Will Answer (14-16)

1. the last three verses are God's approval of the concepts in Psalm 91 and his signet seal to be an abode for the righteous
2. hear these promises
 - a. deliverance
 - b. set on high
 - c. an answer when we call
 - d. his presence in times of trouble
 - e. honor
 - f. long life in salvation
3. one condition which encompasses a life of faithful submission to his will—the believer must set his love upon God
 - a. why should we choose to love God?
 - b. because he first loved us (First John 4:17-19)
4. then God can redeem you both from slavery to sin and its eternal consequence, starting you on a pilgrimage greater than the Hebrew Exodus (Deuteronomy 7:6-11)

II. Some Applications

A. Dwelling In God

1. when the psalmist extols the blessings of abiding in God, our minds should turn to the book of First John, for the apostle was intimately acquainted with the concept
 - a. obedience to his commands is how we know that we know Christ (First John 2:3-6)
 - b. the word is an anointing that dwells in us and makes us to dwell in God (First John 2:24-29)
 - c. practicing or tolerating one's own is evidence of a different abode (First John 3:4-7)
 - d. the fruits of the Spirit are evidence that one abides in God and vice versa (First John 3:24)
 - e. some say doctrine is unimportant, but it matters if you want to experience Psalm 91 (Second John 9)
2. in all this, John is merely passing along the things that Jesus had shown him and the other apostles in the night that he was betrayed (John 14:15, 15:9-10)
 - a. the creeds can clamor about works interfering with grace and brethren can make their gospel/doctrine distinctions, but the words of Christ will prevail
 - b. law and love are united and when they are, we will be united in presence with God, in his secret place, his shadow, his refuge, his fortress, and we will know a peace that surpasses all understanding

B. Deliverance From Evil

1. for all those who would prefer an absolute physical deliverance to be the meaning of Psalm 91, let me say that are bargaining for something far cheaper than what is intended
2. which is greater—physical deliverance or spiritual redemption (Luke 5:17-24)?
3. the real power of a faithful life is not in avoiding every hardship and difficulty in life, but in perfecting one's perspective about them, so that they do no harm to the only part of man destined for eternity, his spirit
 - a. this is how the apostles were able to rejoice when they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ and how we are to find opportunity for growth in every trial (James 1:2-4)
 - b. wisdom leads to Heaven and wisdom comes when knowledge is put to the test by experience
4. remember how Joseph responded when he was reunited with the brothers who had sold him into slavery?: “You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Genesis 50:20)
 - a. your perspective on the trials of life will make all the difference in how you perceive God and whether or not you ever comprehend what it means to dwell in him (Romans 8:28-30)

b. when will you say, “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (Second Corinthians 12:10)

C. Angels’ Charge

1. our generation is deeply concerned with angels, if you judge by our movies, television programs and books
2. these heavenly messengers do indeed exist, even if they do not interact with man in quite the way that Hollywood and Madison Avenue portray (Hebrews 1:14)
 - a. with the passing of the age of miracles, the kinds of encounters with angels must also have passed
 - b. yet still they watch over the affairs of men, especially regarding salvation, and have standing in the throne room of God (see Matthew 18:10)
3. no doubt, the degree of care mentioned in Psalm 91 had special significance for the Messiah, who had to live long enough in a hostile world filled with disease and crime to die sacrificially in Jerusalem
 - a. but still, we see angels involved in the conversion of Cornelius and the execution of Herod; they were messengers of God in very active ways
 - b. it is impossible to attribute this and that to the work of angels in this post-miracle age, but if they are today agents of Providence, they truly do continue to minister to the saints
 - c. and still, they act as ushers when the righteous die and need escorting into Abraham’s bosom (see Luke 16:22)

D. Setting Your Love Upon Him

1. a flame burns in the heart of the man, woman or child who has set his or her affections and hopes upon God
2. personal unworthiness is defeated by grace upon the soul that strives against the devil rather than submitting to his allure (Second Timothy 1:8-12)
3. love, though, is more than a feeling (Second Timothy 1:13-14)
 - a. “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (First John 3:18)
 - b. if you are not convinced that you are even now abiding in God, it is likely that you are holding some part of your heart back for the devil to play with, that you do not yet know God’s name entirely because your affections are divided between two lovers
 - c. it’s about your perspective: “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness” (Matthew 6:22-23)
4. set your love upon him at last (Romans 13:11-14)

Conclusion

Psalm 91 is a tremendous comfort, even if it is not a physical absolute. Instead, it is a spiritual matter when people choose to walk by faith with a sanctified perspective.

Psalm 92: He Is My Rock

Introduction

The ninety-second psalm is of unknown authorship, but is entitled, “a Psalm or Song for the Sabbath,” and evidently was for use in the temple among all the people. “Jewish tradition says that it was sung in the morning at the time of the drink offering of the first lamb” and “recited on the second day of the Feast of Tabernacles” (*Pulpit Commentary*). Psalm 92 breaks the trend of community laments and individuals cries, for it is eminently optimistic. The triumph of the righteous is its grandest theme, for God is their rock. [Read Psalm 92:1-15.] We may divide the song into three parts. Verses 1-4 describe the value of praise. Verses 5-8 introduce the concept of God’s incomparable wisdom. Verses 9-15 attribute judgment and blessing to his throne.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Give, Sing, Declare (1-4)

1. as the day of worship dawned, the people were reminded that it is simply a good thing to acknowledge the giver of good things and protector of the vulnerable
 - a. by giving thanks
 - b. by singing praises to his name
 - c. by declaring his loving-kindness and faithfulness
2. nothing is quite so awful as the apathy of ingratitude; we discipline our children because of it and struggle through life with it ourselves as we measure our hardships against our triumphs
 - a. the Sabbath was on the last day of the week and so it was natural to look backward at what had occurred, where God had given the increase and where it had been withheld
 - b. within the Hebrew covenant, Israel was always fed, protected and guided and it was fitting for her to dedicate the seventh day for gratitude
3. the instruments described in verse 3 were for the worship done in the temple
 - a. the psaltery, lute and harp made harmonious sounds just as the burning of incense made a pleasant aroma and the Sabbath itself was lent to rest and dedication
 - b. whether with the instruments of Old Testament worship or the voices of New Testament worship, a harmonious sound is ever the objective of worshipers everywhere
 1. harmony, though, is not judged best by a musicologist, but by God who searches the hearts of the worshipers to find sincerity
 2. technical harmony often escapes the untrained voice, but spiritual harmony is within reach of all men
4. the work of God is his amazing providence, that he has not left this world orphaned as the deists would claim, but continues to hear prayers and intervene providentially in the affairs of his highest creatures
 - a. God made the psalmist glad with his divine work and when one chooses to cooperate in that effort, triumph cannot help but follow
 - b. the results may not be immediately obvious, but they are eternally assured nonetheless

B. How Great Thou Art! (5-8)

1. deep thinkers are sometimes revered in this world, but imagine the depth of God’s thoughts, being able to see beyond today perfectly into tomorrow
2. a man or woman of piety comprehends that God possesses such depth, even if that person must admit that his wisdom is too great to harness completely
3. the fool, however, has no comprehension of God’s wisdom and pretends to find sage direction in between his own ears
 - a. although they may seem to flourish in material things, the purpose of life is greater than money and objects and the addiction of the wicked for such baubles become his undoing
 - b. God gives all men the opportunity to show their stripes, even to change them, but the wicked who refuse to be converted are left to their own destruction
4. where so many writers have anguished at the prosperity of the wicked, this psalmist is untroubled, seeing it only as a prelude to a fall

C. The Righteous Shall Flourish (9-15)

1. this psalmist is not at all worried, having recognized the powerful anointing of God to be superior to anything the wicked can muster against him
- 2 here is a man with perspective, who is not crashing into despair simply because someone else has more money than he has
3. he is content to be among the righteous who flourish like palm trees planted in the temple
 - a. some people are so devoted to prayer and praise and learning that it seems that they are planted in the presence of God, rooted in him and in his church
 - b. Judgment Day will vindicate the position of the righteous that seems challenged now by the temporary material success of the wicked

II. Applications

A. It is Good To Give Thanks

1. even as we instruct our children to thank their benefactors and threaten to remove their blessings if they fail, we so often neglect to return thanks to our God for his grace (James 1:17-18)
 - a. it is good to give thanks for our basic needs, especially the daily bread for which we must not forget to pray (First Timothy 4:4-5)
 - b. God does not bless us just to get thanks, but ingratitude tells him that we can't handle so much blessing and continue to be pious (Luke 17:11-19)
2. too much material blessing can make us apathetic and dependent upon self for what God has provided (Proverbs 30:7-9)
3. gratitude acknowledges the work of God and helps to put our shortfalls in perspective (Philippians 4:1-7)

B. Morning and Night

1. morning is a time of anticipation and potential, and we are told to eat a healthy breakfast so that we will be nourished and prepared for the physical and mental challenges of the day; Corn Flakes, however, will profit you little when you are faced with temptations, spiritual quandaries and opportunities to share your faith
2. evening is a time of reflection during which we may count all the successes and failures of the day gone by, but without a sense of what should have happened, the days can fly by with little spiritual advancement
3. our psalmist recommended a period of praise and meditation in the morning and evening, for this was the law (see Exodus 29:38-39) and Hebrews like Daniel even added a midday devotion
4. contrast that with our modern habit of reserving praise to God for the first day of the week alone, or possibly some time in the middle of the week as well
 - a. days can go by without prayer or the Bible being disturbed
 - b. worship is not quite so codified now as it was under Moses and men are required to pursue their personal periods of devotion through self-discipline and faithful motivation
1. yet, as much we expect to eat bread daily, we should also recall that man does not live on bread alone, but every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God
2. prayer, exhortation, growth and fellowship are to be daily exercises toward persistent holiness (see Hebrews 3:13, Acts 17:11, Acts 2:46)
5. take time to be holy by speaking often with your Lord, and spending much time in secret, feeding on his word (Second Timothy 2:8-13)

C. A Harmonious Sound

1. like the Sabbath itself and the burning of incense, instruments of music had an authorized role in Old Testament worship that only served as typical of the forms of praise to come; what folly it is to revert to them when something better has come
 - a. the Sabbath was replaced by the Lord's day, on which the resurrection of the Savior is celebrated in communion with his body and blood (see Acts 20:7, First Corinthians 11:23-26)
 - b. the smell of the incense was but a stench compared to the aroma of the sincere prayers of the redeemed priesthood of believers in Christ (Revelation 5:8, 8:3-4)
 - c. and the mechanical instruments of music were replaced by psalms, hymns and spiritual songs making melody upon sincere human hearts (Ephesians 5:17-21)

2. making harmonious sounds becomes less an exercise in musical artistry and more a matter of a cleansed conscience and a devoted spirit (John 4:23-24)
 - a. when we sing with understanding and with our hearts actively engaged, we make beautiful noises that reach Heaven
 - b. mechanical instruments only get in the way of the Spirit and the truth

D. His Ways Are Higher

1. it is sometimes impossible to figure out what God has in mind for us, especially when some bad things happen and our lives appear to be chaotic and without meaning or direction
2. generally, we discover only later how wise were God's ways and how shortsighted were our own
3. becoming a Christian is even a choice made to follow up God's ways instead of one's own (Isaiah 55:1-9)
 - a. the psalmist has risen above the pious doubts of Habakkuk and Jonah to accept that God knows what he is doing, even when we can't quite comprehend it
 - b. what way are you headed?

E. Planted

1. are you planted in the vineyard of the Lord or being choked among the devil's weeds and tares?
 - a. the righteous flourishes emotionally and spiritually because he is content to grow like the palm tree planted in the courts of the temple
 - b. "Its stately growth, and graceful form, its perpetual verdure, its lovely and luxuriant fruit, together with its manifold uses give it precedence over all other vegetable growths in the eyes that are accustomed to rest upon it" (*Pulpit Commentary*)
2. being planted in the temple means being rooted in the body of Christ today, like a formerly wild vine grafted into the family of God to bear fruit and receive sustenance from the root
 - a. such a one is no doubter, but basks in the contentment of knowing that God will sustain and reward his children
 - b. he is our rock, which cannot be moved

Conclusion

Like the writer of Psalm 92, let us increase our trust and devotion to God, so that our mornings are filled with anticipation and entreaty and our events are closed with gratitude and contentment.

Psalm 93: The Lord Reigns

Introduction

Psalms 93-99 are sometimes known as the enthronement psalms because each of them discusses the rule of God and his divine king. A special part of them has to do with a celebration of divine justice on the Earth amidst a seemingly chaotic environment. [Read Psalm 93:1-5.] The ninety-third psalm recognizes the sovereignty of an eternal God to rule in the affairs of mankind, even as it seems that the world is without rule or reason.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. God is Clothed and Girded (1)

1. the story of *The Prince and the Pauper* by Mark Twain (1881) is based in the idea that a king is known by his clothing and accoutrements and regal bearing, and if they are removed, he would be indistinguishable from other men

2. in this psalm, we find our God clothed, not in purple robe and golden scepter, but majesty itself—clothed with an intangible air of power

3. likewise, we find him girded, not with a literal girdle, but with strength itself

a. men are tempted to forget the sovereignty of God and pretend that they can spend their lives opposing or ignoring him, but sooner or later, his majesty and strength are revealed

b. the just are avenged and the guilty are punished and God's sovereignty is undeniable

3. the world that now exists and is maintained in its orbit by the strength and patience of God, so that only he can move or remove it in his sovereign will

B. His Throne is Everlasting (2)

1. in school, we study the ancient dynasties of China and the empires of Alexander and the Romans, but where are they now?

2. they seemed so sovereign in their time, but are now extinct while God who is from everlasting remains upon his throne, attending to the cries of his people

3. even in Revelation, we find God hearing prayers and promising vindication

C. The Lord is Mightier Than The Waves (3-4)

1. because many refuse to recognize the sovereignty of God, the world remains in a state of constant conflict, symbolized by the noisy, crashing flood waters and waves here

2. it was God who set the limits of the waters and they cannot even now trespass against them, for he will part the clouds and release the sun to move them back again

3. whatever waves are crashing upon our society or the church, faith in God's sovereign rule will restore our conviction that all will work out in the end

D. Sure Testimonies and A Holy House (5)

1. God's testimonies are his righteous laws, then composed in the law and prophets and now in the new testament of grace through Christ

a. they are sure and steadfast, like an anchor in the shifting seas and neither human opinion nor attempt at amendment can alter them

b. instead of considering God's will to be an unpleasant obligation, we fare better when we look at it as a compassionate code of warning and reward

2. holiness adorns the house of God who does not rule arbitrarily or with prejudice

a. God is the friend of good and the enemy of evil, never permitting wickedness to dwell alongside of him but expelling it from his presence

b. if we reverence God as we should, we will likewise adopt holiness as an adornment for our houses and bodies

II. Some Applications

A. Sovereignty of God

1. can you imagine trying to explain our God to a person who had never heard of him?; if you have ever taught children, perhaps you can

2. Paul was challenged to explain Jehovah to polytheistic idolaters (Acts 17:16-31)
 - a. God is not an object to be worshiped the way you wax a car or kneel before a television, but a subject to be acknowledged and honored for his kindness
 - b. he is sovereign over the affairs of men even when it seems as chaos and crisis
 - c. while he reigns in heaven, he is likewise never far from us in a spiritual sense
3. he attends our worship services more faithfully than do we and hears our prayers as if they were a sweet-smelling incense reaching his nostrils
 - a. through answered prayer and daily providence, he continues to exert his sovereignty in a way that ultimately benefits man, even if it sometimes seems otherwise for the moment (James 5:16-18)
 - b. the church of God is destined to suffer trial, hardship and persecution, but in the relief and encouragement granted by God, she glimpses his sovereignty (Revelation 19:1-6)

B. Eternality of God

1. unlike the kings and high priests of the Bible and our presidents and elders today, God occupies a place of authority that has gone unchanged since everlasting; the number of his years cannot be searched out (Hebrews 1:1-4; see also Job 36:26)
2. the universe itself testifies to its creator and even scientists are at a loss to comprehend the wonders of creation (Romans 1:18-22)
 - a. many are atheists who recognize evidence of design but cannot permit the notion of a designer to enter their feeble minds
 - b. the remarkable, systematic and irreducible perfection of our universe, planet and bodies cries aloud about the eternal nature of a benevolent designer
3. his sovereignty is valuable because it stands before an eternity of proof

C. The Winds and Waves Obey

1. if we establish this much trust in God's power and strength, the inevitable storms of life are easier to bear (Mark 4:35-41)
 - a. too many of us feel ourselves sinking beneath the waves of life precisely because we do not trust in the sovereignty of God; our faith is not secure enough to anchor in eternity
 - b. worries, wants and woes upset our crafts and we feel adrift, dragged along by the devil and untouched by the hand of God (Philippians 4:4-9)
2. we sometimes talk about building your house upon the solid rock or the shifting sand and believe that this is only a matter of doing certain obvious commands
3. the story was once told by Harriet Beecher Stowe that one evening Frederick Douglass was delivering a powerful oratory about the injustices done to enslaved black people in nineteenth century America
 - a. "Warming with his subject, and waxing more and more indignant with their persecutors, he seemed to lose all patience, and at last said that they must henceforth trust in the strength of their own right arms, seeing that it was in vain otherwise to hope for deliverance. At this moment, there arose a tall, aged [woman], who, while perfect silence reigned in the hall, said, in a voice not loud, but deep, 'Frederick is God dead?'" (S. Conway, *Pulpit Commentary*).
 - b. when we take vengeance, morality, and self in our own hands, we tell the world we think God is as dead or indisposed as the baals defeated by Elijah in the Old Testament (Hebrews 6:9-20a)

D. Sure Testimonies and A Holy House

1. what manner of persons ought we to be (see Second Peter 3:11)?
2. humble, transformed and holy (Romans 12:1-3)

Conclusion

Acknowledging the sovereignty of God is more than making an insincere confession or promise. It means accepting that God is arrayed in majesty and strength, no matter how much it may temporarily seem otherwise.

Psalm 94: To Whom Vengeance Belongs

Introduction

The second enthronement psalm now celebrates God's divine prerogative of exacting vengeance on those who reject him and persecute the righteous and the vulnerable. Psalm 94 gives voice to our silent curiosity about the longsuffering nature of the Judge, but also the need to be well pleasing to him. [Read Psalm 94:1-23.] Psalm 94 can be divided into four parts. Verses 1-7 form a community lament and plea for retribution upon the wicked. Verses 8-11 remind us that the Lord knows even when it seems he is not acting. Verses 12-19 balance the talk of his vengeance with a message about his comfort. Verses 20-23 bring the song to a painful end as the wicked are cut off at last.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Vengeance is His (1-7)

1. this psalm is of unknown authorship, but one thing proves uncommon to it; Psalm 94 is not a lament against foreign oppressors, but domestic ones
 - a. the cry is not against enemy kings and generals, but local men who would oppress widows, orphans and immigrants
 - b. the net effect of taking advantage of the weakest segments of society was that the Hebrew people were broken in pieces by the decline in national character
2. so the psalmist sees that although he is not among the afflicted class, his nation is in decline morally if it can persecute such vulnerable people; he decides to ask God to put an end to it
 - a. the psalmist expects the Judge of the Earth to render punishment to the proud who commit such crimes as stealing scraps from widows and orphans and extorting money from immigrants
 - b. as long as he waited and did nothing, the sinners became only more hardened in their iniquity, boasting in their own wealth and might and daring God to try to stop them
3. they characterize the chances of getting caught by God as slim
 - a. they say, God neither sees nor pays any attention to what we are doing
 - b. if you find yourself committing some sin with that attitude about the prospects of being caught, understand that a psalmist is working against you even today

B. The Lord Knows (8-11)

1. it has been a long time since a prophet proclaimed that divine retribution was coming so that the people could clearly connect their sin with his punishment
 - a. Noah and Jeremiah were prophets of this sort and after destruction rained down around their prophecies, there could be no realistic doubt that God had rendered a judgment
 - b. today, men pretend to have prophetic ability and get it wrong when they are not getting lucky, making predictions after the fact or predicting what is fairly obvious to begin with
 - c. the result is that many of us begin to feel as though God is ignorant of our devices
2. but God created the ear and eye for man does see and hear
 - a. he both teaches and grades
 - b. God knows all of our futile behaviors, but gives us an opportunity to correct them ourselves through the guidance of his word and the wounding of our consciences
 - c. even Ananias and Sapphira had opportunity to repent, but understand that such opportunities do not always repeat themselves or linger very long
3. God knows the thoughts of man and no one can hide from him

C. His Comforts (12-19)

1. here is a psalmist beatitude: Blessed is the man whom you instruct and teach out of your law, that you may give him rest from adversity while the pit is dug for the sinner
 - a. for all those who complain that God is too longsuffering or that the return of Christ has been too slow in coming, understand that the Lord is simply showing to others the same patience that gave you time to come into Christ and escape condemnation
 - b. the ones who benefit from this extended patience may be your loved ones and neighbors, but then that may be up to you as well as to God

2. in those moments when it seems our feet are slipping because we have suffered wrong that we cannot vindicate ourselves, God's mercy holds us up
 - a. vengeance is his, not ours
 - b. and there is a preferred alternative—the conversion of our enemies into God's friends
3. "In the multitudes of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul."
 - a. an omniscient God is somewhat a frightening concept; we are all grateful we do not have omniscient parents, spouses, employers and friends
 - b. but an omniscient God is a comfort to a person who earnestly wants to do right and to be saved in Heaven; there is no sense in lying about our actions or motives to an omniscient God, so we can be frank and open with him as with no one else

D. Cut Off (20-23)

1. in Israel, even the rulers were involved in the awful crimes and the throne would have to be punished
2. the humble psalmist speaks for all of us in those moments of vulnerability and concern—God is our defense and the rock of our refuge
3. know that the wicked will receive their punishment in due course; be content to leave vengeance in God's hands and out of yours, lest you join them in condemnation

II. Some Applications

A. The Vulnerable

1. Jesus taught, "the poor you have with you always" (John 12:8)
2. in society and in the church, there will always be a class of people who are vulnerable, whether due to poverty, age, infirmity or being orphaned
 - a. because we are the disciples of Christ, we share our savior's concern for such people, whom he blessed and labored with even as the rich and powerful rejected him because of their pride
 - b. Jesus himself was but a humble carpenter and one acquainted with hard work
3. and so individually, our discipleship will compel us to share with the vulnerable, rather than take advantage of them or ignore them (Galatians 6:7-10)
 - a. "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).
 - b. in a distributive sense, the church sees to those in need as her members share generously
4. collectively, we must commit our resources to ensuring that no one is left behind in need while others live sumptuously
 - a. in times of dire distress, extreme steps may become necessary (Acts 2:40-45)
 - b. in times when hardship is less widespread, as now, liberal giving is required when troubles arise for one or another (Acts 11:27-30)
5. sometimes because we do not contribute to institutions like hospitals, orphanages and rest homes, we are accused of not caring, but when we see to the needs of our widows, adopt orphans and visit the sick with food and prayers, we show how deeply we care for them and the plan of God for aiding them

B. Vengeance

1. we all feel that desire for vengeance sometimes, whether it is because of a personally-experienced offense or for someone else like the psalmist here
2. yet even he understood that vengeance belonged to God and he had to leave it alone; vengeance is part of the scepter of the Almighty and we are not qualified to pick it up for we are too frail and shortsighted
 - a. instead of practicing an "eye for an eye," we are taught to turn the other cheek and to be uneasily provoked by unintentional slights (see Matthew 5:38-39, First Corinthians 13:4-5)
 - b. whether we are lied to or about, cut off on the freeway, passed over for a promotion, or called a dirty name, vengeance does not belong to us as an option for finding satisfaction (Romans 12:17-21)
3. treating enemies with kindness is one of the surest ways of converting them to friends; seeking vengeance just ratchets up the evil, rewards the devil and adds your own soul to his roster
 - a. even seeking vengeance on behalf of God or the vulnerable is not sanctified by the Lord

b. the answer the psalmist found was instruction and understanding and prayer (Matthew 5:43-48)

C. Does The Lord See?

1. the oppressors back then figured God could not see what they were doing or did not care since their victims were useless and voiceless sufferers like widows, orphans and immigrants
2. do we sometimes assure ourselves that we can sin with immunity by virtue of the same myth?
 - a. Eliphaz was not much of a friend to Job, but his advice would have been fitting for a person who did rationalize his sin based on the myth of God's ignorance or disinterest (Job 22:12-22)
 - b. as Jonah discovered, there is nowhere to hide from an omniscient, omnipresent God (Hebrews 4:11-13)
 - c. but this is a blessing, not a curse, unless you are intent on and in love with sin (Hebrews 4:14-16)

D. God's Comforts

1. the psalmist writes, "In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul."
2. anxiety, worry, stress, panic attacks—all these are prominent modern complaints that lead to great physical and emotional sickness
3. and they all result from an unwillingness to be content with God's blessings as they are and the overwhelming hope of heaven that should eclipse every hardship on Earth
 - a. most of what we worry about never happens
 - b. most of what we worry about, we have no power to change anyway
 - c. we tend to exaggerate our worries and contemplate worst case scenarios, that although, they do not actually happen, we have already lived them in our minds so that the fables have the same painful impact as if they had occurred
4. we should learn contentment, when the Lord gives or takes away (Philippians 4:11-13)
5. prayer and faith should invade the multitude of our anxieties with a peace that delights our formerly burdened soul (Philippians 4:4-9)

Conclusion

Psalm 94 reminds us that God is ever watchful and compassionate toward his people. He will not allow them to be cut off, but will grant them peace of mind and see to the punishment of their oppressors. Sometime we oppress ourselves, though, and we are both friend and foe. It is then that we must make peace with God again so that our souls can be settled.

Psalm 95: Oh Come, Let Us Sing

Introduction

The ninety-fifth psalm almost seems to be two psalms in one. The first seven verses are a celebratory call to worship for all who would hear and honor God. The final four verses shift almost entirely to a stark warning about hardness of heart and spiritual rebellion. [Read Psalm 95:1-11.] Today, we will get into the heart of Psalm 95 and honor its call to worship and warning about backsliding away from the Promised Land toward renewed perdition.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Call To Worship (1-7a)

1. neither the author nor occasion for writing Psalm 95 is anywhere revealed, but the overall tone is both celebratory and solemn enough to show that the writer had in mind both the goodness and severity of God

a. Israel, however, was not being called to worship simply to avoid the severity of God, nor simply to obtain future benefit from the Lord

b. this call to worship is rooted in God's faithfulness—his history of blessing his people from creation right up to the present day

2. the invitation is to participate exuberantly, displaying genuine emotion and connection with the purpose of praise

a. in days of old, before clocks were common, congregations would erect bells in towers to announce a call to worship on Sunday mornings

b. Psalm 95 is a timeless summons to join in praising a God who deserves our esteem (Psalm 84:1-2)

B. Backsliders Shall Not Enter (7b-11)

1. this attitude toward worship is healthy and grateful, and for those redeemed by the blood of Christ, it should seem logical and pleasant

a. still, we all know that some are wearied by the summons to worship and seek out excuses for being absent and withholding what is a weariness to them

b. perhaps that is why the psalmist changes direction so abruptly—he is calling the faithful to their beloved duty and warning the backslider against avoiding it

2. it can only be hardness of heart that overlooks God's record of blessing his people to quit the worship and serve the self

a. the writer makes reference to the Exodus pilgrimage, lengthened from an anticipated 11 days to 40 years because of cowardice and shortsighted ingratitude

b. make note that God is grieved by a generation that does not trust him, although they have seen his work

3. for the backslider, there is no realistic hope of entering God's rest; generation of complainers and doubters was buried between Egypt and the Promised Land

II. Some Applications

A. Call To Worship

1. a call to worship is issued every Lord's Day, even if Psalm 95 is not regularly read and the bells of clock towers are stilled in an era of digital clock/radios

a. the sun rises in the East and the calendar reads Sunday and worshipers are summoned as simply as that

b. these Israelites worshiped on the Sabbath in their Old Testament manner, sacrificing animals and observing strict laws against labor, but Christians are liberated from the Sabbath and married to the Lord's Day (Colossians 2:16-20)

2. on Sunday, the communion feast is spread so that the redeemed can commemorate Christ's sacrifice and proclaim his death until he returns; no faithful person could be content to miss this original feast of thanksgiving (First Corinthians 11:23-26)

3. verse 20 recognizes that the church comes together in one place and Acts 20:7 establishes that this occurs on the same day of the week in which Jesus was resurrected

a. songs of praise are sung (see Ephesians 5:19), men lift up holy hands in prayer (First Timothy 2:8), funds are laid by in store to fund the church's work (see First Corinthians 16:1-4) and the church is taught (see Acts 20:7)

b. the call to worship is too vital to ignore (Hebrews 10:24-27)

B. Thanksgiving

1. every November, our president lays a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns to commemorate all those who gave their lives for our nation; were he to choose not to participate, he would be immediately skewered and possibly impeached

2. yet how many Christians choose not to participate in giving thanks to the Lord, either occasionally or consistently?

a. Revelation 5:8-14 symbolizes the attitude that we should naturally possess, as we sit in the place of slaves redeemed from a wicked taskmaster to rejoice in present help and eternal hope (Revelation 5:8-14)

b. "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 7:24-25)!

3. the truly grateful will overcome surmountable obstacles to render their worship, not succumb to invented and inflated maladies as an excuse for taking the week off (Hebrews 13:10-15)

C. People of His Pasture

1. the just must surely love the psalmist's description of the people of God's pasture, the sheep of his hand; he is still the watchful shepherd (Psalm 23:1-6)

2. now Christ is our Chief Shepherd (see First Peter 5:5) and he pastors his flock with the rod of correction and the staff of mercy

3. out on the hillside, sheep go astray because they don't know any better; we must know better and thrive in the fold (John 10:1-15)

D. Backsliders Shall Not Enter

1. the sheep who stray are also described in the ninety-fifth psalm; they are the ones who wander away from the shepherd and the ninety and nine who safely remain in the fold

2. this part of the psalm is quoted by the Hebrew writer to warn the saints against ignoring the summons to worship out of ingratitude and shortsightedness (Hebrews 3:1-19)

a. as it was to the pilgrims traveling between Egypt and Israel, the Promised Land is ours in prospect, but the hope is not irrevocably secured until we cross the threshold (Hebrews 4:11)

b. the straying sheep that never comes home is devoured by the wolf (Hebrews 10:28-31, 35-39)

Conclusion

Psalm 95 summons us to worship and warns against ignoring the call. Refusing to join with the saints in praise to God reveals an element of ingratitude in our character, dissatisfaction with redemption and flirtation with destruction.

Psalm 96: Sing A New Song

Introduction

The ninety-sixth psalm is a work of David that provides a valuable companion to the song that precedes it. As Psalm 95 lamented the rebellion of Israel, Psalm 96 predicts the conversion of Gentiles. The two songs then tell the tale of the pruning away of a native, but lifeless plant and the ingrafting of a wild, but submissive new one. [Read Psalm 96:1-13.] The occasion of writing the words that form Psalm 96 is actually one of the most famous events in Hebrew history. The song of David, though, is greatly adapted by the Holy Spirit for his purposes here.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Declaring His Glory (1-9)

1. these words were originally spoken by David during his reign over Israel on one of its brightest days (First Chronicles 15:1, 25-16:36)

a. this mere humble tent is the tabernacle that David speaks of so fondly throughout his writings; it is marvelous to him because of what it represents—the presence and approval of his God

b. the presence of God, whether signified by a cloud, a light, a burning bush or this tabernacle has ever brought warmth into the heart of this man after God's own heart

2. so confident is David about his God that he is fully prepared to proclaim his reality to those who served other gods, which David determined were but idols and myths

a. he attributes to the sanctuary of Jehovah honor, majesty, strength and beauty

b. not in physical terms, but spiritually through the goodness and greatness of our creator

3. the character of God then makes our response important as well

a. David urges the worshiper to give back to God the glory that is due to him by entering his courts with an offering

b. they that worship God must do so in the beauty of holiness which is reverence and godly fear, really no different from what Jesus commanded in the New Testament as worship in spirit and in truth

B. Say Among The Heathen (10-13)

1. David's proclamation among the heathen is that the Lord reigns and he will judge its people righteously and with truth

2. in Christ, the son of David, even these heathen can hear the message of salvation and escape the futility of living in sin and spiritual error

3. truth is knowable and observable and God will not be unjust to ignore it as a standard for assessing the individual and administering eternity accordingly

II. Some Applications

A. Recognizing The Presence of God

1. as a prophet and king, David had an advantage over us in recognizing the presence of God; men like Moses would have to be dense to overlook a burning bush or ignore a voice thundering on the mountain

2. yet we know that these men and all Israel that passed through the Red Sea sometimes had difficulties engaging the presence of God, especially when times were tough and expectations of quick resolution were not fulfilled

3. perhaps our struggles with acknowledging God's presence begin likewise in those hard times, but then extend themselves throughout our lives like gangrene

4. we become uncertain of God's presence and concern when it seems our prayers are not being answered promptly and then we carry this misunderstanding and resentment over into our daily lives so that the absence of God becomes self-fulfilling

a. remember in the Old Testament that the presence of God was always about communication

b. idol statues were carved and engraved, not to communicate, but to vegetate; our God's ephemeral symbols of presence—a burning bush, a traveling cloud, smoke and thunder—were designed to communicate

5. engaging the presence of God today is going to be accomplished for the same purpose, only now God has spoken definitively through his son (Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:1-4)

a. giving the more earnest heed to our salvation requires attention to the word of God that inspires faith and motivates perseverance

b. the presence of God is defined and intensified in those who are prayerful, studious and meditative; like cogs in a machine, prayer, study and meditation function together to expose the providence of God and his means of communicating with his children (Philippians 4:8-9)

6. understand that unfulfilled prayers are sometimes evidence of the divine presence, rather than absence (Second Corinthians 12:7-10)

a. don't make knee-jerk decisions about the character or reality of God because your prayers have not been answered the way you mandated

b. time will always tell that God knew what was best for you, although you did not, and his answer was much better than what you desired

c. sometimes the only way God can teach you a lesson you don't want to learn is to hold your hand while you walk through the valley of the shadow of death; detouring around it would just keep you from the opportunity you need to grow stronger and wiser through experience (First Peter 1:3-9)

B. Beauty of Holiness

1. could you still worship God if all the preacher could afford to wear was a clean pair of overalls and the meeting place was a dilapidated shack and the seats were mats on the floor and the communion was served in dented cups?

2. sometimes we go overboard in our desire to give our best and we begin to think that architectural and sartorial beauty is as appealing to God as it is to us; we stain our glass, pad our pews and dress up our preachers, but lose sight of the much more valuable beauty of holiness

3. while there is nothing inherently wrong with physical beauty, it is expendable where the beauty of holiness is not

a. the beauty of holiness is worshiping God in spirit and in truth, with godly fear that demands attention to the pattern and sincerity of heart

b. the beauty of holiness is in the holy hands of the men who lead our prayers and the genuineness of those who lead us in songs and hymns and spiritual songs

c. the beauty of holiness is in our own participation in worship, which punctuates a life marked by sanctification and genuineness (Second Corinthians 6:16-7:1)

4. some will look at our worship and insistence upon biblical authority for its components and cry "Legalism!" but really it is the beauty of holiness that searches the scriptures to comprehend God's will and applies our hearts to its obedience

C. Salvation

1. David's psalm proclaims the reign of the king among the nations, looking forward then to the Messiah who has come in the flesh and ascended to David's throne

2. his realm is not exclusively Jewish, nor limited by Calvinistic notions about free will; Christ died for all men of every race (Acts 10:34-35)

3. yet this is still not universal salvation, for conditions are included in the offer of grace (Titus 2:11-14)

4. the acceptance by God of so many Gentiles into his family is meant to provoke the Jews to reconsider their unbelief and to embrace Jesus as the savior (Romans 11:13-23)

a. our attitude toward unbelieving Jews needs to be the same hopeful attitude that David had about heathen Gentiles in his day

b. it is not the will of God that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance

Conclusion

Psalm 96 is a wonderful reminder of the presence and intention of God, to communicate with his creation and usher them into his kingdom and ultimately salvation.

Psalm 97: The Lord Reigns

Introduction

Psalm 97 is another enthronement psalm, applauding vocally the place of God in his majesty above the Earth. There he reigns in power and greatness, glad for the rejoicing of his people who are delivered by his sovereignty. [Read Psalm 97:1-12.] This psalm reminds us again of the presence of God and how his omnipotence and omniscience should influence the choices that we make and the hope that we harbor.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Lord Reigns (1)

1. in spite of earthly turmoil and widespread iniquity, it remains that God still reigns upon his throne in Heaven over the affairs of men, that he is always present so that we can find him and be found by him
2. from the great cities to the remotest islands in the oceans, God is present and conscious and aware
 - a. but is this reason to rejoice or mourn?
 - b. if it were some Orwellian despot upon that throne, we would cry out in oppression for freedom, but our God is a benevolent God whose omniscience is intended to bless us and guide us, while providing us with a sense of spiritual companionship and abiding hope

B. Praiseworthy (2-6)

1. the clouds and darkness that begin this section remind the reader of God's rendezvous with Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16-20)
2. his throne, though, was not established by overthrowing some other monarch, nor by a pattern of self-seeking, but through righteousness and justice
 - a. unlike the idols of Mesopotamia and the gods of Greek and Roman mythology, Jehovah is not drunk on power and indulgence, but interacts with man so that he can transcend the self-destructive influences of the world and become prepared for eternity
 - b. he deals with man righteously and fairly
3. bolts of lightning, melting mountains and quaking continents are all figures for God's righteous judgment upon his creation when that time comes, but his kingdom is not shaken
4. creation itself is a pattern of evidence for divine blessing (Psalm 19:1-4)
 - a. consider only the placement of the planets and how perfectly situated Earth is to sustain life
 - b. the cosmic highway above us every night reminds us how right Earth is for us

C. Hate Evil! (7-12)

1. it remains that some continue to pursue idols in their ignorance and arrogance—whether they are the carved images of paganism, the relics and replicas of Catholicism or the misplaced priorities of modern, greedy, busy man
2. God is truly above them all, but sometimes man brings him down to Earth in his own estimation and reduces him to a thing or a fling
3. idolatry in any form is evil and here we are instructed to hate it all
 - a. like a food that is foul to your taste, a pain in the flesh that you cannot bear, an odor that is repellant, a sight too gruesome to behold, a sound that screeches till your ears ring—that is our attitude about evil
 - b. this is one of the great ways by which God “preserves the souls of his saints” and “delivers them out of the hand of the wicked”—infusing them with a hatred of that which would destroy them spiritually or physically or both

II. Some Applications

A. The Presence of God

1. an acknowledgement of the presence of God and a constant awareness of his presence are vitally important to the contentment and deportment of mankind

- a. atheists claim they have no sense of God's presence and subjective believers claim they would prefer to feel than to know
- b. neither is well served in their ignorance
- 2. the presence of God can be known
 - a. Creation itself bears witness to intelligent design, a higher power with the intellect to create and organize the universe and life within it (Job 38:4-11)
 - b. Providence is God's evidence of concern even for unbelievers (Acts 14:14-17)
 - c. communication with God is possible (Acts 17:24-27)
 - d. he speaks to us through his son and the gospel, which is his power to save man (Hebrews 1:1-4)
- 3. we approach God through prayer, meditation upon his word and by doing his will; we draw near to him by fleeing from the adversary of all these good things
 - a. an abiding awareness of God's presence is like the sense that a loving father is watching over our shoulders as we face life's challenges, there to instruct and correct and soothe
 - b. ignoring his presence is like pretending that God can't see through the clouds

B. Idolatry

- 1. still, some will adore idols and false gods and themselves rather than grope for their creator (Romans 1:18-25)
 - a. some idols are carvings or sculptures that men foolishly endow with mythical powers (Isaiah 44:12-20)
 - b. idolatry is a progressive disease of self-delusion; one invests so much passion and faith into the object of his adoration that even without a response, he must intensify the delusion so as not to feel a time-wasting fool
- 2. idolatry is alive and well when portraits, statues and relics are treated as conduits into heaven
- 3. the most prominent forms of idolatry, though, are far more subtle—they are the facets of life to which we give priority over God
 - a. they include prestige, popularity, prosperity, conflict avoidance and countless others
 - b. these idols are likewise self-deluding as they seem to occupy a harmless seat behind God, but they are gradually inching ahead of him and trying to take control of the heart (Mark 12:28-31)
 - c. God promises that people who opt for self-delusion will be permitted to have their choice; God will give them up to it (see Second Thessalonians 2, Romans 1)

C. Hate Evil!

- 1. the only viable attitude then is to hate evil (James 4:7-10)
- 2. any choice that willfully violates God's will is self-delusional and self-destructive and it will not go unpunished
 - a. consciences will be pricked, blessings will be forfeited and fates might be altered
 - b. if we persist in evil, communication and fellowship will be interrupted (Isaiah 59:1-3)
- 3. doing good and right is food to the soul and nourishment to the heart (First Thessalonians 5:21-22)

Conclusion

Psalm 97 reminds us of the presence of God and how that awareness should influence our choices. In the end, it is about hating evil and clinging to good, that we might maintain fellowship with him.

Psalm 98: Oh, Sing A New Song

Introduction

Psalm 98 is usually classified with the enthronement psalms even though it does not contain the characteristic phrase, “The Lord reigns.” Nevertheless, this series of songs acknowledges the sovereignty of God and attributes to him great power and justice. [Read Psalm 98.] Psalm 98 recounts a singular deliverance from despair that God accomplished for Israel, which also gave the psalmist evidence that eventually the Lord would set everything right in a world that seems always to be mixed up.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Deliverance (1-3)

1. it is possible that the psalmist has in mind the post-exile restoration of the Hebrew captives to their homeland, accomplished through the benevolence of their Medo-Persian overlords (Ezekiel 36:22-32)

2. Israel regained some of its dignity, stolen by Nebuchadnezzar as the walls of Jerusalem were breached in 586 B.C., when the new empire permitted them to return to Palestine and rebuild the city, the temple and their religious systems

3. yet, clearly Ezekiel is pointing to a restoration far greater than physical repatriation and reconstruction; he is predicting a spiritual renewal that can only be understood in the framework of the Christ

a. sprinkling clean water to cleanse away sin

b. a new heart and spirit to replace the heart of stone that caused them to forsake God for idols

c. a walk by faith in the statutes of a caring God

d. deliverance from uncleanness

e. and all by grace, for God tells them that he is not doing it for their sake, or because of their merit, but because of Christ’s

4. a typical restoration is accomplished when Haggai, Zechariah, Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah reconstruct the city, the temple and the system, but it only hints at the spiritual restoration to come when Jesus arrives

B. Celebration (4-6)

1. restoration is cause for rejoicing, for God has seen fit to deliver his unworthy people from the mess of their own making

2. the shouting and singing and playing were characteristic of Old Testament praise, but we might be expected to react just as emotionally today when we witness a restoration of a lost soul to his savior, though after a New Testament pattern that is decent, orderly and devoid of David’s instrumentation

C. One Day (7-9)

1. this isolated deliverance event has given the psalmist renewed confidence that eventually God will sort out every injustice on the Earth

2. he comes in temporal judgments against the Babylonians, Egyptians and Romans and will one day come in judgment against all the Earth

3. in today’s court cases, many defendants are relieved to be assigned a certain judge with a reputation for fairness and mercy; one day we will all be defendants in the highest court in the universe and we can know that our judge will be fair and merciful, through the blood of his son, not by lowering the standards and offering a substitute form of grace for those who rejected him in life

II. Some Applications

A. Deliverance

1. have you noticed how many of our problems and difficulties are the result of our behavior, misbehavior or just plain apathy?

2. surely some awful things come upon us by accident or by the action of someone else, but the other category of hardship is entirely avoidable

- a. many diseases are avoidable, traffic tickets are usually avoidable, financial crises are often avoidable
- b. when heeded, the word of God has the power not only to deliver after the hardship begins, but before, and an ounce of prevention is surely worth a pound of cure (Luke 4:16-21)
- 3. the very first psalm points to the prevention of many hardships by preventing sin (Psalm 1:1-3)
 - a. we have a word for those who disdain the counsel of God and then find themselves complaining about the consequences; that word is “fool”
 - b. but whether hardship is self-inflicted or imposed from without, we want deliverance
- 4. the faithful, penitent Christian is assured of deliverance (Second Timothy 3:10-11)
 - a. deliverance may take different forms and may not bring about full restoration of the health, relationships or prosperity that was threatened or lost
 - b. deliverance may teach painful lessons and ultimately, deliverance is going to be defined by death, but even that is a deliverance from every hardship to a place of paradise

B. Celebration

- 1. the psalmist had no shyness about celebrating the deliverance that God had wrought
 - a. a celebration like the parades and parties when the war was won in Germany and Japan, when the Berlin Wall fell
 - b. but those celebrations faded in time and today are barely remembered or commemorated
- 2. celebrating the deliverance of God through the sacrifice of his son has a certain somberness to it and yet much of our worship is also designed to acknowledge the joyful state of affairs at present
 - a. the cross of Christ is in the past, not the present or future (Hebrews 9:23-28)
 - b. Jesus will never suffer it again, for he reigns today on David’s throne in Heaven
- 3. we, his subjects, must never grow complacent about celebrating deliverance, when souls are redeemed from slavery to the devil, for Heaven understands the degree of victory and price that was paid, as the Allies did in June 1945
 - a. Christ came to seek and to save the lost and when someone advances to the front of this assembly to flee the tempter and embrace the master, Christ wins a victory worth celebrating (Luke 15:1-10)
 - b. leaving the applause, dancing and playing of Moses behind, we shed tears, hug the redeemed and sing and pray with joy and relief instead, to celebrate deliverance

C. One Day

- 1. the hope of the downtrodden is that one day everything will be sorted out and the evil will get back what they have committed
- 2. the hope of the Christian is less vengeful, but just as hopeful that God will judge fairly and mercifully
 - a. when we mention mercy, we are not introducing the possibility that something other than salvation by grace through faith will be available on Judgment Day for those who disbelieved the evidence and walked in sin (Second Corinthians 5:10-11)
 - b. mercy is through Christ, accepted in life, not in death
- 3. all creation eagerly waits (Romans 8:18-25)
- 4. if you cannot eagerly anticipate Christ’s return, you are missing out on the reassuring fullness of hope (Second Peter 3:11-14)

Conclusion

Psalm 98 reminds of the price and victory of divine deliverance. Let us stop inflicting bondage upon ourselves by purposeful sin, but remain delivered through trusting faith.

Psalm 99: The Lord Reigns

Introduction

The last of the enthronement psalms that began back in Psalm 93 continues the same theme of God's majesty reign as ruler of the universe, but focuses more here in Psalm 99 on his holiness. [Read Psalm 99:1-9.] Psalm 99 has two divisions, each ending with a summons to worship God because of his holiness of character. Verses 1-5 discuss his nature and verses 6-9 recount some of his history with Israel.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Between the Cherubim (1-5)

1. Psalm 99 begins with the image of God reigning upon the throne of Heaven before his people who respect his authority and understand his power

2. their trembling is reminiscent of their ancestors back when the pilgrimage out of Egypt began; the 10 commandments were issued from Mt. Sinai and the presence of divine power was overwhelming to their senses (Exodus 20:18-21)

a. most people would love to hear God speak directly to them; some like Joan of Arc and Oral Roberts believe that he has, but these people really came that close and it overwhelmed them

b. is there enough evidence of God's presence around us to encourage that degree of respect and fear of God?

3. Moses could go into the tabernacle and speak with God, actually hearing his voice emanating from between the two cherubim at the mercy seat

a. he is a great God, high and holy and his name is awesome

b. whether his voice is heard aloud by Moses or read on the pages of the Bible, it is an awesome way to communicate with creation

4. proof of his holiness is found in the combination of strength and mercy that he possesses

a. many very strong men find it difficult to show kindness and mercy because their pride is wound so tightly around their muscles; even the idols of mythology were endowed by their human creators with that kind of arrogance and injustice

b. by contrast, our God's strength also loves justice and equity—tending to the vulnerable and overthrowing the intentions of the wicked toward them

5. we are summoned to kneel at his footstool in gratitude that our God is not a Zeus (Isaiah 66:1-2)

B. The Cloudy Pillar (6-9)

1. in this part of the psalm, the writer illustrates God's mercy, strength and power through his involvement with Israel through the years

a. Moses and Aaron represent the priests while Samuel represents the prophets and all three men in both offices called upon God's name and were heard because their hearts were obedient, humble and contrite

b. this psalm is entirely about the accessibility of a heavenly king who rules in the affairs of men by answering prayer and extending both daily providence and saving grace

2. during that pilgrimage out of Egypt, God led them in a meaningful way (Exodus 13:20-22)

a. the cloud and fire symbolized God's presence and leadership; how do you make such an abstraction into something tangible that you can recognize and celebrate?

3. the psalmist gives our God a new moniker here: he was to them "God-Who-Forgives"

a. although forgiveness does not cancel out all the physical consequences of sin, it does something better by assuaging guilt and promoting spiritual reconciliation and renewing fellowship

b. our God is a jealous and vengeful God, but only upon the rebellious and impenitent

4. so we are called again to worship God at his holy hill

II. Some Applications

A. God's Voice

1. surely it was an incredible thing to hear God's voice thunder from the mountain, or even to hear Christ whisper or preach on the mount

2. but God continues to speak to us today through his son and through the Bible that can never be silenced (First Peter 1:22-2:3)
 - a. God's word abides forever; it was not silenced when the king threw Jeremiah's prophecy in the fire and it is not abolished because unbelievers reject it or Christians neglect it
 - b. with or without you, the word of God abides and endures
3. in order for that voice to be heard, those who believe in him must report accurately what he has said in the Bible (First Peter 4:10-11)
 - a. preachers and teachers and all disciples should report the will of God as accurately as if God were directly speaking through them, not filtering the message through societal shifts and personal opinions, but simply the original, unadulterated oracles of God
 - b. when Jesus arrived in Jerusalem and the people praised him, the Jews called upon him to rebuke the worshippers, but he replied that if they quieted down, the very stones of the road would cry out (see Luke 19:40)
 - c. when the leaders of Jerusalem implored the apostles to stop preaching that resurrected savior, Peter replied that they could not help but speak the things they had seen and heard (see Acts 4:20)
4. God speaks to us through the ministry and sacrifice of Jesus (Hebrews 1:1-4)
 - a. the gifts of prophecy, miraculous knowledge and wisdom have ceased and God does not speak directly to anyone today, but he still speaks
 - b. his voice may be still and small to those who have no faith, but to those who believe, it thunders daily as he provides and as he answers prayers and as eternity looms larger

B. At Christ's Feet

1. twice the psalmist summons us to the feet of God to worship our holy king, but to modern men and especially those who live in democracies where our leaders are pilloried in the press and on television every day, that kind of submission can be hard to grant, even to God
2. crucifying pride and embracing humility often separates genuine disciples from pretenders and unbelievers (Philippians 2:5-11)
3. it is either be humbled in life or humiliated in death (Romans 14:11-12)
4. what the pretenders and unbelievers never grasp as they resist humbling themselves at the feet of Christ is that this is the only path to true exaltation (First Peter 5:5-11)
 - a. make no mistake about it—when someone rejects Christ or his church because of its emphasis on submitting to him or says I don't want to be told what to do or how to live, they are choosing pride and self over humility and him
 - b. it is not easy, even for some Christians, to humble themselves at the feet of an itinerant Jewish carpenter who also happens to be the son of God, but that is where glory is hidden

C. God-Who-Forgives

1. our God is just but he desperately wants to forgive men of their trespasses so that heaven's population can boom; he wants to show mercy so deeply that he offered his own son as an atonement for the sins of everyone but him
2. yes, he is a jealous and vengeful God, but being the object of his jealousy means that he does not want to share you with the devil who will destroy you, and you only become the target of his vengeance if you refuse to renounce the tempter that brought him to the cross
3. it is only those who love sin so much that they insist on having it and salvation, too, that want to rebuke God for his justice; to those who hate every false way, he is the God-Who-Forgives (Ephesians 1:7-14)
 - a. life with God is not a tightrope, but a pathway and when we inevitably stumble or take a wrong turn, God-Who-Forgives is there with a rod and a staff to chasten and exhort so that we can resume our journey toward him
 - b. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (First John 1:9).
4. his mercy seat between the cherubim is a throne of grace where we can obtain help in time of need (see Hebrews 4:16)

Conclusion

The last of the enthronement psalms continues the same theme of God's majesty reign as ruler of the universe, but focuses in Psalm 99 on his holiness.

Psalm 100: God Is Good

Introduction

Picture the scene in your mind of pilgrims marching into the temple area to worship their God. That is the setting for Psalm 100, a hymn of procession sung with spirit by true worshipers as they make their ways from home to the place of assembly. [Read Psalm 100:1-5.] While we may not have a procession hymn in our worship today, the spirit behind this one should fill our hearts when the bell rings and it is time to head to the place of assembling.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Make A Joyful Shout (1-3)

1. literally the entire Earth is called to worship Jehovah as the only true and living God; while the Law of Moses was directed only to Jews, the entire Earth was capable of becoming a proselyte Hebrew and a servant of the Lord

2. this thanksgiving procession into worship is exactly the attitude that worshipers need to possess, especially when times are tough or the summons to worship has grown wearisome to the laborer or the lazy

a. serve the Lord with gladness in recognition of his bountiful provision if not also in anticipation of all that is yet to come

b. come before his presence with singing, for song has always been a chosen vehicle by God for praise

3. the anonymous psalmist reminds us that God is not unknown or unknowable and that skepticism about him is not a sufficient replacement for true faith

a. if atheism is a burgeoning profession today, it also was in that age where the miracles wrought by God were forgotten and attraction to foreign deities abounded

b. yet only Jehovah makes a credible claim to be humankind's creator; they are fearfully and wonderfully made—his people and the sheep of his pasture

B. Enter With Thanksgiving (4-5)

1. when the Sabbath came around, there were probably dozens of other things to do, not the least of which would be to relax, but God deserved to be remembered on the day that he finished creating our world

2. rather than entering the meeting place with long faces and drooping eyelids—or not at all, the people were urged to come with thankfulness, praise and blessing

3. why?—because God is ultimately good, merciful and true

II. Some Applications

A. Know He Is God

1. as there is a difference between belief and faith, so there is a special meaning attached to knowing God here

a. many believe certain facts without investing anything in them, but the faithful both believe and obey

b. those who know God do more than acknowledge his existence, they incorporate his character into their lives without an unhealthy dose of skepticism

2. the faithful get beyond the process of considering deity and actually know him (John 20:24-29)

a. those whose faith is marked by persistent doubt are like waves of the sea, driven and tossed about by the rising and falling affairs of the day

b. while Christ wants to perfect, establish, strengthen and settle them, the doubter is like a spool of yarn between the paws of a kitten, only the feline is really a roaring lion seeking souls to devour (First Peter 5:6-11)

c. when we have successfully groped for God and found him in his word and in his works, we can know him and partake of his divine character (Second Peter 1:2-4)

3. 3Second Times in his first Bible letter, the apostle John uses the word “know”

a. knowing God is more than just believing he is out there (First John 2:1-6, 3:16-21, 24)

b. it is eminently about adopting his character, partaking of the divine nature (First John 4:7-8)

B. His Sheep

1. the psalmist paints a pastoral picture of a Good Shepherd tending to the sheep of his pasture, which are the people of God

2. abiding in that relationship strengthens our convictions about knowing God (First Peter 2:21-25)

3. the skeptic resists that guidance because his doubt is stronger than his conviction and his resistance prevents the Shepherd's rod and staff (Hebrews 13:20-21)

4. when we acknowledge the admonition and chastening wrought by our Shepherd's rod and staff, we prove how deeply we have come to know God (John 10:7-14)

a. the doubter prefers to direct his own steps and finds himself dangerously outside the security of the fold

b. he entertains heretical concepts in his mind and flirts with every pretty thing the devil has to offer, until finally the sheep is devoured by the wolf

C. Serve Him With Gladness

1. while the saints may be summoned on any day to come to sing and pray and learn, the call to praise is especially sweet on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, when the early brethren communed in the Lord's Supper and gave of their means to support the gospel

2. the Jews' Sabbath observance of the day in which God rested was fulfilled by the Christians' observance of the day that Christ finished his rest and resumed his work (Matthew 28:1-9)

a. in olden days, before electricity was widely harnessed, church buildings had bells that pealed at the worship hour to summon the saints to come to praise God

b. today, we still listen for bells, but they are on alarm clocks beside our beds

c. that summons though is just as urgent and should be even more sweet

3. some, however, are wearied by labor or distracted by laziness and prefer their lonely beds to the company of the pews

a. those that deeply know God will not struggle with such weaknesses, but when doubt about him or the second coming of Christ interfere, others will (First John 5:1-5)

b. the skeptic shuns the worship hour and steals the Lord's Day back for himself

c. or just as bad, he comes to worship under such duress and with so much complaint or after so much hypocritical living that his praise is spoiled (Amos 5:21-24)

4. instead, worship should be an occasion to serve him with gladness

a. to sacrifice the fruit of our lips (Colossians 3:15-17)

b. the skeptic's faith will not make him well and his healing will prove only temporary (Luke 17:12-19)

c. let us never forsake the assembling of ourselves together as is the manner of some, but let us exhort one another as the day approaches (see Hebrews 10:24-25)

Conclusion

The one hundredth psalm is a summons to praise God in the assembly. Let us never be guilty of resisting the Shepherd and showing ingratitude by taking the Lord's Day back.

Psalm 101: I Will Sing of Mercy and Justice

Introduction

The one hundred first psalm is a song of commitment by King David, concerning the nature of his reign and the ministers he would select to serve in his administration. While it is highly unlikely that anyone here will ever be in the position of a king or even a President, some will find themselves in authority over others and all hope to reign eternally as a kingdom and priesthood of Christ. [Read Psalm 101:1-8.] The psalm is divided into two sections. Verses 1-4 detail David's personal commitment about his own behavior. Verses 5-9 describe his policies for selecting ministers. We can grasp the first section easily and find guidance in the second by applying the wisdom to our selection of friends and influences.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. I Will Behave (1-4)

1. this begins a royal psalm, reflecting all the ideals and principles that the monarch, King David, intends to obey during his reign

a. it is like the campaign speeches of the challenger to an incumbent, who is currently under no pressure to perform in the office he desires

b. as we examine these ideals, we know that in spite of David's best intentions, his humanity sometimes led him astray and yet we frail creatures are reluctant to judge too harshly a man after God's own heart

2. because our God is a model of justice and mercy, it is fitting to acknowledge the place of these qualities among men as well

a. mercy and justice must always be exercised in concert, for mercy tempers justice, which is often mocked when mercy is replaced with tolerance

b. God's justice is rooted in an objective, knowable standard of assessment and his mercy recognizes that all will fall short of the standard and that the penitent will require a measure of forgiveness

3. wisely, though, David has not paved the way for sin in his life by planning for it and taking grace for granted

a. instead, he acknowledges the ideal: "I will behave wisely in a blameless way."

1. Noah was blameless and so was Job (see Genesis 6:9, Job 1:1)

2. not sinlessly perfect, but committed to doing right and righting their own wrongs

b. David's commitment involves perfecting his heart, so that he neither commits evil nor contemplates it; his mindset is due for purification because he does not want to be a slave to evil surmising

c. in that interest, he promises to set nothing wicked before his eyes

1. how strong men are until an unexpected temptation becomes tangible

2. when Bathsheba bathed on the adjacent rooftop one night, David allowed a wicked image to remain set before his eyes and it led him to adultery, lies and murder

d. as he contemplates his ideals, however, he promises to hate the work of the apostate—the politically correct idolater who divides even his spiritual loyalties to appease the majority

e. finally, David promises to free his heart of perversions so that he will be ignorant of the experience of wickedness

B. He Shall Serve Me (5-8)

1. this second half of Psalm 101 describes David's plans for adding ministers to his administration; he intends to recruit them from the faithful of the land rather than from among those merely successful in faithless endeavors

2. this eliminates the slanderer, the proud, the deceiver and the liar

3. there is something eminently dangerous about surrounding yourself with wicked people, with unbelievers, or even weak-willed believers who tend to fall more than they stand

4. David recognized that their service would impact his reign and that their influence could misguide him when he needed wise advice the most

II. Some Applications

A. Committing To Holiness

1. we often sing the wonderful song, *Take Time To Be Holy*, a checklist of what God requires for faithful living and a reminder that holiness does not always come naturally to us
 - a. sometimes you have to make time for the ideals and works that matter the most, especially when the world is hurrying you along and leaving little time for a life beyond work and leisure
 - b. it becomes necessary to take time to be holy and to spend time in secret with Jesus through prayer and meditation upon his word
 - c. when your classmates are cheating, your teammates are cursing, the other drivers are raging, the politicians are lying, your neighbors are fighting and the world is at war, the Christian has to resolve to make time to be holy—to be honest, sanctified, mild-mannered, straightforward and peaceful
2. the promises of God are at the other end of holiness (Second Peter 1:2-11)
3. while living holy does not mean that you will be sinlessly perfect, it does begin with the notion that you will refuse to make excuses for your shortcomings or anticipate them by taking forgiveness for granted (Ephesians 4:17-24)
 - a. Christ died to set us apart and someone delivered the gospel to us that we might be set apart from the course of this world to obtain eternal salvation
 - b. we ought to stay set apart and resist the leaven of selfishness and hypocrisy so common to this world

B. David's Plan

1. behave wisely (Ephesians 3:14-19)
 - a. consult God in prayer (James 1:5) and feed upon his word (see Second Timothy 2:7)
 - b. wise behavior is a matter of knowing the truth and then doing it
2. perfect your heart of its perversions (Hebrews 10:19-22)
 - a. evil does not just appear out of thin air; instead it issues from the heart of man who permitted the devil to sow the tares within in his spirit
 - b. you cleanse your conscience and heart by confessing your evil thoughts and striving to weed them out by careful study, prayer and practical acts of self-discipline (First Peter 3:10-12)
3. set nothing wicked before your eyes (Philippians 4:8-9)
 - a. if the website, program, movie or magazine is wicked because of its sexual content, profane language or mockery of Christ, it has no place before your eyes, if you can help it
 - b. if the friend will not be influenced for righteousness and intends to win you to wickedness, he or she has no place in your circle of life ("Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits" (First Corinthians 15:33).)
4. hate the work of the apostate (Second John 7-11)
 - a. rather than drink from the wells of Calvinism, express curious admiration of the bloated system of Catholicism or even ponder seriously the insights of apostate Christians, hate their evil works
 - b. through God's precepts, we get understanding, "Therefore I hate every false way" (Psalm 119:104)
5. refuse to know wickedness (Romans 16:17-19)
 - a. it is okay to be simple about some things, to have so little acquaintance with profanity that much of it is "over your head"
 - b. your knowledge is better suited elsewhere (Philippians 1:10-11)

C. Perfection

1. we have remarked that Psalm 101 is David's concept of the ideal and we have acknowledged that he did not always meet the ideal, yet this imperfect man is one after God's own heart (see Acts 13:22)
2. human perfection is a personal impossibility since all sin and fall short of God's glory, but believers in Christ can be rendered blameless when they confess their sins and ask for mercy
 - a. baptism is for the initial remission of sins and confession is a part of life (First John 1:5-10)
 - b. David's ideal may be difficult to attain, but his understanding of justice and mercy returns us to the station of hope

Conclusion

The one hundred first psalm is a song of commitment by King David, concerning his administration.

Psalm 102: Hear My Prayer, O Lord

Introduction

The one hundred second psalm is a mournful song of the afflicted, when he feels overwhelmed by trouble so that he pours out his pain to God. No doubt, we have all had occasion to feel so discouraged that hope begins to take a hit. This writer seems to be of the generation that saw Jerusalem destroyed and was taken captive into Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar's forces. [Read Psalm 102:1-28.] Psalm 102 can be divided into three segments. The psalmist's complaint in verses 1-11 is followed by an expression of his confidence in God's interest in Israel in verses 12-22. The song ends with confidence in the continuation of God's blessings into the future in verses 23-28.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Complaint (1-11)

1. the writer begins by addressing God in a tone of desperation, almost sensing that God won't listen to him in the day of his trouble
 - a. if you have ever offended a parent or a spouse so severely that you wondered if he or she would ever listen to you or like you again, you may know the doubts and pain of the psalmist here
 - b. can you imagine how awful his suffering must be to cry out to God with this much fervor?
2. he describes a state of physical decline and anguish, but almost seems to be making himself a metaphorical representative for an entire nation that had felt God's rejection by the hands of the Chaldeans and was even then struggling in poverty, imprisonment and hopelessness as captives
3. in this pitiable state, he feels alienated and unclean, as is indicated by the unlawful birds that he compares himself to and the enemies' reproach that he hears
4. as he withers away, he wonders why the indignation and wrath of God should afflict him so miserably; he traces his pain to God's punishment

B. Confidence (12-22)

1. so many mythological gods and deities have come and gone in the thousands of years of recorded history, but the endurance of Jehovah God, the God of the Bible, is unfazed
2. even our psalmist recognizes that the one true God outlasts all the pretenders made of stone and wood
3. he relies on that record to restore Judah one day, for she has undergone an awful punishment by God for her unfaithfulness to the covenant
 - a. most egregiously, she played the harlot under every green tree and on every high mountain with the silly false gods of the Canaanites
 - b. she mingled growing carnality with her idolatry until God was compelled to divorce her as he had her wicked sister, Israel
4. this punishment and captivity, though, had a cleansing effect, in that penitence was left where sin had formerly dwelt
 - a. the surviving generation that arose to rebuild Jerusalem seventy years later was smaller and humbler, but also far less burdened with superstition and corruption
 - b. the psalmist's confidence is that God will regard the prayer of the destitute and will not despise their prayers
 - c. "The word translated 'destitute' is elsewhere only used as the name of a shrub—probably the dwarf juniper, still so called by the Arabs. The dwarf juniper has 'a gloomy stunted appearance,' and well symbolizes the Israel of the Captivity period, dry and withered, like a wretched desert shrub" (*Pulpit Commentary*).
5. this song of confidence is for a future generation that would see God renew his fellowship with man, when the peoples are gathered out of the kingdoms of their birth to the kingdom of Christ
 - a. as often happens, the psalmist, probably unwittingly, prophesies beyond the restoration of Hebrew captives from Babylon to the establishment of the church of Christ
 - b. in Christ, the restoration is greater and more enduring

C. Hope (23-28)

1. the writer pleads for a few more good days, like Hezekiah crying out and receiving an additional 15 years

2. he contrasts his frailty with God's eternity, noting that even the universe will wear out like an antiquated garment only to be changed by its owner

II. Some Applications

A. Why Won't God Listen?

1. we have all petitioned our parents and even God for responses that just did not seem to be forthcoming

a. the lonely woman has asked for a companion, the unemployed has asked for work, the poor has asked for relief, the sick has pleaded for a few more days, only to perceive a negative reply

b. our perspective, though, is so limited, that we can only see for seven or eight decades against God's backdrop of eternity, and only in a small radius around our own simple lives against God's oversight of billions of souls

2. God's ears and heart are always open to the penitent of the Earth but it does not follow that his response is always going to be to grant our every desire

a. as the kindest thing a parent can do on occasion is say no, so God is sometimes driven by love to deny our requests (Romans 8:26-28)

b. those who are wise learn to use their hardships as opportunities to grow and show others (Second Corinthians 12:7-10)

3. God is really listening when we pour out our pain to him, but there are some arduous journeys in life that we simply must make, and if we travel with dignity and righteousness, they will be worth it

B. God's Chastening

1. this psalmist was correct when he attributed the nation's suffering to God's wrath, but the way that illustrates that so personally, makes us think of the times in which we feel individually punished

a. he describes a state of physical decline and anguish and we would otherwise wonder if his illness is the cause of his troubles or the result

b. so much illness is brought upon oneself by worry that even this episode may derive from obsessive concern over something else

c. he sees his days passing by him and seems to describe a fever that is contributing to his suffering and poor prospects for recovery

2. it is without question that God chastens all those children whom he loves

a. "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God" (First John 3:1)!

b. an orphan who is adopted by godly parents learns that part of the blessing of adoption is gaining parents who will both nurture and admonish

c. since we receive the adoption by faith, we can expect the same, sometimes painful, blessing (Hebrews 12:3-11)

3. not every hardship is the result of divine chastening, however, as the case of Job surely proves

a. every hardship can be an occasion for soul-searching and conscience clearing, though (Second Corinthians 7:8-13a)

b. don't burden yourself with the certainty that God is punishing you because you get a pimple or a tumor or lose your keys or your child

c. our limited perspective on time and place blinds us to the entirety that God oversees, but genuine faith trusts that we will have the victory when all is said and done

C. Beatitude Attitude

1. remember that little shrub that the psalmist compared himself and Judah to? (verse 17)

a. the word for shrub was translated destitute for English speakers, but the original illustration would be worth the extra work in reading the passage

b. when you have done wrong, it is better to take on the character of that dry, desert shrub than the pride and stature of the mighty oak

2. what the psalmist described is the character that Jesus validated in the beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10)

3. it took the awesome destruction of a once proud nation, though, to elicit this kind of humility; what will it take to bring you down to praying knees?

a. “As I live says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God” (Romans 14:11).

b. when does it become time to stop fighting against God and resisting the gospel (First Peter 5:5-7)?

c. when do you change your attitude?

D. When The Universe Wears Out

1. what the psalmist foresaw has come to pass, even beyond his comprehension, for the kingdom of God has been established, but with borders that transcend lines on maps, racial barriers and even languages (Hebrews 1:8-12)

2. the saved are conveyed into that kingdom of the called-out (see Colossians 1:13) to await the inheritance of adopted children (Romans 8:18-25)

3. the Milky Way has a date with destiny and the disciples of Christ are bound for the last restoration to God, the journey into the clouds to be with Jesus forevermore

Conclusion

Psalm 102 comforts us in our moments of despair, for we are reminded that God is listening and that no matter how bad things are on Earth, Heaven does not move.

Psalm 103: Bless the Lord, O My Soul

Introduction

The one hundred third psalm is a work attributed to David, who writes about his personal debt of gratitude to God for all that the Lord had done for him. David speaks to his own soul, when he instructs it to bless the Lord of righteousness and justice. [Read Psalm 103:1-22.] Psalm 103 is made up of four parts, beginning with an outburst of praise in verses 1-5. David then enumerates God's blessings upon his people in verses 6-14 and describes man's reliance upon him in verses 15-18. The psalm finishes with a reminder of God's abiding glory in verses 19-22.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Bless The Lord (1-5)

1. David gives instruction to his soul and we all know how often our spirits forget to follow goodness and do the right thing, when apathy or sloth take command
2. he calls all that is within him to bless the name of God for his goodness, like the singer who projects from his diaphragm the sweetest and deepest tones of praise
3. there comes a time to count one's blessings, leaving out none and taking nothing for granted
 - a. when our consciences are cleared, it is God who has forgiven all our iniquities
 - b. when we rise from a sickbed, it is God who has healed our diseases
 - c. when we escape disaster, it is God who has redeemed us from destruction
 - d. when life goes uneventfully and pleasantly, it is God who has crowned us with kindness and mercy
 - e. when we are happy, well fed and basking in provision, it is God who has satisfied us
4. taken in concert, the blessings of God enable a man or woman to soar like an eagle, renewed in vigor and determination

B. The Lord Is ... (6-14)

1. while some see God as perpetually angry and harsh in his judgment, the true picture is the one found in the midst of Psalm 103
 - a. for every loss of fortune and life in the Old Testament and every warning of judgment in the New, there is a symphony of grace thundering out an alternative
 - b. even awful Pharaoh was given the opportunity to serve God, do right and find divine approval
2. the nature of God is eminently merciful, but his purity cannot abide willful transgression and so he executes righteousness and justice after his longsuffering is exhausted
3. to the penitent, though, God is slow to anger and abounding in the mercy we require
 - a. David even acknowledges that God does not inflict upon the penitent sinner what he has merited by his iniquity; instead he pities the penitent as a father shows mercy to his children
 - b. God knows that we are not of the stature of his son, whose divine spirit was enveloped in human flesh; he knows our frame and that we are dust and he is not shocked beyond appeasement when we fail

C. As For Man (15-18)

1. the life of man is indeed temporary and his prime seems to give way to his demise so swiftly
2. so Pharaohs built pyramids and presidents are replaced by statues, in an attempt to defy mortality and live on in reputation
3. God's method of immortality is different—he makes a covenant with the redeemed and prepares their souls to dwell around his throne in an everlasting kingdom beyond the clouds

D. Bless The Lord (19-22)

1. in light of all this, David asks the angels of heaven and the works of God's hand to join his soul in blessing the Lord
2. Psalm 103 ends exactly as it began; it is a song to remind us of God's blessings, especially when they seem to be overshadowed by the frailty of life

II. Some Applications

A. All That Is In Us

1. David taught his soul to bless God and to utilize every ounce of his being to accomplish the task at hand; we can only rise to the same occasion by virtue of the same diligence (Mark 12:28-34a)

a. the first commandment requires a total commitment

1. heart—emotions trained on the love of God (First John 4:7-11)

2. soul—investment of the essence of self (Second Timothy 1:12)

3. mind—every thought brought into captivity for Christ (Second Corinthians 10:4-6)

4. strength—laboring physically to advance his cause (Hebrews 4:9-11)

b. the second commandment requires selflessness, inspired by the sacrifice of Christ (Philippians 2:3-7)

2. employing all that is within us to bless God does not mean conjuring up a loud voice to shout noises, but stirring up the gratitude within us to glorify God in every way possible

3. worshipping him with the church, praying to him alone, testifying of his gifts to others, advancing his cause while the strength resides in our bodies to do so

4. it is so often the case that man forgets all the benefits of God, ascribing successes to himself and neglecting his Maker to his own destruction

a. that is what concerned David as he began Psalm 103 and it is something that ought to motivate us toward daily expressions and acts of gratitude

b. taking God for granted will ruin the relationship (Second Corinthians 2:14-17)

B. God's Fatherly Pity

1. "Behold what manner of love the father has bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God" (First John 3:1)!

a. we become his sons and daughter by the adoption of faith and heirs of eternal salvation through the blood that his only begotten son shed on the cross of Calvary

b. truly, God embraces and chastens the sons and daughter he loves as a father would

2. to a large degree, one's impression of God is shaped by the kind of earthly father that he or she had, and if one had a godly father, that probably works quite well, but if one's father was harsh or permissive, one's ideas about the heavenly father might be distorted

a. God is neither harsh nor permissive, but is merciful and longsuffering to the penitent. "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (Second Peter 3:9)

b. if his mercy knew no limit, he would be the permissive father without the heart to discipline his children, but he is not (Romans 2:4-11)

3. God is merciful, but just, as a good father is for his children (Matthew 7:7-11)

a. a good father recognizes that his children lack the maturity, experience, wisdom and strength that he possesses and a good father is not shocked beyond appeasement when his children fall short

b. our heavenly father knows we are made of dust and he longs to forgive us of our shortcomings; "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart" (Psalm 51:17); these God will not despise!

4. the wages of sin is death, but God does not deal with penitent according to his sins, but according to grace

a. faithful baptism remits sins and when we sin again later, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (First John 1:9)

b. every ounce of his pity and mercy is measured in the blood of his own son (see Acts 20:28)

C. Immortality

1. none of us is likely to occupy a pyramid or be remembered in a statue after we die; a few people may gather to say nice things about us before our dusty frames take up residence six feet under the grass somewhere, but if that is the only attachment we have to life after death, we are surely hopeless

2. we must be citizens of a heavenly country, bound in heart for eternity (Luke 17:20-21)

3. a kingdom spirit will validate your hope with daily progress (Second Peter 1:2-11)

Conclusion

David speaks to his own soul, when he instructs it to bless the Lord of righteousness and justice.

Psalm 104: How Manifold Are Your Works

Introduction

While the one hundred fourth psalm is not attributed to David, it bears a resemblance to the song that precedes it, which is. Both psalms instruct the singer's soul to bless the Lord for his majesty. In Psalm 104, the emphasis is on God's creative power, however. [Read Psalm 104:1-35.] The psalm is almost entirely consumed with identifying and enumerating the works of God's hands before ending with a note of praise for them. Psalm 104 is a song about noticing things that are so common that many take them for granted.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. What God Made (1-26)

1. the heavens (1-4)
2. division of waters and the land (5-9)
3. provisions for animals and humans (10-18), food and shelter
4. luminaries (19-23), the sun and moon
5. sea creatures (24-26), including Leviathan

B. Dependence Upon God (27-32)

1. when one gets past the fantasy that the world descended from nothing and that life is merely an accident of big bangs and interspecies evolution, there is time to consider the place of God in the equation
2. watching the instinctive behavior of the animals is enough to remind us of our own dependence upon the Almighty, as they work in due season and collect what God drops from the sky for their use
3. we are really not so different, just more efficient and socialized, for drought and famine affect humans like animals

C. Note of Praise (33-35)

1. the psalmist meditates upon all that he sees and declares, "I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being."
2. and that is really the point of the process—getting past the notion that we are so disconnected from the Earth that we do not need God in the way that the rest of his creation does
3. in the midst of commerce, agribusiness, zoos and the air conditioned tombs we sleep, work and move in, it is easy to lose that sense of belonging to God's creation
4. when we stop paying attention to his works, we quickly forget to meditate sweetly upon our dependence on him, and then we are in trouble

II. Some Applications

A. The Earth is the Lord's

1. it was the plague of thunderstorm and hail that temporarily convinced Pharaoh that the Earth was the Lord's and even today we refer to hurricanes and lightning strikes as acts of God
2. in the twenty-fourth psalm, David wrote, "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein. For he has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters."
 - a. even as nations battle over provinces and counties argue over lucrative strips of land between them and people mortgage the future to buy their own few acres, ultimate ownership is never transferred
 - b. all the wealth, fertility and habitation of the planet belongs to God who is eternal
3. that fact alone renders all the idols of paganism impotent (First Corinthians 10:25-31)

B. God is Light

1. the psalmist praises a God who covers himself with light as with a garment; unlike those false deities of paganism who tortured humanity as if it were a plaything, Jehovah is good and compassionate
2. David wrote earlier, "With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful; With a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless; With the pure You will show Yourself pure; And with the devious

You will show Yourself shrewd. For You will save the humble people, But will bring down haughty looks. For You will light my lamp; The Lord my God will enlighten my darkness” (Psalm 18:25-28)

3. with God, there is no variation or shadow of turning to do evil unto man, for he sends rain and sun on both the just and unjust; even unbelievers are ignorantly dependent upon him

C. Sharing That Light

1. Jesus is the light (John 3:16-21)

a. “For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (Second Corinthians 4:6).

b. Paul was delivered from his persecutors, “in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in [God]” (Acts 26:18).

2. God’s word is a light to illuminate the path of the believer

a. “Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

b. “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20)

c. “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (Second Peter 1:19).

3. his children reflect that light, letting it so shine before men that they may see good works and glorify the Father in Heaven (see Matthew 5:16)

a. it was said about Daniel that the Spirit of God was in him “and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom” were found in him” (Daniel 5:14)

b. Christians must endeavor to walk in the light of right (First John 1:5-7)

D. Leviathan

1. the mysterious creature, Leviathan, is brought up in Psalm 104 as an example of what God has wrought, but no living person has ever seen a Leviathan; Job had (Job 41:1-11)

a. God used the Leviathan to remind Job that he was just a man and had no right to judge God based on his own feeble understanding and strength

b. Leviathan was a real beast with which Job was acquainted

2. materialists try to tell us that Leviathan was just an ordinary crocodile, but Job 41 does not sound like anything that Steve Irwin ever captured

a. “God’s descriptions of behemoth and leviathan are compatible in every way with the descriptions we have of dinosaurs and dinosaur-like, water-living reptiles that roamed the Earth, not millions of years ago as some have suggested, but only a few thousand years ago” (Lyons)³

b. the Bible teaches that God created animals and humans within a day or so of each other, not that some extinct animals like dinosaurs roamed the Earth millions of years before man evolved

c. Job 41 supports that truth, as does unbiased archaeology: “In the early 1920s, distinguished archaeologist Samuel Hubbard uncovered Indian petroglyphs in the Hava Supai area of the Grand Canyon. Among them were representations of easily recognizable creatures, including the ibex, the buffalo—and the dinosaur” (Ibid.).

E. I Will Sing

1. the song closes with a promise: “I will sing to the Lord as long as I live”

2. he finds sin and wickedness to be jarring to his soul that seeks concord in a world of God’s creation, and hopes for the spread of righteousness

3. in the meantime, the psalmist is not going to lose the lessons he learned from watching creation function; he will sing his thanks to God everyday

Conclusion

Psalm 104 is a welcome reminder to us in a world that is often disconnected from creation. We need to watch it work so that we remember our dependence upon God.

Psalm 105: Make Known His Deeds

Introduction

The one hundred-fifth psalm is very evangelistic in the sense that it begins with a demand to “Make known his deeds among the peoples!” In fact, this anonymous song is a review of Israel’s history, beginning with Abraham (7-15), continuing with Joseph (16-22), the deliverance from Egypt (23-36), provision in the wilderness (37-41) and ending with the occupation of Canaan (42-45). It begins and ends with a message of praising God, not only directly, but also by sharing him with others. [Read Psalm 105:1-45.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Introduction (1-6)

1. the message of Psalm 105 is powerful, calling upon the believer to rejoice in God and to let that joy overflow so that others can be immersed in it and become believing as well
2. seek him because you have sought him and not been disappointed; teach others to seek him
 - a. give thanks to God for all he has done, remembering his gifts with gratitude,
 - b. call upon his name by using it forcefully and purposely; glory in it and be joyful
 - c. make his deeds known by your children and all the people that you come in contact with, by talking about his wondrous works
 - d. seek the presence of God through prayer and meditation upon his word
3. most things in life are habit and if you are in the habit of accepting God’s goodness, gratefully at first but complacently later, you are setting yourself up for major disappointment when one day that divine answer does not come as quickly or precisely as before

B. History (7-45)

1. in Abraham’s time, God promised something unlikely—that from this man, a great blessed nation would arise—but God made it happen by protecting his chosen son until it did
2. nowhere is God’s providence more evident than in the employment of Joseph, made a slave in Egypt only to rise to power so that he could sustain Israel during the famine
3. with God on her side, Israel become stronger than her enemies even while in a very different Egypt than the one that Joseph oversaw
4. without the Lord, they would have died in the wilderness, but from behind the cloud and the fire, God rained down manna upon them and broke open rocks to give them drink
5. finally, Israel arrived in the Promised Land and inherited all of Canaan, not that they might live in luxury and wantonness, but so that, “they might observe his statutes and keep his laws” (45)

II. Some Applications

A. Making It Known

1. there is this wonderful evangelistic tone to Psalm 105 that ought to be present in the melody of each of our redeemed hearts; it is that grateful urge to share a fountain of joy with a thirsty unbeliever
2. if most things in life are a matter of habit, we need to make certain we are in the habit of seeking God, finding him and remembering that he didn’t hide from us
 - a. how disheartening it is to labor under the self-delusion that God hides when you need him most; the truth is that God is always near enough to be found, but we are sometimes so intent on doing things our way that we flee from him in secret shame
 - b. the yearning to sing psalms to him comes from a grateful, contented, happy heart (Philippians 4:4-7)
3. if you are afflicted with the leprosy of sin, or are beaten down by life’s little eventualities, and that burden is suddenly or slowly taken away, how would you respond (Luke 17:11-19)?
 - a. would your faith make you well?
 - b. well enough to be healed not only of your immediate problem—a lifetime of sin, addictions, etc.—but also of a bitter, self-centered, defeatist, fatalistic mindset (Philippians 4:8-13)
4. make God’s goodness known to others by glorying in his name
 - a. you hear them use in vain all the time in exclamations and damnation

b. you use his name to praise him and honor him, not vainly or carelessly, but forcefully and powerfully (First Timothy 1:14-17, Second Timothy 1:12)

B. Teach Your Children Well

1. making God known to other people begins with the people nearest to us, especially our own children, who will not learn the truth about God at school or on television or in video games
2. this was so in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 4:7-9, 6:6-9)
3. although such specific methods are not bound in the New Testament, do you really think the objective is any less binding—to teach our children well (Hebrews 2:1-4)
 - a. training children in Christ’s nurture and admonition does not mean subscribing to the latest theories of sociologists and child psychiatrists
 - b. it means grounding children in the history of the Bible, from Adam and Eve to the heavenly visions of John and it means governing your house as theocracy with the New Testament as the Law

C. Borrowing From Israel’s history

1. the New Testament tells us that, “the things written before were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4)
2. Israel’s downfall along the pilgrim trail was recorded and retold “for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (First Corinthians 10:11)
3. the psalmist likewise made a song out of Israel’s history, from Abraham through the Canaan conquest, and today we read from it as an exhortation that God is good and reliable

D. The Lessons We Learn

1. in Abraham’s time, God promised something unlikely—that from this man, a great blessed nation would arise—but God made it happen by protecting his chosen son until it did
 - a. often against a backdrop of secularism and deified science, God’s promises seem unlikely, but faith trusts that he can and will deliver, even as he permitted Sarah to conceive Isaac (Hebrews 6:13-19)
 - b. his promises are too precious to forfeit to nagging doubts and declining habits (Second Peter 1:2-4)
2. nowhere is God’s providence more evident than in the employment of Joseph, made a slave in Egypt only to rise to power so that he could sustain Israel during the famine
 - a. in the heat of the moment, it is often hard to see the best solution to our problems; just as a child believes that having his parents bail him out is best, only to find they want him to fight a good fight first, so we, the children of God, sometimes cannot comprehend until much later why God tarries
 - b. Joseph figured it out and provided us a timeless lesson in patience, for even when men mean things for evil, God can turn it to good (Genesis 45:3-8)
 - c. when you figure out why it was good that you had to endure chemotherapy or the flooding of your house or the illness of your child or the loss of your job, tell God about it and glory in his name
3. with God on her side, Israel become stronger than her enemies even while in a very different Egypt than the one that Joseph oversaw
 - a. Christians are always outnumbered, except when they are in buildings like this one; at work or school or in the amusement park, New Testament Christians are always a small minority
 - b. but as God strengthened Israel in Egypt, so he lends his might to spiritual Israel in a worldwide Egypt today (Romans 8:29-39)
4. without the Lord, they would have died in the wilderness, but from behind the cloud and the fire, God rained down manna upon them and broke open rocks to give them drink
 - a. the key to contentment is learning how to abound and to lack, without either forgetting about God’s goodness or blaming him for the devil’s severity
 - b. if you were filled yesterday, but are hungry today, praise the God who will not allow you to starve (Matthew 6:25-34)
5. finally, Israel arrived in the Promised Land and inherited all of Canaan, not that they might live in luxury and wantonness, but so that, “they might observe his statutes and keep his laws” (45)
 - a. I guess the Romans had the idea about God’s grace that it flowed so abundantly that they could commit sin in surplus and favor would always engulf their iniquity (see Romans 6:1)

- b. trouble is they forgot that a penitent attitude is necessary to obtaining that grace and when you sin willfully and confess conveniently, you have lost that attitude altogether (Hebrews 10:26)
- c. Christ redeemed us to be his special people, zealous for good works and for his will, not our own, which was exposed to be faulty and deadly (Romans 6:17-23)

Conclusion

We can learn so much from Israel's history. We don't want to be doomed to repeat the same pattern of apostasy.

Psalm 106: Praise the Lord

Introduction

In some ways, Psalm 106 is a fitting companion to the song the precedes it. Psalm 105 retold much of Israel's history as it regarded God's providence and exhortation to faithfulness. This psalm also recounts Israel's history, but more as it concerns her unfaithfulness to the covenant and rebellions. [Read Psalm 106:1-48.] From Psalm 106, we can learn about the real prospects for rebellion when people gradually forget about the goodness of God toward them. That possibility of apostasy exists for all of us, even the most ardent, and with a shield of faith, we must guard against it. Following a six-verse introduction, the psalmist recounts the rebellions in the wilderness, Canaan and the exile.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Introduction (1-6)

1. after that setup, it may be hard to fathom that the psalm begins and ends with the words, "Praise the Lord," for Israel had not done that much at all in the midst of these rebellions
2. the key is that Israel's suffering was entirely self-inflicted and even as she was being punished like a wayward child or put away like an unfaithful mate, God was just and merciful in the process
3. no doubt, the anonymous psalmist is among the rare few who can see clearly their own culpability and confess it, rather than trying to hide from guilt and deny its reality; he admits that we have sinned, committed iniquity and done wickedly
4. without complicating the reasons for Israel's rebellions, those were the facts

B. Rebellion in the Wilderness (7-33)

1. reading these verses is a bit like riding a roller coaster as you watch Israel's faith wax and wane
 - a. God proves himself to Israel in Pharaoh's court, but the people soon forget that when up against the formidable Red Sea, so God parts it and proves himself again
 - b. so they believed, but soon forgot again when their tummies grumbled in the wilderness and God fed them, but even then they complained against Moses and Aaron
 - c. they bowed before a molten calf while Moses tarried on the mountain and complained so consistently that God eventually allowed their generation to expire in the wilderness so that their children could conquer Canaan instead of them
 - d. Moses pleaded for them and preserved their lives, but in the end, even he was left behind because of their provocation
2. sin, backsliding and apostasy tend to come and go in cycles until you make up your mind to quit the process and either give yourself entirely to the devil or finally to God
3. the sin-repent-sin process in neither fulfilling nor edifying

C. Rebellion in Canaan (34-39)

1. when Israel's second and third generations finally reached Canaan after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness with their faithless parents, they found conquest mostly a simple task with God's might on their side
2. yet they had not the heart to heed his commands and remove the Gentile squatters entirely from the Promised Land, leaving kings and commoners behind to mingle their idolatrous ways with God's pure covenant
3. Israel learned their works and served their idols, even sacrificing their children to them, polluting the land with innocent blood
4. Israel became a spiritual harlot, appeasing her husband, then dallying with vile suitors
5. instead of quitting the cycle for God, Israel was choosing the devil

D. Rebellion in Exile (40-46)

1. first the Assyrians and then the Chaldeans rose up and took back the Promised Land from Israel, enslaving and kidnapping those who remained alive
2. in all this, God was punishing his children, but had mercy upon them after a while by motivating earthly kings to send the Hebrews back to rebuild a smaller version of their way of life

3. pride was punctured so that piety could take root

E. Doxology (47-48)

1. why in the world would God care about restoring such an historically rebellious people?
2. for the same reason that he cares about restoring us in spite of our repeated forays back into sins of the mind, heart, hands and feet
3. God is merciful and deserving of praise, for he is patient beyond comparison

II. Some Applications

A. Cycles of Backsliding

1. many of us get caught in a cycle of sin that is more like the Hebrews' pattern than we would want to admit
 - a. while there are many shortcomings that we manage to overcome completely and rather easily, there is at least one temptation that we can never seem to conquer altogether
 - b. we tend to think of addictions in terms of alcohol, drugs and cigarettes, but any behavior—good or bad—can have addictive qualities, in that it provides satisfaction or release
 - c. maybe we are caught in a pattern with gossip, worry, pessimism, lust, anger, hatred, prayerless days, forsaking worship or any number of things
2. we sin, regret, repent, restore and then sin all over again—and over again and over again
3. all we really want is to quit the cycle, but how?
 - a. first, you must recognize that you have been called to war, and you will either arise to fight like a soldier of Christ or be taken prisoner eternally by a satanic adversary (First Corinthians 9:24-27)
 - b. when you make excuses for misbehavior and indulge your addictions, you have surrendered to the devil just as infamously as the Hebrews kneeling before a molten calf (First Timothy 6:11-12)
 - c. you cannot afford to be caught by the devil with your armor in the closet (First Thessalonians 5:5-10)
 1. make belief and love protect your heart from a devil bent on doubt and hate
 2. make hope preserve your mind from an adversary intent on defeat and doom

B. Spiritual Harlotry

1. Israel played the harlot with Molech and other Canaanite gods, worshipping God in the tabernacle and temple, only to return to the high hills afterward to flirt with death and indignity
2. we pity their superstitious shortsightedness, only to realize that we are less than immune ourselves (First Corinthians 10:1-14)
3. James indicates that friendship with the world is choosing sides against God, making one a spiritual adulterer or adulteress against Christ, our bridegroom in baptism and redemption (see James 4:4)
 - a. you cannot be wed to God and mammon at the same time, nor can you play the harlot with the flesh, possessions or pride and then merrily return to praying knees or padded pews like nothing else transpired
 - b. God put away Israel and Judah for such spiritual adultery and we risk the same alienation when we attempt to compel God to share his throne with a tempter who offers such shiny baubles and shoddy bargains (James 4:7-10)

C. Puncturing Pride

1. pride often precedes a fall for those who think they stand invincibly fall the hardest; the sound of Goliath crashing to the ground with a rock in the middle of his forehead is that of pride being punctured
2. pride plays a role in this cycle of harlotry because it says that we just won't get caught by death or the second coming with our armor down; we practically dare God to make us wrong
3. in his patience, God tries to prick our pride so that it will burst and we will return to reality; he spans his children in the hopes of restoring their reason (Second Corinthians 7:8-11)
 - a. the direct consequences of sin, which God often refuses to ameliorate, are evidence of his discipline, but there are other instances as well
 - b. a word of rebuke by a loved one or even the withdrawal of the church are others
 - c. no doubt there are more that exist in the merciful mind of God, too

D. Restoration of the Rebellious

1. the goal of this entire discussion is to convince believers to quit finally the cycle of apostasy and devote themselves entirely to holiness (Hebrews 12:11-13)
2. a time is coming when it will be too late to slip back into your armor after a period of dalliance (Hebrews 12:14-17)
3. satisfaction with the cycle of backsliding is part of the illusion of being lukewarm (Revelation 3:15-19)

Conclusion

Psalm 106 is a wonderful reminder of God's patience, but also that his patience is eventually exhausted. Let us quit the cycle of apostasy and become on fire for righteousness.

Psalm 107: Give Thanks to the Lord

Introduction

Psalm 107 is a song of thanksgiving combined with a wisdom hymn, producing an ode to God's faithfulness during the Exile period when Israel lost all her sovereignty and waited for redemption. After the introductory call to worship in verses 1-3, the anonymous writer describes four scenes of redemption in verses 4-32 before ending with a message of instruction in verses 33-43. [Read Psalm 107:1-43.] Like its predecessor, this psalm celebrates God's providential power, but its main purpose is to identify God as the giver of great spiritual blessings, of which the temporal gifts of this life are only shadows and types (Spurgeon).

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Introduction (1-3)

1. it appears this psalm was written in response to God's restoration of the Hebrews to their homeland after the Exile
 - a. after all the doubt and skepticism and after all of God's warnings went unheeded, Israel and Judah were conquered by pagan kings and reduced to rubble
 - b. her choicest people were taken captive to toil for the heathen kings while the old and weak were left to die
 - c. and all this was only fitting after Israel had persisted in idolatry, ignored the prophets and practically dared God to go through with the punishment he promised
2. in spite of that checkered history, God's mercy brought their suffering to a fruitful end and motivated the heathens to send some of the Hebrews back to rebuild Israel
3. for that bit of mercy, the psalmist asks the people to give thanks

B. Four Scenes of Redemption (4-32)

1. first, the psalmist imagines the captives as if they were wandering in the wilderness (4-9)
 - a. they had wandered away of their own volition and lived to regret it
 - b. at last, God returned them to a community of people to support them
2. second, the writer speaks of them as if they had been in prison (10-16)
 - a. they sat in darkness and death, bound because they had rebelled against the word of God
 - b. when they repented, he answered and set them free
3. third, the psalmist says the captives were ill (17-22)
 - a. we learn again how often our misery is self-inflicted, for the captives had been taken captive entirely because of their transgression
 - b. they were spiritually sick and without nourishment of the soul until it finally occurred to them that their unfaithfulness was to blame and then God healed them
4. fourth, the psalmist imagines the captives as if they had been lost at sea (23-32)
 - a. travel on the sea becomes a metaphor for life's ups and downs
 - b. we sometimes reel to and fro and sometimes rise high toward heaven or plunge low near to submersion, but when we cry out to the Lord, he calms the storm and rescues us from distress

C. Instruction (33-43)

1. God has the power to turn abundance into barrenness when it is abused and Israel is the perfect example of that capacity
2. he can likewise turn poverty into exaltation when people learn to obey his word and seek his lovingkindness
3. the psalm ends with a good moral—wise people will observe these facts and will comprehend the love of God toward them, how it is expressed and even turned toward chastening by our own deeds

II. Some Applications

A. Thanksgiving of Emancipated Slaves

1. when we hear the word "emancipation," we probably think first about Abraham Lincoln, who signed the Emancipation Proclamation to free all the slaves in the Southern states during the Civil War

2. he is called the Great Emancipator by historians, but that term should probably be reserved for a greater emancipator, Jesus Christ, who brought the promise of freedom to untold billions of slaves to a much harsher master, Satan himself
 - a. but think back even further than that and you find a type of what Jesus was going to do in what Moses did (Exodus 1:8-14)
 - b. Moses freed the Hebrew slaves through God's plagues upon Egypt, starting them on a march toward the land of promise that foreshadows our goal of Heaven
3. in the 500s B.C., Israel learned again about bondage as Jerusalem was laid waste and people like Daniel and Ezekiel were carried away captive to Babylon
 - a. they appreciated the opportunity to follow Ezra, Nehemiah and Zerubbabel back to rebuild the temple, the walls and the system
 - b. but they never completely left bondage, passing from the hands of the Babylonians to the Persians, Greeks and Romans
 - c. and in the midst of this physical bondage, they were sinking deeper into a spiritual kind
4. their pride prevented them from even acknowledging this obvious fact (John 8:31-36)
 - a. they were overpowered by temptation and impotent to effect their own redemption from sin since there was no savior yet sacrificed and glorified (Romans 7:21-25)
 - b. Jesus came to set them free, not from the Romans, but from the devil (Hebrews 2:14-15)
 - c. the gospel is man's Emancipation Proclamation (Romans 6:16-23)
 - d. and being set free, you must be careful that you do not follow the mindset of the pilgrims who began to yearn for a return to slavery: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1).

B. Scenes of Our Own Redemption

1. sometimes we wander in the wilderness
 - a. we are lost in a thicket of hardship, temptation, confusion and frustration and we cannot seem to find the right path that will lead us out of misery and into joy
 - b. remember that prayer is a conscience-clearing appeal to heaven and that God's word is "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105)
 - c. when you are wandering in the dark, it is not time to stop crying out for help or to snuff out your candle; it is time to cry louder and more frequently and to bring the light closer to your soul
 - d. Christ will guide you home, but it may take a little while, so be patient
2. sometimes we are in prison
 - a. the psalmist spoke of those that were bound in affliction and irons because they rebelled against God
 - b. admitting the need for redemption is hard because it destroys our pride and makes us feel weak and humiliated, but unless we can get over that false sense of self-righteousness, we are just going to remain in a prison built for rebels (James 4:7-10)
3. sometimes we are sick
 - a. spiritual malnutrition and disease characterized the exiles in captivity in Psalm 107
 - b. it is a bitter cycle that we choose when our zeal for good begins to wane and we treat that problem by diminishing our Bible study and worship attendance (First Corinthians 11:27-32)
 - c. he is not only a great emancipator, but he is also the Great Physician
4. sometimes we are lost at sea—the waves of sadness, disappointment, failure and heartache beat against us as we sail through life until finally we are ready to capsize just to get it over with, but if we surrender to the sea, we will be lost (Matthew 8:23-27)

C. Instruction

1. Psalm 107 ends with this instruction: "Whoever is wise will observe these things, And they will understand the lovingkindness of the Lord."
2. the sinner of every age has to recognize his own plight in these scenes of redemption and put his trust in the Lord to see him through
3. God's lovingkindness is not to be underestimated!

Conclusion

This psalm celebrates God's providential power, but its main purpose is to identify God as the giver of great spiritual blessings.

Psalm 108: My Heart is Steadfast

Introduction

Psalm 108 has an awfully familiar ring to it and for good reason. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, King David borrows liberally from his earlier work in Psalms 57 and 60 to form the theme and words for this song. As before, this psalm pays homage to the Lord for his mercy and truth by calling upon all peoples to join the writer in praise. [Read Psalm 108:1-13.] This first five verses of this psalm replicate Psalm 57:7-11 in a call to worship. Verses 5-13 correspond to Psalm 60:5-12 to show the conquering power of God on behalf of his beloved ones. Our objective is to magnify the mercy and truth of God as a conquering power worthy of gratitude and praise.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. My Heart is Steadfast (1-5)

1. David begins by describing his heart as steadfast—standing fast, that is, in what it holds dear
 - a. a steadfast heart not only claims to believe things, it truly does and it expresses that conviction practically and personally
 - b. just as hearts can be steadfast in defense of country or through love of a mate, hearts can be so anchored in the Lord that no room remains for doubt or skepticism or bitterness
 - c. but getting to the steadfast heart is not something accomplished by everyone who claims to be of God, for the devil spends his time trying to assault the stability of our convictions
2. David is so convinced about his God that praising him is the first order of the day; he awakens the dawn with worship, not brushing his teeth or putting the coffee on, but by reminding himself of the reason for the day
3. and his faith is not merely a private matter, either, as he promises to express it even among others who do not know the source of his joy
4. it is God's mercy and truth that have gained David's focus in this song
 - a. God's mercy extends beyond human estimations and limitations, enabling him to forgive to the uttermost the vilest of offenders
 - b. his truth also transcends the random and slippery nature of what passes for truth among men; it is consistent and verifiable and practical

B. That Your Beloved May Be Delivered (6-13)

1. just here, David shifts to the sixtieth psalm, which described Israel's response to a military setback
2. while many of his countrymen probably began to doubt God, David did not retreat from his steadfast heart, being certain that God would deliver his beloved
3. God remains sovereign over the affairs of men, even when it appears chaos and evil are in control
 - a. by listing these countries and regions, David asserts God's control over them, affection for those who believed and disdain for those that did not
 - b. the law would go forth from Judah while Moab, Edom and Philistia would be subjected to the consequences of their wickedness
4. the city of Edom is probably Sela, the stronghold captured by King Amaziah (see Second Kings 14:7)
 - a. when alliances with men and dependence upon self fail, God allows his people still to do valiant things and to defeat their enemies
 - b. Israel's enemies were foreign nations, but our enemies are mostly spiritual foes

II. Some Applications

A. Steadfast Heart

1. the steadfast heart is stable, consistent, solid, unshaken, steady, reliable, trusting and content
 - a. that is the kind of heart most of us want to possess and present to God and man, but we must admit that the cares of life, deceitfulness of riches, temptations of the flesh and the skepticism that passes for knowledge often assault the steadfastness of our hearts, causing them to sway and shutter (Hebrews 3:12-15)

- b. the steadfast heart is not empowered by secular convictions, by works of the flesh, by wealth and beauty or even by science
- c. only the heart in the chest is a physical thing; the steadfast heart is spiritual and is made so by divine convictions and heavenly hope (Hebrews 6:19)
- 2. when assaulted by the flaming darts of the devil, it becomes time to stand fast behind a shield of faith (see Ephesians 6:16)
 - a. when tempted to rebel, regress or regret, “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (First Corinthians 15:58).
 - b. when drawn to sin or even apostasy because you feel isolated and targeted by the tempter, “Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world” (First Peter 5:9).
 - c. stand fast lest you cease to be reconciled to God and begin doubting either his existence or his power (Colossians 1:21-23)

B. Awaken The Dawn

- 1. in his psalm, David sounds like a child who wakes up long before his parents and begins singing and playing and carrying on because he is so happy and does not know the worry and weariness of the mature
- 2. David wakes up with that kind of joy because he has filed away the worry and weariness of the spiritually immature whose faith is incomplete as a result
- 3. don’t you love the first 30 seconds after you wake up in the morning, when you temporarily have forgotten the disappointments behind you and the drudgery ahead of you?
 - a. what if you could prolong that state of bliss by arranging all your disappointments and unpleasant duties in a way that corresponds to their reality and compares them to eternity?
 - b. instead of punctuating those 30 blissfully ignorant seconds with regrettable awareness, what if you could transition them into a few moments of prayer, meditation or Bible study instead?
- 4. if your days start sourly, look for another way to start them
 - a. if you are suffering pray and if you are cheerful, sing psalms (see James 5:13)
 - b. speak to God and let him speak to you through his word
 - c. awaken the dawn with praise as David did and your whole day might turn out differently

C. Mercy and Truth

- 1. the false gods of man and most of their adherents are an unmerciful lot, for they look out for their own interests and are willing to sacrifice one another so that the fittest might survive
- 2. to them, truth is the product of human imagination, is subjective and personal rather than objective and universal
- 3. the merciless Pontius Pilate typifies them, when he scornfully asks Jesus, “What is truth?” before permitting the innocent man to die on the cross
- 4. ours is a God who has forgiven many of the people who crucified his son and many who have committed multitudes of sins; his mercy is extended to all people so that they should not receive the wages of sin which is eternal death, but forgiveness and reward instead (Romans 10:6-13)
- 5. Jesus is the truth, and the word of God is sanctifying, liberating truth (Ephesians 1:13-14)

D. The Help of Man is Useless

- 1. Israel had to learn over and again that disobeying God to form alliances with infidel nations was shortsighted, insulting and destructive
- 2. even trusting in their own power, might and intellect proved feeble
- 3. we are out to conquer life and outlast our enemies, but we cannot gain the victory on our own (Second Corinthians 10:3-6)
- 4. through God, we can do valiantly and find help in times of trouble (Second Corinthians 10:17-18)

Conclusion

Psalm 108 reminds us that God is our defender and that behind him, we can know a victory that will sustain us even when it seems that defeat is imminent.

Psalm 109: Do Not Keep Silent, O God

Introduction

The one hundred-ninth psalm has been called “the most terrible psalm in the whole Psalter” (*Coffman Commentaries on the Old and New Testament*). It is not that Psalm 109 is poorly written or unappreciated, but that the tone and theme of this song seems so wholly unchristian. Of all the imprecatory psalms, this one is the most bold and bloodthirsty against the writer’s enemies. David is identified as the author, but his enemy is unknown. [Read Psalm 109:1-31.] Commentator W.E. Addis said, “These are further from the spirit of Christianity than anything else in the whole Psalter” (391). Derek Kidner added that, “These things are written for our learning, not for our imitation” (Vol. II, p. 389). The attitude we must have toward our enemies is decidedly different from that of a king living under the Law of Moses in the nation of Israel. The only element that perseveres is the understanding that wicked men should be punished if they refuse to become penitent and reform. Sometimes, the only way to protect the innocent and righteous is through the incarceration or execution of the evildoer, but that is the realm of God and the state, not you and me. Psalm 109 can be divided into three parts. Verses 1-5 give a description of David’s enemies. A prayer for the punishment of those who had wronged David follows in verses 6-20. Psalm 109 closes with a prayer for the deliverance of the writer in verses 21-31.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Psalmist’s Complaint (1-5)

1. David was a man after God’s own heart and if his reasoning here can be believed, and it is after all inspired, then David had done nothing to bring this conflict upon himself

2. in the course of seeking to do good, men bent on selfish ambition and evil indulgence, had found David to be in their way

3. David complains that they had lied about him and surrounded him with words of hatred

a. David’s enemies had tried to stir up unrest and rebellion against him by exaggerating his flaws and attributing to him positions he did not really take

b. moreover, they had fomented hatred toward him in much the way that our political candidates sometimes try to advance their own campaigns by creating unfounded animosity toward an opponent

4. Christians can find themselves victims of this kind of ugliness when adversaries cannot tie them to real evil and yet want to see them silenced anyway; the saints in the first century were accused of profaning the Hebrew temple and calling for rebellion against Caesar, but none of it was true

B. Imprecation To The Utmost (6-20)

1. either these verses put the vindictive attitude of David on display or they merely ask God to remove from power a corrupt enemy before he can do more harm to the innocent

2. we sometimes are confronted with bloodthirsty tyrants like Saddam Hussein, Adolf Hitler, Osama bin-Laden and others, who become enemies of all humanity

3. prayers for their conversion are thwarted by impenitence and the suffering of their subjects continues; may we pray for their removal and even their destruction?

4. David clearly did and in the most brutal of terms

C. Save The Wounded (21-31)

1. David closes by reminding himself of his trust in God to turn things around

2. he promises to worship the Lord when his answer comes and mercy is renewed

II. Some Applications

A. Love Your Enemy

1. we have three categories of enemies in life

a. personal enemies whose animosity is rooted in personalities or proximity

b. enemies of the cross who persecute or teach error

c. enemies of humanity who torture, enslave, rape, threaten and kill

2. we are involved daily with personal enemies, occasionally with enemies of the cross and usually only by extension with enemies of humanity

3. can we have the attitude of David or even of Mark and John (Luke 9:51-56)
4. obviously not, for we are to love our enemies for the value of their immortal souls (Matthew 5:43-48)
 - a. we should strive to convert personal enemies (Romans 12:17-21)
 - b. we should be willing to make spiritual war with enemies of the cross (Second Corinthians 10:3-6)
 - c. we should understand that God and government will sometimes have to punish enemies of humanity, that war is made unavoidable by evil men who must be stopped (Romans 13:1-4)

B. Judases

1. verse 8 of Psalm 109 stands out because it is quoted by the apostle Peter after the suicide of Judas Iscariot; David wrote, "Let his days be few, And let another take his office."
2. coupled with words from Psalm 69, this formed the basis for replacing Judas Iscariot among the apostles (Acts 1:15-26)
 - a. there is no record of any other apostle being replaced, and certainly no testimony that would show one of them betraying the master as Judas did
 - b. Judas fit the bill of Psalm 109 and Peter saw the need to fill his office with a man who could remain loyal
3. Judas is typical of the corrupt men that troubled David and truly corruption remains today, even in false teachers (Second Peter 2:1-3, 12-17)
 - a. preachers, teachers, elders and deacons can be corrupted if they do not guard their hearts; they can begin teaching and doing in the interest of self and pride instead of the kingdom
 - b. beware corruption (First Thessalonians 5:5-8)

C. For God's Sake

1. David makes the claim that others have made in appealing to God that he should save them for his own sake (21)
2. Moses reasoned this way concerning the Exodus pilgrims whose eventual destruction might have given the Egyptians cause to doubt God anew
3. but the pilgrims and David occupied a special place in the scheme of redemption that we do not; God was working through them and others to bring the Messiah to the Earth and we are the beneficiaries of that arrangement
4. we certainly cannot tell God that he must bless us for his own sake and indeed, we may actually have to suffer for his sake (Hebrews 10:32-39)
5. we ought instead to be asking what we can do for the sake of God, to advance his cause and prove its power in our examples (First Peter 4:12-19)

Conclusion

Psalm 109 is chief among the imprecatory psalms, but it has much to teach us when it comes to dealing with evil and living for the sake of God.

Psalm 110: The Lord Said to My Lord

Introduction

Two of the best-known quotations drawn from the Old Testament for the New are found in the short seven verses of Psalm 110. It is often classified as a royal psalm of David's monarchy, but Jesus obviously saw it as more messianic than anything else. In fact, it is highly unlikely that parts of this psalm could ever have referred to an Old Testament king, but must surely point to the Savior alone. [Read Psalm 110:1-7.] We will take the messianic lead of Psalm 110 and examine its prophecy about the kingdom of God that was then yet to come through the seed of David.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Lord Said To My Lord (1-2)

1. the Lord said to my Lord is unusual language and it probably dwelt in the minds of scholarly Jews for centuries until Jesus came along to explain it to them

2. what Lords were under consideration and how did the authority function if both were Lords?

3. before his crucifixion, Jesus found the occasion to teach men about this somewhat difficult passage (Matthew 22:41-46)

a. in doing so, Jesus once again challenged the false understanding of the nature and character of the Hebrew messiah

b. to most who anticipated his arrival, he was simply a modern version of David, Saul or Gideon, sent by God to judge Israel and rule over her like a monarch of old

c. the kingdom would be restored much as it had existed centuries before and the Gentiles would be evicted from Canaan again

d. the nature of the messiah was thought to be thoroughly human; the notion that deity could inhabit human flesh did not much occur to them

e. it is for this reason that Peter and other committed disciples rebuke Christ's prediction of death, try to prevent his seemingly untimely arrest and wonder at his ascension when Israel would be restored to its former glory (see Matthew 16:21-23, 26:47-51, Acts 1:4-6)

d. each time, Jesus rebukes them, for while they came to understand that he was deity, it was a long time before they understood the spiritual nature of his kingdom

4. God's right hand is the place of highest honor, desired ardently by those with strong ambition, but belonging only to the Son of God, the Lord of verse one

a. this is where Jesus sits even today (Acts 5:25-32)

1. Paul comments, "It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (Romans 8:34)

2. and the Hebrew writer twice applies this verse in Psalm 110 to Jesus Christ (see 1:13, 10:12)

b. his reign over the kingdom of the redeemed would endure until all his enemies become his footstool, a theme picked up by the inspired writer in First Corinthians 15:20-28

1. this has reference to the events of the second coming, when Jesus will deliver up the kingdom—his church, or elect—to his Father, "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Ephesians 5:27)

2. then the kingdom will be assimilated into Heaven's population and Earth and all that is in it will be destroyed

5. verse 2 is yet another instance of God dispelling the theory of Premillennialism before it even started

a. Christ's reign over his kingdom would not be in some insulated millennial environment, but right in the midst of his enemies and against their will

b. his strength would be required, for the kingdom would be surrounded, not by a utopian paradise Earth, but by enemies out to conquer it (see Colossians 1:13, Hebrews 12:28)

B. The Order of Melchizedek (3-4)

1. his people are his church, which he promised to build long before his physical downfall, which was in fact, his coronation and fulfillment of the Law and Prophets

2. elsewhere, David had prophesied that one from the fruit of his body would rise up to sit upon his throne and Peter applied that prediction to the resurrection of Christ from the dead (Acts 2:25-35)

3. his people are not born helplessly into the kingdom as Americans are born Americans and Jews were born Jews, but become naturalized citizens by faith and rebirth in water and the Spirit (Hebrews 8:10-11)

4. the seed of David would be not only prophet and king, but also priest according to the ancient order of Melchizedek, which preceded the order of Aaron and the Old Covenant (Hebrews 6:19-7:3, 17)

C. He Shall Judge (5-7)

1. the culmination of this kingdom era is considered as the psalm closes in the last three verses
2. it is a moment of judgment and even of punishment for rulers and citizens who earned tribulation with their lawless deeds and faithless hearts
3. but David closes on a happier note, foreseeing the savior as one who drinks of the wayside brook and who lifts up the head in offering himself as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind
4. no one has to be numbered among the condemned

II. Some Applications

A. Jesus Is Lord

1. in Psalm 110, Jehovah God said something to David's Lord, who had not yet been born, but even then existed as a member of the Godhead
2. God predicted the messianic claims of Jesus Christ, who would be born to the lineage of David on Mary's side, but to the Holy Spirit on his Father's
3. Jesus became not only David's Lord, but also the King of kings and Lord of lords, our Lord and savior
 - a. the word for Lord is 'adown (aw-done')
 - b. Jesus is *Adonai*, our Lord, but what does that mean?
4. Jesus is our master, in principle when we obey the gospel, but in reality, only when we continue to practice the will and ways of Jesus Christ (First Corinthians 6:12-17)
5. there is only one legitimate Lord and yet men who are lovers of money, pleasure and themselves can exchange him for other things and ruin the relationship (Luke 6:40-49)

B. The Kingdom

1. confusion reigns over the nature of the kingdom today as both unbelieving Jews and Protestant premillennialists wait for the Messiah either to come or to come again and set up an earthly system with its headquarters in Jerusalem for 1000 years
2. clearly, though, this psalm contends for a kingdom in the midst of active enemies, not a millennial paradise
3. we in the church of Jesus Christ compose the population of that kingdom, for our citizenship is in Heaven where we hope to travel
 - a. unbelieving Jews have rejected Christ and Protestant premillennialists have attributed failure to his first advent, but we believe he conquered death and sat down on David's throne in Heaven
 - b. in so doing, he enabled us to become a spiritual nation spread out over the globe, but united in spirit and heart (First Peter 2:4-10)
 - c. surely his enemies surround us (First Peter 2:11-12)

C. Priesthood

1. Jesus is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, signifying a change from the Law of Moses with its Aaronic priesthood to the Law of Christ (Hebrews 7:11-17, 4:14-16)
2. his priesthood endures, so that he can continue interceding for us (Hebrews 5:5-10)
3. and while he reigns as prophet, priest and king, the day of reckoning that the psalmist foresaw draws ever closer (Romans 2:5-11)
4. his kingdom is neither Jew nor Greek, but is made of Christians of every stripe

Conclusion

Psalm 110 is one of the great works in predicting the coming of God's son and our Messiah. It gives us abiding hope that his return in the clouds will usher in an eternal paradise in heaven for all the redeemed.

Psalm III: Praise The Lord!

Introduction

The one hundred eleventh psalm is an acrostic ode to the worthiness of our God to be praised and honored by all creation. It is his works that the writer calls wondrous and great and worthy of being remembered. How often we forget his works when all we want is more. [Read Psalm 111:1-10.] Psalm 111 begins with a vow of praise and concludes with a recommendation to fear God. In between, verses 2-9 enumerate many of those wondrous praiseworthy works. This psalm, along with next two, is sometimes called a Hallelujah Psalm, because that word marks the beginning in Hebrew of each of them.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Acrostics

1. an acrostic psalm is one in which each line of the song begins with the next sequential letter in the Hebrew alphabet
2. in our alphabet, each line would begin with A-B-C-etc.
3. this is simply a poetic device, but it also adds some level of inflexibility to the psalm's subject matter—sometimes it is hard to come up with a consistent idea for the next line from the letter that is mandated to begin it
4. for that reason, some acrostic psalms are like a potpourri of different ideas

B. Vow to Praise (1)

1. in Hebrew, the psalmist begins by saying “Hallelujah”
 - a. of course, that word is a transliteration of the Hebrew, which means “Praise the Lord!”
 - b. it is a word that we hear today, but which is generally used in a vain and flippant manner
 - c. because it is a word that contains the name of God, we must use it only discriminately so that we are not taking the name of God in vain in the process of crying out “Hallelujah” sarcastically
2. the psalmist promises to praise God with his whole heart in the midst of the assembly
3. as we contemplate the goodness of God, the sacrifice of Christ and the revelation of the Holy Spirit, it is just as important that we praise God wholeheartedly

C. The Works of the Lord (2-9)

1. just what are the great works of God, studied by those who have pleasure in them?
 - a. perhaps the works of nature, as diverse as the piney woods of East Texas, the deserts of Africa, the oceans that span the globe and the heavens that surround it
 - b. perhaps as innocent or dangerous as the life that stalks the Earth, as minutely as the amoeba and fiercely as the lion
 - c. perhaps as intricate as the human body and mind, the knowledge of which unfolds year by year
2. the works of God are studied by disciples and artists and scientists and philosophers and outdoorsman, and are best appreciated in terms of divine creation, rather than freak happenstance
3. beyond objects, the works of God include also his actions—his saving works as in the Exodus, the Exile and the execution of Christ to come
4. by covenant, God provides for the needs of his children and gives them a land of promise
 - a. the Exodus itself spans four Old Testament books and 40 years of Hebrew history, and is a record of God providing for his people against all odds and in spite of their doubts and complaints
 - b. where the Pentateuch ends, Joshua begins and the land of promise is conquered, not by Hebrew military will, but by divine assistance, for walls fall down and enemies' hearts melt
5. moreover, we find that through 1500 years of Bible history and in 2000 years since, the works of God harmonize with his precepts—righteousness, truth, justice and reliability
6. here in the King James Version of the Bible is the only place where the word “reverend” is applied to anyone's name and it is God's, and for good reason—he is the maker of the covenant and guarantor of the promises who does praiseworthy works

D. The Fear of the Lord (10)

1. in verse 10, the psalmist concludes by quoting from the Hebrew proverbs that, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”
2. for those who are studying the works of God, a proper understanding of them will only result when there is respect for their creator
3. moreover, obedience to the will of God is evidence that a person truly understands what truth is all about

II. Some Applications

A. Wholeheartedly

1. “I will praise the Lord with my whole heart”
2. there is always the danger that worship can become nothing more than a regular ritual in which the heart can operate disengaged from the action at hand, but we must understand that God will not accept half-hearted or no-hearted worship any more than he will accept unauthorized forms of worship
3. worship requires concentration and self-discipline, as well as attention to the process
 - a. dullness of hearing, hunger, apathy, complacency, ingratitude, carnality, worry—all these can get in the way and steal a little piece of the worshiper’s heart so that just enough is dedicated to self and Satan and not God
 - b. Jesus answered, “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment” (Mark 12:30).
4. why should we suddenly realize that we have worshiped, but that our hearts were not in it, or that so much of our heart was absent from the desire to praise God, that we chose to stay away?
 - a. the gratitude for redemption that once filled our hearts with two hungers—to praise the giver and learn more of his ways—has subsided
 - b. the first sign of backsliding is when the flames of thankfulness start to diminish; the church at Ephesus was eventually noted for having left its first love (see Revelation 2:4)
5. friend, how can you contemplate the scenes of the cross, the empty tomb and Judgment Day upon the screen of your mind and not find your heart revived and restored to wholeness?

B. Studying The Works of the Lord

1. it is hard for me to understand how anyone could study the works of creation and not be impressed with the beauty and perfection of God’s marvelous works
2. how could anyone examine the universe or even the human body and conclude that there is no evidence of the hand of a designer, of order and purpose?
 - a. the universe (Psalm 19:1-6)
 - b. the Bible (Psalm 19:7-11)
 - c. the body (Psalm 139:13-16)
3. in art, science, history, philosophy—even religion, something powerful is missing where there is no acceptance of the hand of God in creation
 - a. such men and women become like children who think that covering their own eyes makes them invisible to others
 - b. the truth of God in creation is so obvious that some eventually accept it after a lifetime of denial, while others remain more loyal to their positions than to a pursuit of truth

C. Covenant and Promises

1. the psalmist notes that God was ever mindful of his covenant with Israel and he indeed fulfilled it, including the portion that promised divorcement if his people committed apostasy
2. Christians today are part of a new covenant, one written on the heart of the believer, but spelled out on the pages of the New Testament
3. it is a covenant in which parties are added by grace through faith (Hebrews 8:6, 10:15-17)
 - a. Jesus shed the blood of the new covenant, for the blood of Old Testament bulls and goats was not sufficient to remit sins
 - b. the communion feast commemorates the blood of the covenant (Hebrews 13:20-21)
4. their Promised Land was a geographical patch of real estate called Canaan; ours is better located, for it is Heaven itself, but the promise is just as certain as it was when Moses’s pilgrims and Joshua’s armies marched onward (Hebrews 6:17-19)

D. Holy and Reverend is His Name

1. the English word “reverend” is used only here in the King James translation, but the original Hebrew word is used many times to denote something that is “fearful” or even “terrible”
 - a. the connotation is unmistakably one of awesomeness and the respect that ought to be engendered in the hearts of mere mortals
 - b. and for 1400 years, the notion and word “Reverend” were reserved for God himself
 - c. in 1449, the Roman Catholic Church began to use the term as a title for its clergy, later modifying it into “Very Reverend” and “Right Reverend” so that men in black robes were seemingly elevated not only above their peers, but above God himself
 - d. Protestantism fails because it seeks only to reform an apostasy rather than to restore the practice of truth—clergy distinctions and titles like “Reverend” remain in most every Protestant denomination today, including the Christian Church
2. but, biblically, holy and reverend is God’s name alone
 - a. it is his name that must not be used thoughtlessly or carelessly, according to the 10 commandments
 - b. and Jesus condemned the use of religious titles in the church (Matthew 23:6-12)
 - c. taking or accepting any clergy title is a work of self-exaltation and all that remains is the humiliation of an unpleasant appointment with the real Reverend

E. The Fear of the Lord is The Beginning of Wisdom

1. a lifestyle that expresses accountability to God is one that shows signs of true wisdom
 - a. it may not hold degrees of higher education, swollen pocketbooks, or positions of esteem among men, but a God-fearing, God-serving way of doing things is more to be sought than any such thing that perishes with use
 - b. the fear of the Lord and comfort of the Holy Spirit allowed the early churches to multiply (Acts 9:31) and to remain sound in their practices
2. respecting God leads to obedience to his precepts which are always for the ultimate benefit of his people—understanding that fact, even if one does not always understand the reason for the particular command leads to wisdom and blessing and eventually higher understanding (Revelation 22:14)

Conclusion

We close Psalm 111 with thoughts of praise for our Lord, not only in the sacred assembly, but also in the quiet recesses and public thoroughfares of our lives.

Psalm 112: Blessed Is The Man Who Feels The Lord

Introduction

Like the song before it, Psalm 112 is an acrostic poem that begins with a familiar and simple phrase—"Praise the Lord!" Psalm 112 also has a teaching objective, however, in that the writer hopes to distinguish between the lives of the upright and the wicked. [Read Psalm 112:1-10.] Throughout the psalm, we learn a number of beatitudes—blessings promised upon the upright that translate into a New Testament life as well.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Introduction (1)

1. literally, Psalm 112 begins with the word "Hallelujah," as do 10 other psalms including the one before this
 - a. "Hallelujah" is a word that contains the name of God and so when we hear it used so carelessly and vainly today, it is just as flippant and lawless as any other vain use of God's name
 - b. "Hallelujah" as an exclamation is reserved for spiritual expressions like this one, when praise is genuinely being given to God for some blessing or act
2. in this case, the praise is due God who blesses his servants that delight in keeping his commandments
 - a. fear and delight are the emotions wed together in this passage and I know they seem like poor mates to many today, who have fallen for the false theory that love and law are enemies
 - b. but just as there is true joy in obeying and pleasing one's parent, so there is great happiness that can be derived from disciplining oneself and remaining in the protective hollow of God's hand
3. delighting in his commandments does not mean that it is always easy or without consequence, but even when there is sacrifice and ramification, the joy is only deepened through that satisfaction
4. although his advice was somewhat misguided for Job's case, Eliphaz counsels the sinner soundly to restore his delight to the Lord when he has strayed (Job 22:21-26)

B. The Upright (2-8)

1. most of this psalm is consumed with listing the blessings that are accumulated by the upright person because he is guided by the commandments of God
2. it does not follow that every righteous person must also be materially blessed and wealthy, but what this psalm teaches is that following God's will must generally lead to better choices and a much better result
3. consider the blessings as they are enumerated
 - a. the descendants of the upright will be blessed, in that his children will be reared on a solid foundation of moral certitude instead of a shifting base of generalities and relativity (2)
 - b. where he might otherwise squander his means on get-rich-quick schemes and sinful diversions like gambling and liquor, now his righteousness espouses sound economy (3)
 - c. he will not be miserly with the blessings God has given him, but will know the joy of giving is greater than the joy of receiving (4)
 - d. God's word will lend him discretion by which he can guide his affairs more wisely than the person who cheats and steals and takes advantage of others (5)
 - e. neither will his faith be disturbed when the inevitable hardship arises or when his material prosperity fails to match his spiritual wealth (6-8)

C. The Wicked (9-10)

1. the psalm concludes by contrasting the fates of the upright and the wicked
2. the upright sees his righteousness hold up because it is rooted in practical love for God's law
3. the wicked, on the other hand, will see his desire perish—his desire for wealth and contentment thereby will fail and he will be left to envy the wiser choices of the man who lived uprightly

II. Some Applications

A. Praising the Lord

1. surely, we must be impressed with all that our God has done for us; certainly it is more than we deserve
2. when we are told to “Praise the Lord,” our worship should come naturally as a response to his blessing and love (Ephesians 3:14-21)
3. the trouble is that we sometimes lose sight of that blessing in the drive to obtain more and we begin to take the greater gift for granted; our praise is held hostage to material demands for earthly advancement
4. the key to contentment is not acquiring things but in surrendering the spirit to God’s employment (Philippians 4:4-9)

B. Delighting in His Law

1. gratitude and contentment inspire us to obey God’s will, even when that means sacrifice and consequences (First John 5:1-5)
 - a. a believer is someone who does more than just accept a set of facts; he acts upon them and submits himself to them so that his trust and fate depend upon them
 - b. faith wins the victory when the believer keeps God’s will without considering it too burdensome to bear
2. Paul wrote about a delight in the law of God, but recognized that there were opposite desires often at work within himself (Romans 7:18-23)
 - a. sin has an addictive quality; alcoholics and drug addicts know this well, but it is also true of sins like anger, lust, greed and hate
 - b. the soft-hearted can read God’s will and know their impulses are sinful, but it is quite another thing to defeat those impulses
 - c. yet it is a fight worth winning (First Corinthians 9:24-27)
3. “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1)

C. Blessings of the Upright

1. Psalm 112 is almost like a beatitude, a promise of blessing and happiness in return for obeying some simple point of wisdom
2. the sermon on the mount is filled with beatitudes (Matthew 5:2-12)
 - a. all these are attitudes with accompanying actions that bring rich spiritual blessing, even though the cost may include material prosperity
 - b. no matter the cost, a reward in Heaven is worth every penny
3. consider those promises of Psalm 112
 - a. blessing to one’s children
 1. Timothy was blessed to grow up at the feet of believers like his mother and grandmother (Second Timothy 1:3-5)
 2. you can bless your children by letting them grow up in a spiritual environment that values conviction and hope over self-service and doom (Ephesians 6:1-4)
 - b. wiser use of resources (First Corinthians 6:12-15)
 1. the wisdom in the Bible—throughout the Proverbs, the ministry of Christ and the Acts and epistles of the apostles—is enough to measure out self-discipline and renew the insight of any believer
 2. the book of Ecclesiastes especially exposes the folly of modern materialism, so that a disciple of Christ can use his resources more wisely and not squander them on prodigal living
 - c. joy of giving
 1. Paul tells us that Jesus taught, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35)
 2. what a wonderful blessing to sacrifice and to share (First Timothy 6:17-19)
 - d. discretion (Colossians 4:5-6 and Ephesians 5:15-17)
 1. the upright man or woman is not ruled by his baser impulses, but understands the implications of every choice
 2. discretion is the ability to choose wisely
 - e. perseverance

1. the upright is not immune from temptation and trial, but he is better equipped to persevere and to emerge from life with his faith intact (Matthew 7:24-27)
2. “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” (James 1:27)

Conclusion

As Psalm 112 closes, we are reminded of the eternal implications of the choices to we make to live uprightly or wickedly, to walk by faith or by sight. Remember that the righteous will endure forever, but the desire of the wicked will perish.

Psalm 113: Praise the Name of the Lord!

Introduction

Psalm 113 is one of the Hallelujah Psalms, but it is also the first in a group called the Egyptian Hallel, which praise the Lord for Israel's escape from captivity in that land. Psalms 113 and 114 were customarily sung before the Passover meal while Psalms 115-118 were used afterward. In Psalm 113, a call to offer praise (verses 1-3) is followed by a recital of the characteristics of God that are worthy of such adoration (4-9). Having been released from our own Egypt of sin and guilt, perhaps we can celebrate a new Passover of messianic grace around the cross of Christ. [Read Psalm 113:1-9.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Call to Praise (1-3)

1. the servants of the Lord are all of his worshipers called to surround the Passover feast and to celebrate the moment physically, but with a sense of the deeper spiritual meaning behind it
2. it is the name of God that is to be praised, but what does that mean?
 - a. the name of God indicates his character, his eternal nature, his goodness and compassion toward his servants
 - b. the name of God stands for something special that is due the respect and even awe of those who use it; it is to be praised rather than abused
3. the very first Passover feast was preparatory (Exodus 12:21-30)

B. The Lord Is ... (4-9)

1. while we don't learn anything particularly new about our God in Psalm 113, we are reminded of some truths that we are tempted sometimes to forget
2. the Lord is high above the nations and his glory towers over the heavens
 - a. the psalmist uses words that we will understand to show divine omniscience and omnipotence
 - b. scientific and engineering advancements have made it seem to some that nothing is beyond man's capability and that we are in ultimate control of the fate of nations, the environment and even our own souls, but it is truly God who is above it all
3. yet who is like our God, who with such glory nevertheless humbles himself to behold our lowly planet and lives?
 - a. God is not unapproachably aloof like the stereotypical billionaire or Hollywood celebrity who ensconces himself in an impenetrable castle so that he need not rub shoulders with the common man
 - b. God hears his prayers and intervenes in his life, though he is but poor and needy and she feels shamed by barrenness
 1. the poor and needy were at the mercy of their neighbors, who were bound by law to provide for them, but whose greed often led them to break that law
 2. the barren woman felt despised and rejected in Israel, but God offers her security

II. Some Applications

A. Christ, Our Passover

1. remember that this series of Psalms was written to help celebrate the Passover feast of the Old Testament Jews, who were rescued from Egypt on the night that the death angel of God slew all the firstborn sons of the kingdom, but passed over the houses of the Hebrews that had been marked with lamb's blood around the door
2. and for centuries this one event practically defined the difference that God constructed between Israel and the world around her; yet all the while a more terrible form of bondage was beginning to constrict the hearts of the people—sin
3. Israel sinned and sunk deep into idolatry and the very immorality that should only have been known without the nation of God
4. a new scapegoat was required, a perfect, pure lamb whose blood could deliver the slaves to freedom; when John saw Jesus, he prophetically exclaimed, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)!

a. Jesus would be “led as sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opened not his mouth” (see Isaiah 53:7-8, Acts 8:32)

b. the lamb of God, it turns out, was the very Son of God, whose body was killed on a Roman cross and whose blood was spilled to break the bonds of all who would form spiritual Israel (First Peter 1:17-21)

5. Jesus is our Passover, sacrificed for us, and there is a new feast to be kept, not “with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (First Corinthians 5:7-8)

a. the weekly Lord’s Supper is a part of this Passover memorial, in which physical actions invite thoughts of the spiritual aspect of the bread and wine (First Corinthians 11:23-26)

b. but resisting corruption is a daily struggle (First Peter 1:22-2:3)

B. Hallowed Be Thy Name

1. the 10 commandments codified the importance of God’s name, that it was not to be substituted with an idol’s or used even in vain (see Exodus 20:1-7)

2. Jesus perpetuated the importance of God’s name in his covenant by offering a model prayer to him (Matthew 6:9-13)

3. he warned that man will be judged for every idle word that he utters (see Matthew 12:36)

4. the name of God, whether it is pronounced Jehovah, or Yahweh, spelled Hebraically *YHWH*, or denoted simply by God, is to be hallowed and respected

a. it is to be used, but not abused by damning others with it or taking it in vain through thoughtless invective or repetition

b. we respect God’s name when we use it in prayer and praise and when we share it with others, but we drain away its awesomeness when we use it carelessly or to harm others

c. if you are in the habit of saying, “Oh, God” or even “Gosh” or “Jeez,” break that habit by correcting yourself verbally every time until you’re cured

C. Towers of Babel

1. Psalm 113 is such a powerful reminder that God is in control and that we, thankfully, are not

2. our engines and rockets and missiles and computers and speculations make us think that we are much more powerful than we really are

3. another generation thought that way (Genesis 11:1-9)

4. sadly, telescopes and space ships that should have helped us to appreciate the glories of God have mostly become towers of Babel to convince faithless men that there is no God, or if there is one, man is it

a. even here, God proves that he can bring the mightiest plans of man down upon him and he always does the same when we choose to ignore him, to declare him extinct or to rebel against his will

b. neither science nor philosophy will ever take man to on high where God dwells; only faith and Bible truth can accomplish that elevation (Ephesians 4:7-10 and Hebrews 9:24-28, 10:19-25)

D. Reversal of Fortunes

1. so much of the doctrine of Christ mimics what we read in Psalm 113 about a divine reversal of fortunes wrought by our God to right eternally the wrongs of temporal life

a. the poor, needy and barren of Psalm 113 are joined in the New Testament by the persecuted, neglected and martyred and they are all epitomized by righteous Lazarus who died and went to Abraham’s bosom as opposed to the fate of the rich man who overlooked his suffering on Earth to enjoy his own temporary pleasures

b. their fortunes were permanently reversed on Judgment Day

2. that promise alone is enough to turn a bad day into an acceptable one, and a bleak future into a glorious one (Matthew 19:23-30)

3. and it should also be enough to remind us that this life is not about this life; it is all about the next

a. houses, siblings, parents, children and property are all secondary to pleasing God and making Heaven our purpose

b. Judgment Day is a day of justice

Conclusion

We appreciate the call to worship that begins Psalm 113 and the reminder of the awesomeness of God’s name throughout the song.

Psalm 114: When Israel Went Out

Introduction

Psalm 114 is the second of six psalms categorized as the Egyptian Hallel (113-118), a series of songs traditionally sung before and after the Passover meal to commemorate God's rescue of the people from slavery. The psalm was possibly written many centuries after this momentous event, perhaps as late as after the Babylonian exile had eased and many Jews had returned to rebuild Jerusalem. If so, Psalm 114 is a nostalgic reminder of an earlier crisis in which God had saved his people, giving hope that perhaps he will revive Judah's fortunes again in the midst of all the difficulties and disappointments they had encountered since coming home. [Read Psalm 114:1-8.] In addition to the obvious connection with ancient Israel, their bondage in Egypt becomes typical of every person's experience with the power of sin, especially when that power is broken by faith in God's redeemer.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Out of Egypt (1-2)

1. Israel's exodus from Egyptian slavery is one of the most stirring events in all the Bible record and it provides the climactic moment at which God fully consummates his relationship with the nation that sprang from the lions of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the twelve sons of the renamed man Israel
2. after four centuries of declining fortunes in their Egyptian oasis, Israel had been transformed from a clan into a nation (cf. Exodus 1:1-7), but a nation enslaved by another within its borders (Exodus 1:8-14)
 - a. this Pharaoh went so far as to attempt to wipe out the Jews by murdering their just born sons, but the midwives would not cooperate
 - b. his next plan was to compel the Hebrew mothers to cast their sons into the river and the mother of Moses complied, but only after building a little ark to hold the body of baby Moses
 - c. Moses was adopted into Pharaoh's household, but fled when accused of murder. only to be recalled by a greater king for a special mission (Exodus 2:23-3:10)
3. Moses was a reluctant leader at first, but with the assistance of his spokesman brother Aaron, they approached Pharaoh and argued for the right to go out to worship Jehovah
 - a. Pharaoh vacillated depending upon his magicians' ability to imitate the plagues Moses worked by God's power, sometimes granting the Hebrews' request, only to recant when the plague eased
 - b. finally, a tenth plague was inflicted on Egypt (Exodus 12:29-42)
4. Passover was instituted to commemorate the flight from Egypt and the beginning of the establishment of Israel as a geographical location once the land of Canaan was conquered

B. What Ails "Mother Nature"? (3-6)

1. in the second section of the psalm, the writer calls several witnesses to the Exodus to testify about their reaction—the Red Sea, the Jordan River, and Mount Sinai
 - a. upon fleeing Egypt, the Hebrews very quickly become unconfident about their prospects for survival, especially as the Egyptian armies thundered behind them and the Red Sea stood ahead in their path (Exodus 14:5-14, 21-31)
 - b. once they were safely out of Egypt, God assembled his people around Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16-20)
 - c. the Hebrews' complaints, doubts, idolatry and sinfulness doomed most of the adult generation to perish on the 40 year journey to the Promised Land, so that a new generation that was not yet born when the Red Sea parted actually reached Canaan's border at the Jordan River (Joshua 3:14-4:3)
2. Psalm 114 reminds the worshiper of all these great events so that he will know to trust in God in spite of present conditions, for God is still in control
3. what people refer to as "Mother Nature" is even in the hands of our Heavenly Father

C. She Trembles (7-8)

1. the question from part two is answered in part three—"What ails you, nature, that you fled?" "The presence of the Lord!"
2. early and late in the journey toward Canaan, Israel doubted God not because of a fearsome enemy, but because their bellies grumbled and they were thirsty

- a. God sent them manna to soothe their bellies and opened rocks for drink (Exodus 17:1-7)
 - b. yet the same miracle was required again later, for they did not learn (see Numbers 20:10-13)
3. here the psalm abruptly ends

II. Some Applications

A. Surrounded by People of a Strange Language

1. the Egyptians were described by the psalmist as speaking a strange language and that phrase appears again to indicate one's presence among foreign people (Isaiah 33:19)
2. very often, the Christian has this same sensation in his own nation, for he hears a language of doubt, cruelty and wickedness that doesn't match the language he learns in Christ
 - a. one wonders how the Hebrews could exist in Egypt very long without picking up some of their words and idioms and ways
 - b. therein lies the danger for the Christian who must remain in the world without becoming of the world (First John 5:18-21)
3. the language and customs all around us are so opposed to the love and confidence of the Christian that the contrast is striking, yet by its prevalence, wickedness can appear inviting and harmless
 - a. the disrespect shown to God by using his name carelessly, the unkindness of favoring oneself over others, the corruption of making jokes about excretion and sexuality—this is the uncertain sound and language of Ashdod that surrounds our vexed souls from day to day
 - b. how do we resist learning the strange tongue of those who would enslave (First Peter 2:9-12)?

B. Spiritual Israel

1. that holy nation is spiritual Israel, for God is no longer working through the plot of land in Palestine, but through the universal church established by his son (Philippians 3:20-21)
2. being Jewish is a metaphor to describe a circumcised and obedient spirit (Romans 2:28-29)
3. circumcision is no longer a physical operation upon infant flesh, but the response of the believer to the gospel invitation (Colossians 2:11-12)
4. our liberty is from a more terrible taskmaster than the Pharaoh and for that, we should be even more grateful than hapless Israel wandering in the wilderness of doubt and distrust (Romans 6:17-23)

C. Red Sea, Jordan River, Mount Sinai

1. yet like Israel, we all find ourselves from time to time backed up against a Red Sea of insurmountable despair, or feeling washed out by an overflowing Jordan River of tears or overwhelmed by the thundering Mount Sinai of God's present omniscience in our lives
2. prospering in our sojourn becomes a practical matter of marching through the Red Sea that God will part, crossing over the Jordan River to find milk and honey on the other side and glorying in the overwhelming presence and participation of God in our lives
 - a. every Red Sea of despair and doubt can be parted if you are willing to march confidently on through (Hebrews 4:14-16)
 - b. every overflowing Jordan River of tears and barriers can be crossed if you are willing to alter your perspective and focus on a honeyed future in the midst of a troubled present (Second Corinthians 4:16-18)
 - c. and acknowledging, accepting and basking in the presence and participation of God in your affairs is the surest path to reverence and eternity (Hebrews 3:9-13)

D. Thirst

1. the same God who turned rock and flint into fountains of water can quench your thirst for righteousness and mercy (John 4:5-14, 7:37-39)
2. believe and come—faith wed to obedience—and the sinner's thirst is quenched by the Holy Spirit who brings truth and forgiveness into the most parched soul

Conclusion

Psalm 114 was written for the worship of a people long ago, but its themes echo even today when we find ourselves struggling to recall why we began this journey of ours. The answer lies in the power of God unto good and our hope to revel in it.

Psalm 115: To God Be The Glory

Introduction

The one-hundred fifteenth psalm is the third of the Egyptian Hallel, psalms sung to celebrate Passover back in those ancient days. In keeping with the two songs that precede it and the three that will follow, Psalm 115 heaps praise and hope upon God, comparing him to the fallen idols of pagan lands and petitioning him for fellowship. [Read Psalm 115:1-18.] No one is sure when the psalm is written, but some suggest that it was intended to be sung responsively instead of collectively. Psalm 115 begins with an invocation of God's assistance (1-3), followed by a contrast between him and idols (4-8). The singers then express their trust in the Lord (9-13) before closing with another invocation of blessing (14-18).

Discussion

I. The Text

A. To His Name (1-3)

1. one of the worst mistakes made by the Israelites and even by people today is to attribute to themselves too much credit for the works of God
2. the psalmist goes to great extremes in this song to heap all credit for goodness upon God, making certain from the outset that Israel will not appear to be bragging on itself, but only upon its God
3. of course, it was that kind of sin that prevented Moses from entering the Promised Land after 40 years of leadership in the wilderness and the provocation of the people (Numbers 20:7-13)
 - a. and God did not relent from this punishment (Deuteronomy 34:1-5)
 - b. so many make so much of the dramatic punishment of homosexuality in Sodom and Gomorrah, but the ways in which he punished presumption and irreverence like this is no less meaningful
4. God is praised because he shows mercy and truth to his people even in the presence of unbelievers whose trust in self and dumb idols proves fruitless

B. God and Idols (4-8)

1. the psalmist describes a statute or icon that is made in man's image, having eyes and ears and hands, but being unable to use them
2. they are powerless and empty-headed and the psalmist says the men who make such idols are just like them, as are all those who trust in them
3. Isaiah takes note of the same folly (Isaiah 44:13-20)
4. today, idols are mostly different, being not statues worshiped as gods, but other people and things that are set up in a man's heart for greater service than the God of Heaven
5. such idols, however, are no less insidious

C. Trust In The Lord (9-13)

1. every Israelite, including the priests and landed foreigners who have learned to know Jehovah, are called upon to trust in God as a help and a shield
2. in Psalm 46, God was called "our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though its waters roar and be troubled, Though the mountains shake with its swelling."
3. a shield is helpful when a person is under attack from without and God provided that shield to Israel, being mindful of those who fear the Lord, both small and great

D. The Lord Give You Increase (14-18)

1. the psalmist closes with another petition for blessing from God and a reminder that we are responsible for learning to praise him while there is time
2. how often do we forget to be grateful to God until the time that we simply need something else?
3. the dead cannot decide to reform and become spiritual, yet men are often tempted to put off service to God until later and later until it's too late, but we will bless the Lord!

II. Some Applications

A. Praise God For Mercy and Truth

1. humble people will realize that nothing worth accomplishing is a solo act, but that usually other men and always the God of Heaven, is involved in whatever good is done

2. somewhere along the line, doing the right thing merges with a faithful heart and purity of purpose and objective results (Galatians 2:17-21)
 - a. you can accomplish a lot of good if you don't care about getting the credit for it, but truly giving God glory for your ability and opportunity
 - b. self-exultation will always lead to humiliation, if not quickly on Earth, then more severely in the day of judgment, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Proverbs 3:34)
 - c. therefore, "Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips" (Proverbs 27:2)
3. being clothed with humility involves recognizing the mercy and truth that God supplies as only he can
 - a. be clothed with mercy and truth (Proverbs 3:3)
 - b. use them to devise good (Proverbs 14:22)
 - c. be redeemed by them (Proverbs 16:6)
 - d. be preserved by them (Proverbs 20:28)

B. God Or Idols?

1. the causes and effects of modern idolatry are well summarized in New Testament prophecy (Second Timothy 3:1-5)
 - a. love of self, money and pleasure rather than love of God is the culprit and it's hard to deny that this well describes the lifestyle of the entire world today, from Muslim Arabia to melting pot America
 - b. the result is self-centeredness, sin and rebellion, and against this backdrop the Christian is told to maintain his selfless, holy convictions and resist the floodwaters rising around him
2. no one can serve two masters for they have competing interests, but he who worships himself has a fool for a god (see Matthew 6:24)
 - a. just he we are tempted to try to play for two teams in the same season and the division of loyalty is a fatal compromise
 - b. we can no more pursue love of God, self, money and pleasure than Paul could have prayed to Jehovah and burned a pinch of incense for Caesar (see Ephesians 5:5)
3. like in Joshua's time, you must choose whom you will serve, God or idols, but you can't do both
 - a. is it possible self, money and pleasure have crept over the line that separates necessity from idolatry?
 - b. is your worship habit being affected, your willingness to share, your commitment to holy conduct (First Peter 1:13-16)?
 - c. such idols don't stage dramatic coups, but work quietly and slowly in the background

C. A Very Present Help

1. "God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though its waters roar and be troubled, Though the mountains shake with its swelling. Selah There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn" (Psalm 46:1-5)
2. people who are rescued from kidnappers appreciate the police in a way they never did before, as do people for firefighters who drag them out of burning buildings
 - a. Israel had suddenly learned to appreciate God because he had rescued them, just like he used to do in the Judges era every generation or two
 - b. we are rescued, too, by someone we can trust, by a help and shield
3. God shields us from facing too much temptation (see First Corinthians 10:13), from living life without hope and even from apostasy (Jude 24-25)
 - a. remember that no one can snatch you of God's hand, not even the tempter, but as the devil's nickname implies, he will do all he can to lure you to hop out of God's hand and follow him, possible toward self-glorification, the promise of more money or pleasure
 - b. if you are behind your shield of faith, you will be equipped to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one (Ephesians 6:16)

D. We Will Bless The Lord

1. now is the time to praise God, not just on Sunday evening, but in this time of your life
2. none is too young or too old to sacrifice the fruit of his lips in God's adoration

3. but beyond that, it is the time to commit oneself even more fully to him (Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:14)

Conclusion

To God be the glory; great things he has done.

Psalm 116: I Love the Lord

Introduction

The fourth psalm in the six-song Egyptian Hallel begins with a statement of adoration toward God on its way to recounting his deliverance and vowing to praise God publicly before all of his people. In its verses, the psalmist even comments that, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints,” indicating that a believer’s life is valuable and its path is overseen by God himself. [Read Psalm 116:1-19.] In Psalm 116, we learn again to love the Lord and to give thanks for his deliverance and providence. Spurgeon wrote, “Personal love fostered by a personal experience of redemption is the theme of this Psalm, and in it we see the redeemed answered when they pray, preserved in time of trouble, resting in their God, walking at large, sensible of their obligations, conscious that they are not their own but bought with a price, and joining with all the ransomed company to sing hallelujahs unto God.”

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Deliverance (1-11)

1. the psalm begins as sweetly as possible as the writer says simply, “I love the Lord”
 - a. some servants of Jehovah surely do not love the Lord but follow him only out of fear and combined with a certain degree also of loathing
 - b. to love the Lord is to have that feeling one has for his earthly father whom he respects and also cherishes; it is a love borne out of providence and position
2. the psalmist explains how God has attained his love; it is because God has heard his voice and supplications and proven himself to be a ready listener and a trustworthy answerer
 - a. God does not always answer his prayers affirmatively, but when a petition is denied, it is always for man’s ultimate good
 - b. few lessons are more difficult to grasp than this one because we naturally want what seems best to us now and many who see their prayers denied by a loving God do not stick around long enough to obtain that ultimate good
3. because this psalm is part of a collection of hymns about the Exodus for use in the Passover celebration, the deliverance it describes must have some at least metaphorical connection to that event
 - a. this is the song of an individual, who felt himself like all Israel, surrounded and about to be conquered until God heard and responded to him in his near fatal illness
 - b. the simple and lowly was delivered and returned to his contentment for the Lord heaped a bounty of security upon him
4. the tears were dried from his eyes, his feet were placed upon a smoother path and his soul was dragged back from the brink of death, so that he could walk before his Lord in the land of the living again
 - a. just as Israel marched through the parted Red Sea and wandered on to the land of Canaan, our psalmist and every believer that has followed him recognizes that there are times when we must struggle through the valley of despair, but there is always a Canaan ahead if we are faithful
 - b. the psalmist is like Hezekiah, pulled off his deathbed and given another 15 years

B. Vows to Praise (12-19)

1. the psalmist then wonders how to repay God, especially since God already has everything
 - a. while God commands everything, there is one element of creation that resists him—man
 - b. while the writer celebrates the drink offering, it is even more meaningful that he insists on calling upon the Lord’s name in the presence of all his people
 - c. that sincere, heartfelt praise repays God to some extent and though it be called but filthy rags, it is the best that we can do
2. “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints”
 - a. the psalmist apparently was healed from some nearly fatal illness and speaks for all of God’s people who are cured when all seemed lost and for whom prayers have proven most effective
 - b. God will not prevent or cure every illness and even the saint must someday go, but his departure will not be overlooked in Heaven
3. the writer concludes by finding himself back in God’s presence, thankful for another chance at life and dedicated to using it for God’s purposes

- a. there are so many times that we hope for a second chance, but when we get it, we mess things up as terribly as the first time
- b. the penitent returns to his sin, the healed to what caused his disease, the lost to his wandering
- c. the redeemed and restored should instead commit to calling on God's name, lending his life back to the Lord and dwelling in the courts of his house

II. Some Applications

A. Children of God

1. we tell our children, our spouses, our parents, even our cars sometimes—"I love you"; why don't we say it to God?
 2. the psalmist does and he means it because he is grateful; we have so much to be thankful for ourselves that we should love God before all those others and even before our cars (First John 3:1-3)
 - a. there is more in that passage than simply telling God you love him, just as the psalmist went well beyond words to communicate his gratitude and dedication
 - b. John describes the children of God as obedient offspring, seeking to purify themselves and make themselves like their Father (First John 4:7-11)
 3. you can't love God and hate your brother by treating him as inferior to you, especially if that treatment is motivated by a respect of persons based on race, culture or idiosyncrasy (see Romans 2:11)
 - a. my daughter sings a song that says, "Jesus loves the little children, red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight"
 - b. we are missing something if we don't share that attitude and what we may end up missing is Heaven itself because we are not partaking of the divine nature if we are hypocritically showing partiality or denying full affection to some because of accents, skin pigmentation or personality quirks
 4. children of God love their Father, for without it, all their burnt offerings and sacrifices are meaningless (Mark 12:28-33)

B. Deliverance

1. the writer of Psalm 116 was apparently brought back from the brink of death in some horrible illness, with the special aid of praying to God who heard his petition and saved him against all odds
2. we sometimes pray along the same lines for ourselves and others who are facing some dread disease, but who knows how many times God has preserved our lives when we didn't even realize it?
3. Paul understood (Second Corinthians 1:8-11, 4:7-15)
 - a. when you are broadsided by life's hardships and disappointments or laid low by sickness and grief, you have to believe in the potential for deliverance or you are truly lost
 - b. deliverance may take the form it did in Psalm 116 with the healing of the ailment, but eventually deliverance will take its final form when you are delivered from this life and into the next one
 - c. the evil find that they were not really so much delivered as they were transferred to a more permanent place of suffering, but the righteous understand deliverance (Second Corinthians 4:16-5:3)

C. Second Chance

1. the psalmist is cured and brimming with gratitude and commitment
 - a. right now, he sounds like the man who has turned over a new leaf and is ready to change and live the right way, but time has a way of draining away that zeal and making the new leaf brittle
 - b. here is the penitent weeping on the front bench or in the baptistery or in prayer upon his pillow, only to find himself wasting his second chance the very next day or week
2. so what is the key to making a commitment and keeping it?
 - a. it is nothing more than having faith and making a constant effort to do the right thing, to grow in grace and knowledge and to discover satisfaction in God's ready fellowship (Second Peter 3:14, 17-18)
 - b. the moment you let down your guard, Satan will be more than pleased to put his arm around you and squeeze—miss one Sunday, take one drink, utter one curse, worry just a little—and the tempter is there (First Peter 5:6-10)

Conclusion

We all have a second chance in that Christ has redeemed us from the greatest fatal disease of all. Let us make the most of our cure and live with gratitude and devotion.

Psalm 117: All You Gentiles!

Introduction

I am told that Psalm 117 is both the shortest “chapter” in all the Bible and its exact middle point as well. In its two short verses, the psalm forms a kind of doxology that some have assumed actually belongs either to the end of Psalm 116 or the beginning of Psalm 118. Where Psalm 119 goes to great lengths to praise God, this psalm seeks to be utterly concise. [Read Psalm 117:1-2.] Psalm 117 is called Messianic by most commentators because it seems to point to the ministry of the Savior that invited all the nations into God’s kingdom. Its main thrust, however, has to do with God’s greatness of mercy and enduring truth.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Praise All You Gentiles (1)

1. this summons sent to the Gentiles calling for them to praise God truly stands out in the Old Testament, where we are accustomed to them being the enemy and mostly incapable of serving the Lord
2. always, however, God anticipated a day when his people could be composed of men and women in every nation
 - a. Moses had prophesied, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people; For he will avenge the blood of his servants, And render vengeance to his adversaries; He will provide atonement for his land and his people” (Deuteronomy 32:43)
 - b. it is the apostle Paul who quotes this verse to prove the fulfillment of that prediction (Romans 15:8-13)
3. today, there are Christians among all nations on the Earth, some in more difficult places than others, but no person anywhere is removed from the offer of grace by God

B. His Mercy is Great (2a)

1. even the Gentiles living before Christ are asked to consider the goodness of God, even toward them (Psalm 8:3-5)
2. sometimes lost in the rush of everyday life was the fact that God was weaving a scheme of redemption throughout the eras before Christ, getting closer to its fruition day by day, sometimes so gradually and subtly that it went unnoticed, not only by Gentiles, but by the Jews who became more concerned with that daily life than any kind of spiritual redemption
3. it never should be lost in people’s minds that God’s merciful kindness is great toward us
 - a. the idea of greatness here is not only in bulk or frequency, but in power and strength, triumphing over the inventions of men and the temptations that accompany life
 - b. the Levites in Nehemiah’s day came to recognize that fact (Nehemiah 9:13-17)
4. perhaps the single greatest feature about God’s patience is that he does not forsake us in the way that we would probably forsake those who sin against us repeatedly

C. His Truth Endures Forever (2b)

1. God’s truth endures forever; that is, his promises are fulfilled without fail and he keeps his part of every covenant with man
2. if somehow he failed in his promise to Noah, or to Abraham, or to Israel, we might have cause to doubt that he will really fulfill his covenant with us today, but we know that the world has never again been destroyed by flood, Abraham’s descendants conquered Canaan and Israel dwelt there until she herself broke the covenant and was divorced by God for it (Jeremiah 3:6-15)
3. in spite of man’s attempts to alter God’s word or to change his truth, it endures forever and when the dust of the creeds and opinions is blown away, it remains and can be grasped

II. Some Applications

A. Gentiles

1. Joel had prophesied as well about the entrance of Gentiles into God’s kingdom, a prediction which Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost when he and his Jewish comrades were endowed with power from on high to speak in unstudied languages to the throng gathered there (see Joel 2, Acts 2)

2. really, though, it was not until he visited the house of Cornelius the Roman centurion that the Gentile half of Joel's vision was fulfilled (Acts 10:34-48)

a. Peter learned that God had cleansed the Gentiles for Jewish association the same way he had cleansed the animals that formerly were not kosher for their diet

b. the Gentiles of that house were baptized into Christ just as the Jews had been since Pentecost and there was one church composed of disciples regardless of their race or former creed (Galatians 3:23-29)

c. God, who could have raised up children of Abraham from the very rocks that littered Jerusalem, instead raised them from deadness of pagan life to be his son's followers

3. sadly, the more challenging task today becomes saving the Jews who generally reject Jesus and wait for another Messiah who isn't coming (Romans 10:1-4, 11-15)

B. Mercy

1. imagine the mercy of God that he can forgive us of all our sins, no matter how notorious, even forgiving those who crucified his son and persecuted his church (First Timothy 1:15-17)

2. that determination to show mercy and be forgiving is the pattern we are supposed to imitate (Colossians 3:12-14)

3. our participation in mercy has a direct effect on our grasp on God's mercy (Matthew 18:21-35)

a. while you may feel justified in writing people off, holding grudges, bearing resentment, pledging to forgive but never forget, all the while you are erecting another wall in between you and God's mercy

b. "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13)

4. instead of carting around a back-breaking, soul-starving burden of hurt, choose instead to extend mercy, ignore slights, and just generally get over it

C. Truth

1. we can trust God because his truth does endure forever

2. when he makes a promise, it sticks, without exception, excuse or contingency (Hebrews 6:13-19)

3. when we are forewarned that we will be judged by the standard set in the New Testament, we can know that we have all we need to understand God's will and to be found pleasing by him in his grace

a. his word is sanctifying truth (see John 17:17) and a helpful mirror to show us where we are blemished and need repair (Hebrews 4:11-13)

b. he is reliable and just (Second Peter 1:3-4)

4. no matter that Noah broke God's will by drinking, or that Moses broke it through frustrated pride or that all Israel broke it at pagan altars; God was true to his word

a. the grass withers and the flower falls away, but his word endures forever—the word that by the gospel was preached to you (see First Peter 1:25)

b. in spite of societal shifts and denominational rethinking, that truth changes not

Conclusion

In Psalm 117, we are called to praise God for his infinite mercy and enduring truth. When we stop to ponder them both, it is hard to do otherwise.

Psalm 118: Oh, Give Thanks to the Lord

Introduction

The one-hundred eighteenth psalm is the last of the Egyptian Hallel psalms that began back in Psalm 113, customarily sung before and after the Passover meal. Against a backdrop of the Passover night escape from Egyptian captivity and the miraculous passage through the parted Red Sea, Israel could indeed sing that God's mercy is good and eternal. [Read Psalm 118:1-29.] An opening call to praise (verses 1-4) is followed by the psalmist's testimony about the Lord's help in times of need (5-18) and a final vow of praise to that good Savior (19-29).

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Call to Praise (1-4)

1. Psalm 118 is meant to be sung in public worship as people gather to praise God and combine their voices in much the way that we do here each week

2. their singing was to be responsive, as you can easily see in verses 2-4 where various groups are summoned to respond to the command to sing a certain part of the psalm

a. all Israel begins, followed by the priests and then foreigners who have come to know Jehovah as the one whose mercy endures forever

b. God's mercy is longsuffering, even after a point at which human beings would give up being merciful and start being vengeful, God waits and hopes and offers

3. Israel did not deserve on merit to be drawn out of Egypt and they certainly proved that on the journey to Canaan, detoured at first because God knew they would faint at the sight of war with the Philistines

a. the detour grew into 40 years, however, because they proved their unworthiness in sinfulness, complaining and dying faith

b. Israel needed a brand of mercy that can endure that sort of insulting recidivism, and as it happens, so do we

B. A Broad Place (5-18)

1. just here, the psalmist finds inspiration in some personal rescue that God had accomplished in his own life, perhaps medical or financial or physical; who knows?

a. he describes the circumstances as calling on the Lord in distress, as if he were walking across a tightrope stretched over a chasm of doom and death, only to be heard, snatched away, and placed gently upon a broad place beside the Lord himself

b. so often, we bottle up our problems and look for solutions in the people around us, expecting to be bailed out by the government or someone else with such means

c. the psalmist found that he rose above his enemies only when he placed his trust in God and quit worrying about what men could do to him

d. that concern is the one that often keeps us from doing the right thing, whether due to peer pressure or just outright fear of facing persecution for having convictions

e. in effect, we choose to place some man at our side and ask God to move on down because we value human approval over divine, and always we fail when we so decide

2. between verses 1 and 14, the psalmist sounds a little like King David or some other monarch, speaking on behalf of a beleaguered nation, surrounded by heathen bent on its destruction like a swarm of bees

a. although violently pushed on that tightrope, the Lord heard and helped

b. the psalmist boasts of discovering in God strength, a song, and salvation

c. how frequently the people of God doubt one of those three elements in themselves—doubting the strength their faith affords them, or being unwilling to sing from the heart, or questioning the validity of their own salvation

3. although the psalmist has recognized that some outside, foreign force was troubling him, and that God has rescued him, in this section, he ascribes his time on the tightrope to the severe chastening of the Lord (18)

a. it was very common in Old Testament times to look for hidden meaning to every blessing and hardship, never to overlook providence or chastening as a source for the day's circumstances

- b. we tend not to do much of that today, except in great moments of joy or sorrow, and then often with a self-serving, self-soothing explanation
- c. sometimes the Lord must chasten us and in every hardship, no matter the source, we must learn to look for a lesson to learn or the pain is just pain

C. Vow to Praise (19-29)

1. only the obedient were admitted to the temple to worship and our psalmist demands his right to enter as well (Psalm 15:1-5)
2. God has a way of taking people that seem unsuited to the task by men and making them great in their office
 - a. Moses himself thought that he was a poor choice to lead Israel against Pharaoh and out of Egypt because he was not eloquent and he figured the people would not pay attention to him
 - b. David was belittled by Saul and nearly overlooked by Samuel, but became Israel's greatest king
 - c. Paul was rejected at first by the church at Jerusalem but chosen by God and became the most prolific New Testament writer and the apostle to the Gentiles
 - d. some of you were the black sheep of your family and the least likely to be faithful and yet here you are, because God can take stones that builders reject as poorly formed, misshapen or discolored and make them great stones in his temple
 - e. and most notably, Peter and Jesus both apply verses 22-24 to the Christ
3. the psalm closes with words that sound like a priestly blessing received by those who entered the temple, but which form the basis of the cheers for Christ Jesus as he entered Jerusalem on the week of his trial

II. Some Applications

A. Enduring Mercy, With a Limit

1. the psalmist praises God for his enduring mercy, but he knew only a fraction of what you have experienced through his son (Romans 5:6-11)
 - a. with much longsuffering, God endured the Hebrew vessels of wrath prepared for destruction "that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom he called" (Romans 9:22-24)
 - b. the divine longsuffering even waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared so that a few, that is, eight souls could be saved through water (see First Peter 3:18-22)
2. God is merciful enough to want to forgive those who crucified his son and persecuted his church, on the day of Pentecost and in the city of Damascus and throughout the ages, for he "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (First Timothy 2:4)
3. God is merciful enough to forgive us when we don't deserve it and to take us back like penitent prodigal children when we finally come to our senses, even when we must sincerely repent of the same sin more than once
4. yet while his mercy endures, it should not be abused, for as with Noah, the pilgrims and all Israel, there comes a day of reckoning all the same (Second Peter 3:9-15a)
 - a. the goodness of God is designed to lead us to repentance, to seize his forbearance and longsuffering and be converted, but we instead despise his mercy when we persist in sin or delay restoration
 - b. his mercy will not delay Judgment Day forever

B. A Broad Place

1. if you have ever driven through a construction zone with concrete barriers on each side of you, or around a mountain, where one quick swerve would send you careening down into the canyon, you can understand where the psalmist comes from when he expresses such thanks for being put into a broad place after his struggles
2. we feel like we're walking a tightrope when hardships invade our lives and we pray for a broad place on which to rest, so when God answers, we ought to be very thankful
 - a. although we might physically find ourselves walking a tightrope, our goal needs to be that spiritually we always feel a connection to a broader place, as the Hebrew writer quotes Psalm 118 (Hebrews 13:1-6)

b. Paul felt hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed, perplexed but not in despair (see Second Corinthians 4:8) because he knew the same thing the psalmist did (Romans 8:31-39)

C. The Chastening of the Lord

1. many Bible characters either were chastened by the Lord or felt that way
 - a. Moses was refused entry to the Promised Land; Saul was removed from the throne for his sin; David's child by Bathsheba died
 - b. of course, Job felt chastened, but his suffering was more due to the devil's evil than anything else
2. this psalmist also feels chastened by the Lord, but not given over to death
 - a. it is hard to tell sometimes where hard times stop coming from time and chance and start resulting from God's chastening, but understand that a loving father will admonish the children whom he loves (Hebrews 12:7-13)
 - b. for every answer like the psalmist received, someone with a thorn in the flesh like Paul must be told that God's grace is sufficient even if the thorn remains (see Second Corinthians 12:9)
3. then the chastened child must contentedly learn to respond with the power of Christ resting upon him, weakened in the flesh but strengthened in the spirit

D. Gates

1. the psalmist asks, "Open to me the gates of righteousness" through which the righteous shall enter (19-20)
2. by the time the New Testament is finished, the only gates we can think much about are made of single pearls and enclose the eternal home of the redeemed in Heaven (see Revelation 21:21)
3. but more immediately, each day and every decision is also defined by the choices we make and the way we choose (Matthew 7:13-14)
 - a. it is easier to choose the wide gate and broad way, the way taken by the majority because it looks more pleasurable and less expensive
 - b. it is more difficult to choose the narrow gate and strait way, the way taken by the few who are willing to count the cost and pay it in the currency of persecution and self-denial

E. A New Foundation

1. both Jesus and Peter quoted this psalm to show that the Jews' rejection of Christ did not negate his true claim to be the Messiah
 - a. Jesus (Matthew 21:23, 42-46)
 - b. Peter (First Peter 2:4-10)
2. there is no other name given among by which we must be saved, for Jesus is the cornerstone of the kingdom, with his apostles and the prophets forming its foundation through their inspired words
3. when Jesus enters Jerusalem, the people likewise quote this psalm as they scatter palm branches on the ground at his feet (see Matthew 21:9)
4. his death and his example provide us a new foundation on which to build our lives—the foundation of obedience to his will in the hope of heaven (see Matthew 7:21-27)

Conclusion

Psalm 118 ends this series of Passover psalms on a high note, but it does even more to remind us of the blessing we have in knowing God's son.

Psalm 119: Your Word Is A Lamp to My Feet

Introduction

Psalm 119 is by far the longest psalm in the collection, weighing in at a remarkable 176 verses. It is an acrostic poem, totaling 22 stanzas of eight verses each. The general theme has to do with the greatness of the word of God, and although the writer practically exhausts the language in his adoration, Psalm 119 never becomes redundant or aimless. [Read Psalm 119:1-176.] If we could summarize Psalm 119, it would be with the recognition that God's word must be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Like the writer, we should seek to allow the Bible to overwhelm our lives, hearts and minds as we meditate upon it and make practical use of its wisdom and instruction. [Note: Because of the length of Psalm 119, this sermon was actually preached in two parts. Part One included the sections on Psalm 119:1-96 and the first four applications; Part Two concluded with the sections on Psalm 119:97-176 and the last applications.]

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Blessed Are The undefiled (1-48)

1. "Blessed are the undefiled in the way who walk in the law of the Lord" (1)
 - a. the controversy among men over faith and works certainly does not begin with obscure words from the writer of Psalm 119; this song is all about what it means to look into the word of God and obey it from the heart
 - a. the law of the Lord is able to direct all the steps of man as he responds to temptation, interacts with other people and approaches his creator in worship, so that he need not be ashamed or stand condemned
 - b. this psalmist is interested in singing about the statutes of God and his ardent desire to keep them in every way
 1. as you get to know God's will better, you will find some statutes that have instant appeal and others which will obviously become great challenges, but even and especially when it is your will that must be bent, it is a sweeter sacrifice even than an animal upon an altar (Romans 12:1-2)
 2. that is a part of seeking God with the whole heart, not just the part that is naturally attracted to the rewards and promises, but the part that has some foreign loyalty to overcome
 - b. the blameless are blessed because they yearn to walk in the way of the Lord and make no excuses to avoid their duty, but simply do it
 1. even if their trek is imperfect, that same law which prevents sin also provides for its remission, when the penitent and prodigal seek out restoration
 2. still, so long as we are content just to heed God's will, we can do no iniquity, it is when we wander off after our own desires, that we are enticed and sin
 - c. God's word, if believed and obeyed, will prevent and even cure sin
2. "How can a young man cleanse his way" (9)?
 - a. one who hides the word of God in his heart makes it his treasure, but not like some fragile piece of china that must never be used, lest it be broken
 - b. in fact, God's word is more likely to be broken if it is not used regularly
 - c. hiding it in the heart describes an attitude of devotion to God's word, in study, sharing and submission
3. "Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from your law" (18)
 - a. from our youth until old age, God's words should be as solemn counselors for us (24)
 - b. the proud and the accursed may dismiss the rebuke of God, but the righteous will hear it, be humble and changed even if doing the right things brings them under the derision of princes or makes them like strangers in their own land
4. "My soul clings to the dust ... I cling to your testimonies" (25, 31)
 - a. obedience to God's will does not force instability upon the believer's life, even if it does bring along certain fleshly risks
 - b. actually, God's will provides a sense of security throughout all the changes and trials that accompany any life
 - c. though our souls may cling to the dust in despair, God's word revives them and nourishes them so that we can run the course of his commandments—see them through until the end
5. "Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end" (33)

- a. at some point, the psalmist begins to sound as if he is groping for the right words, rephrasing himself over and over again to emphasize his message and expand its brilliance
 - b. God's word, you see, has many rivals for man's attention and affection—idols of tin and skin that are worthless things masquerading as treasures
 - c. the psalmist asks God to incline his heart—to use the message to bend his will so that it might comport with the Lord's
6. "And I will delight myself in your commandments which I love" (47)
- a. you begin to get the feeling in reading this psalm that the writer likes the word of God a little bit
 - b. these are the thoughts of a man who does more than read a verse here or there; a man who searches the Scriptures daily for instruction, wisdom and answers
 - c. his studies have prepared him to share those truths with others as well

B. You Are My Portion, O Lord (49-96)

1. "Remember the word to your servant, upon which you have caused me to hope" (49)
- a. moreover, we find that God can be trusted in spite of the complaints of the proud and the wicked
 - b. for the first time, the writer confesses that his love for God's word makes him to hate—not sinners, but certainly their sins
 - c. his indignation burns within him as he witnesses men trample upon God's name and his will, often without a care in the world for their irreverence and insolence
 - d. on his bed at night, he meditates upon the beauty of God's will even against the gathering darkness of man's irresponsibility
2. "I thought about my ways, and turned my feet to your testimonies" (59).
- a. a person with whole heart faith will consider God's will and turn his feet to follow it with haste, even if the cords of the wicked should try to bind him to do evil
 - b. those unequal companionships with unbelievers often get us into trouble; better to travel life with those who fear God and apprehend his precepts so that influence and support might flow freely and purely
3. "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep your word" (67)
- a. the psalmist finally reveals that part of the source of this revival and celebration of God's word is that he had erred in some way and had suffered affliction as a result
 - b. that affliction, though, turned into something quite positive, because it reminded him of what he then only partly knew, but came to comprehend fully—God's word is more valuable than all the money that might be gained by rejecting it
 - c. the proud, who smeared the psalmist with a lie, are "fat as grease" (70)—thick and foolish—because they intend to gain bragging rights by his misfortune
4. "I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right" (75)
- a. and so the psalmist is writing from the position of a man who tested God's wisdom by straying from it, maybe just to see what would happen
 - b. he learned a hard lesson about the guilt and consequences of any sin; in penitence, he asks for God to comfort him and renew his mercy
 - c. and he also hopes that other believers would turn to help him also
5. "My soul faints for your salvation, but I hope in your word" (81).
- a. perhaps due to his going astray, persecutors surrounded him, if only in words of derision
 - b. like a wineskin in smoke, his spirit feels shriveled up and darkened as he hopes for the Lord to rescue him
 - c. his plea is simple and heartfelt—"Help me," he cries in verse 86
6. "Unless your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction" (92).
- a. sometimes the only thing that keeps us going is the hope we derive from living and abiding in the will of God
 - b. we must take note of the fact that the psalmist is not negotiating with God, conditioning his faithfulness upon some physical relief, but is committing himself to righteousness no matter the consequences

C. Your Word is A Lamp (97-136)

1. "Through your precepts, I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way" (104).

- a. diligence in Bible study can lend you knowledge and wisdom beyond that of your enemies, the ancients, and even your own teachers
 - b. but part of love and being hopeful and positive and helpful is having a controlled hatred for things that are evil and sinful
 - c. controlled so that sinners do not become targets of personal vengeance and wrath, but targeted enough that sin is rebuked and never admired
2. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (105).
- a. this is the heart of the psalm, its theme and its most poetic expression of the power of God’s word in the humbled heart of an obedient believer
 - b. though our lives may be threatened or a snare set for us by God’s enemies, we rejoice in truth and incline our hearts to be obedient in a lifetime commitment
3. “My flesh trembles for you and I am afraid of your judgments” (120).
- a. love for God should never be confused with an attitude of irreverence about his power and position as our Judge
 - b. double-mindedness, that hypocritical form of belief that affords man an opportunity to depend on sin when the season seems ripe, is loathsome and false
 - c. especially when sin seems easier and doing the right thing riskier, more costly or more difficult should we discover that God is our hiding place and shield
4. “My eyes fail from seeking your salvation and your righteous word” (123)
- a. these are the eyes of one who cannot put down the book even when he grows weary from reading
 - b. they are the wearied eyes of one who knows that knowledge does not come without careful and patient study, years of meditation
5. “Rivers of water run down from my eyes because men do not keep your law” (136)
- a. it would be so wonderful if all men sought out God in their lives, but most do not, and we are left to lament the decline of our culture and sometimes even churches because there is so little real desire to keep God’s will
 - b. but without suffering discouragement, we must long for God’s truth, find it wonderful and keep it diligently in the recesses of our spirits

D. Seek Your Servant (137-176)

1. “My zeal has consumed me” (139)
- a. the psalmist recognizes that he is small and despised, and maybe we all feel that way sometimes, if not physically, then spiritually
 - b. congregations feel small and despised and turn inwardly, working no more to persuade the lost or to grow the kingdom
 - c. part of remembering his commandments is remaining hopeful that the gospel is a great power unto salvation regardless
2. “I cry out with my whole heart; hear me O Lord” (145)!
- a. whether it be morning, noon or night, the psalmist finds himself in prayer to God for relief
 - b. if ever there were any doubt, one can surely now see that these are the effective, fervent words of a very righteous man, one who has stumbled but now seeks to walk again if only his detractors would be stayed so that he can regain his footing
3. “Consider my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget your law” (153)
- a. and if ever we considered using opposition as an excuse to quiet our voices or snuff out our determination, we must become ashamed as we hear the dedication of this writer
 - b. revival will belong to those whose faithfulness is not destroyed by adversity
4. “I keep your precepts and your testimonies, for all my ways are before you” (168)
- a. he spreads out his life before God to examine, to see its wrinkles and blemishes and to clean them away even as he praises God all the day long
 - b. we can praise God all day long in our manner of living or we can put our service on hold to flirt with the devil, but the end result won’t be the same either way
 - c. walking with God will give us the kind of strength it took to write this psalm without giving in to fear and failure
5. “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; Seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments” (176).

- a. the psalmist finishes the longest song in the collection by reflecting on his weakness and helplessness, crying out to God from a restored heart for mercy in the midst of his enemies
- b. understand that if your approach to God does not include repentance and determination, it is going to ring hollow and come short
- c. this is the submissive attitude that brings us to God on bended knee rather than the attitude of so many that practically instructs God on how it's going to be

II. Some Applications

A. God Has A Law

1. quite obviously, the psalmist is ready to acknowledge in his Old Testament environment that God has a law, which he is obliged to follow
2. what has become less obvious to mankind is that God has always had a law and still has one today, a law which necessitates grace, but does not nullify it in the least
3. in olden times, God communicated with the patriarchs, really from the time of Adam and Eve, and gave them commands to obey
 - a. Adam was to name the animals and tend the garden
 - b. Noah was to build an ark according to the plan
 - c. Abraham was to leave his home, offer his son and seek the promise
4. beginning with the era of Moses, that concept of law entered into written form with the 10 commandments and the ensuing precepts that regulated life and worship in Israel in minute detail
 - a. in the Hebrew, Law is Torah, which has a root meaning of “to throw” or “to point out (as by throwing out the hand), and so to direct” (ISBE)
 - b. this is what the psalmist adores—an understandable and righteous law that shows him how to live right and avoid things that God judges to be sinful and self-destructive, individually and societally
 - c. that law contained both promises and warnings, and enjoyed only varied respect in Israel, actually being lost at times and ignored at others
 - d. one thing it lacked, which the coming of Christ was meant to supply, was an element of grace, or the unmerited favor of final forgiveness (Hebrews 10:1-9)
5. Christ came to fulfill the Law (see Matthew 5:17-19) and on the cross, it was nailed there along with him, so that it could be described as abolished and taken out of the way (Ephesians 2 and Colossians 2)
 - a. not that the law was sin, however (Romans 7:7-12)
 - b. it was just that law of Moses was only intended to prepare men for the faith of Christ by confronting them with their iniquity and inviting them to choose mercy over self-delusion
 - c. this would be a covenant between man and God, written not on tablets of stone, but each believer's heart (Hebrews 8:7-13)
6. Christ has a law
 - a. a perfect law of liberty (see James 1:25, 2:12), which sets men free from the guilt accrued through sin and from ignorance that results from not knowing God's requirements
 - b. it is a law of the Spirit (see Romans 8:2), for the Holy Spirit completed its revelation as he inspired the apostles and other men to preach and record God's will for man and the kingdom of his son (see Ephesians 6:17)
 - c. it is truly the law of Christ (see Galatians 6:1-5), which values selflessness and sacrifice on the order of its namesake
 - d. this is a law that contains the all-important element of grace, complete forgiveness wrought by the blood of Jesus Christ (First Peter 2:21-25)
 - e. like the straying psalmist, we can return as prodigal children, but to a richer restoration

B. God's Commands Are Not Burdensome

1. some people are resentful about law, rejecting it not always because they disagree with its codes or punishments, but sometimes just because it is a law (Jude 8-11)
 - a. the principles and convictions are not the issue, but a heart intent on uninhibited self-expression and rejection of authority will usually seek out a clear path to autonomy
 - b. and so the very concept of divine law is repugnant to them, and some of these would fancy themselves Christians and proclaim their attitude to be the product and proclamation of grace
2. Paul asked, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound” (Romans 6:1)?

- a. “God forbid,” he replied but this notion about law prevents God from forbidding much of anything
- b. in fact, over and over, the New Testament extols the virtues of faithful obedience as the only reasonable expression of love for God (First John 2:1-6)
- 3. whether it concerns the plan of salvation, the life of the believer or the work of the church, the same attitude about obedience to God’s word will prevail in the believer’s heart when he has bent his will to serve the Lord’s (First Peter 1:13-16)
- 4. when cast against a backdrop of Christ’s blood sacrifice on our account, nothing contained in that New Testament law should prove to be burdensome either (First John 5:1-5)

C. Written On The Heart

- 1. to emphasize again that submission to this new law is not the heartless and emotionless lifestyle that causes some to dismiss it, inspired writers refer to it as written on the heart of the believer (Second Corinthians 3:12-18)
- 2. the New Testament is not like some obscure technical manual that gathers dust on a high library shelf until someone suddenly needs to consult it to make a repair, so that when the repair is made, the book is shelved anew
 - a. no, the words of the New Testament are to leap off the page, fill the mind and sink down into the fertile soil of the heart, for “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:4).
 - b. those heart-written words produce a reliable conscience that pricks a man who wanders and rewards the one who obeys (James 1:21-25)
 - c. those divine words prevent sin (First John 2:1, 3:4-9)
- 3. although sinless perfectionism proves to be an unattainable objective, even for the most pious of men, diligence and grace combine in the heart to equip him to serve God blamelessly

D. Like a Stranger in the Earth

- 1. the psalmist found that his devotion to God made him a target of unbelievers, the proud and the wicked, who persecuted him in Satan’s service so that he might abandon his convictions to win peace among men
- 2. this terrible pressure has never changed in all the history of the world or the church (First Corinthians 4:11-13)
 - a. people who oppose abortion and homosexuality, who accept scriptural limits on the work of the church, who contend for a biblical plan of salvation that includes obedience are but filth to those who would rewrite their personal creeds to incorporate all manner of evil
 - b. either we become “sojourners and pilgrims” or we learn to accommodate evil in our lives without the kind of anguish that made the psalmist weep at the sight of unrestrained evil
- 3. Lot was still a stranger in Sodom and Gomorrah long after he settled there because he never ceased vexing his soul at the sight of rampant sexual immorality
 - a. we run the risk of becoming desensitized to evil because it is so prevalent today, even in our own homes via the television antenna
 - b. that is the struggle—to resist evil even as it multiplies so our souls never get accustomed to it
- 4. God’s peculiar people are strangers to a planet that lives in the flesh for the lusts of men and not for the will of God (see First Peter 4:3), but the alternative is to acquire the unbeliever’s habits and his doom (First Peter 4:12-16)

E. Run The Course

- 1. an enlarged heart is required for the psalmist and latter day believers to run the course of God’s commandments, that is, to enter the race of life, conquer its hurdles, endure the heat and outlast the competition, to arrive at the finish line and break the tape so a crown of life can be placed upon his head
- 2. the heart is enlarged by understanding and growth (Second Peter 3:17-18)
- 3. here is the Christian runner (Hebrews 12:1-2, Philippians 3:12-14, First Corinthians 9:24-27, Second Timothy 4:6-8)

F. A Companion of The Saints

- 1. the writer of Psalm 119 was a self-proclaimed companion of those who fear the Lord, and from that support system, he found encouragement to run with endurance and return from his misstep (63)

2. in what sense and to what degree are you likewise a companion of the saints?
 - a. the Bible encourages us to mark those who follow the Bible pattern and to imitate them, but are we too unfamiliar with them to do so?
 - b. are we a part of the body of Christ, a local congregation, but really in name only—vestigial organs in a body that thrives on cooperation (Ephesians 4:11-16)
3. the early disciples met more frequently than we do, but too many find even the current number of meetings to be too many, opting instead for a lighter schedule and less companionship with the saints (Hebrews 10:24-25)
4. there is no substitute for like, precious faith and the right hand of fellowship; you won't find satisfaction for your spirit in friendships built after the flesh (Hebrews 3:12-14)

G. The Day of Adversity

1. the strong undercurrent of Psalm 119 involves the fact that the writer had gone astray before being afflicted and making up his mind to keep God's word
 - a. not all affliction is the result of sin, but every trial and disappointment is occasion for soul-searching and rededication
 - b. God can use even the consequences of time and chance to get our attention and stir us up to revival, but not until our hearts are attuned to the spirit (Second Corinthians 12:7-10)
2. this writer even goes so far as to admit that it proved good for him to be afflicted since it enabled him to learn God's will in a way he might not have otherwise (71)
 - a. warning and the need for perseverance sometimes can only be learned on the bitter side of failure and punishment, as Peter learned obedience only by denying Christ and crawling back to him
 - b. we count it joy to fall into various trials only because the testing of your faith produces patience (James 1:2-3)
3. in the day of adversity, will you stand fast or buckle under?
 - a. "In the day of prosperity be joyful, But in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, So that man can find out nothing that will come after him" (Ecclesiastes 7:14).
 - b. "If you faint in the day of adversity, Your strength is small" (Proverbs 24:10).
4. on the day of adversity, we need our faith and strength the most; justifying weakness and failure is the surest way to reduce your discipleship to fair weather only

H. A Lamp and A Light

1. the theme of the book is built around the beautiful phrases in verse 105: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."
 - a. many theories, creeds and philosophies compete with the Bible for this distinction, but none contains the selfless, timeless wisdom of the Bible
 - b. without God's word, we walk in darkness; even though we may guess about him from his fingerprints on creation, unless we read his word, we cannot know him or his will
2. Jesus rebuked some neglectful believers in John 8 with this warning: "He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God" (47)
 - a. in Heaven, there will be no night and the redeemed will have no need of artificial light or even the sun to shine upon them (Revelation 22:5), but on Earth, we need the illumination of God's word far more even than we need incandescent lamps and lights
 - b. Jesus and his words provide the light of the world; "He who follows [Christ] shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).
 - c. "While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light" (John 12:36).
3. God's word can enlighten every wise man who seeks after knowledge and even every superstitious man that demands a sign (Second Peter 1:16-19)

Conclusion

The tremendous length of Psalm 119 is so overwhelming that men are tempted to ignore it altogether, but there is a message here that must not be overlooked. God's word is good and great.

Psalm 120: I Cried to the Lord

Introduction

Psalm 120 begins a new series of psalms called the Songs of Ascents, which might have been sung as Jewish pilgrims made their journeys to Jerusalem to celebrate great feasts. The next fifteen psalms will be of this quality. [Read Psalm 120:1-7.] Psalm 120 is an indictment really of the psalmist's neighbors who have wronged him with barbaric slander. We hear it echo today when we yearn to dwell in peace but some enemy is constantly introducing discord and disharmony.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. In My Distress (1-2)

1. the psalm begins with what seems to be a summary of prayer the writer had petitioned and which God had answered

2. it was a prayer for deliverance from ill-willed neighbors who employed lying lips and deceitful tongues to harm the reputation and peace of the writer

3. the psalmist cried in a state of distress and was relieved that God heard him and apparently answered him affirmatively

a. we have all been in the position of the psalmist, when it seems that our troubles and shame are the talk of the town, or when our shortcomings are being exaggerated for the amusement of our enemies, or when people are just plain lying about us

b. it is hard to know how to handle that situation, because when you decide to wrestle with a pig, you're both going to end up looking pretty dirty

B. Coals of the Broom Tree (3-4)

1. in verses three and four, the psalmist uses the tongue to personify his enemies

2. how should the tongues of his enemies be punished, he wonders, and answers—with sharp arrows and hot coals

a. if you think about it, the tongue does indeed seem to launch words like arrows from a bow—missiles that fly swiftly and pierce deeply the spirit of their target

b. Jeremiah wrote, “Their tongue is an arrow shot out; It speaks deceit; One speaks peaceably to his neighbor with his mouth, But in his heart he lies in wait” (9:8).

c. and the coals of the broom tree signify a long burning, such as the effects of slander and lies

3. but in reality, this passage is about God's judgment of such things, that it is God who exacts vengeance upon the wicked who resort to such evils

4. the person who chooses to lie and slander usually finds the same tactics are used against him, because he is teaching all around him how it is done

C. In Meschec and Kedar (5-7)

1. Psalm 120 ends with a complaint about the writer's bad neighbors which practically refers to them as barbarians

2. Meschec and Kedar were distant tribes, barbaric to the psalmist who feels as if he is living among very uncivilized people himself

3. he says, “My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace.”

a. it is so frustrating when you think you are doing your level best to seek peace among your neighbors, coworkers and even family members, and yet someone among them seems to hate peace

b. they lie, argue, complain, mutter and provoke, but they never seem to have any interest in peace

4. “I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war.”

II. Some Applications

A. Sins of the Tongue

1. the psalmist's main complaint is that his peace is disrupted by his neighbors' false tongues

2. “And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell” (James 3:6).

3. there are so many sins of the false tongue

- a. lying
 - b. gossip
 - c. slander
 - d. filthy language
 - e. coarse jesting
 - f. deception
 - g. subversion
 - h. angry words
 - i. malice
4. the list could continue for a long time, but the problem is twofold
- a. some of us are painfully afflicted by the false tongues of people around us
 - b. and some of us may be guilty of owning false tongues of our own, perhaps without even realizing it because we are simply playing along as others work their evil, or because we are engaged in retribution—doing it unto others who have done it unto us first
5. taming the tongue may be the biggest challenge for many who forsake the devil and choose discipleship with Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:20-32)
- a. before this true tongue can become habit, part and parcel of your character, you have to spend a lot of time actively thinking about the way you speak and the motivation behind your words, especially the ones that are spoken either idly or in haste
6. we are commanded to “pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which we may edify one another” (Romans 14:19), so our language should reflect that (James 3:7-12)

B. Vengeance and Just Desserts

1. the psalmist sounds a little vengeful in his complaint against his nasty neighbors, but it seems that he is reserving that vengeance for God’s execution—God is probably the mighty one in the margin of verse four
2. the temptation when you discover that slandered you with a false tongue is either to return the disfavor or to lash out in anger, but replying to sin with more sin is no real solution (Romans 12:17-21)
 - a. there are those coals again, here quoted from Proverbs 25:21-22, which adds, “the Lord will reward you” when you follow such a path
 - b. the reward may be that you sometimes win your enemy’s change of heart
3. but perhaps the real wake-up call needs to come in this form—that this false tongue that we find so objectionable is in fact sometimes found in our own mouths, and we are ardently condemning the same sin in someone else that we permit to dwell in us (Romans 2:1-3)
4. never forget that reformation begins at home and that just desserts are often served to those who are sure they didn’t order them; if you create an environment of deception, angry words and malice, it will swallow you up as surely as the target you intended

C. A Soft Answer

1. most everyone knows that Proverbs 15:1 says, “A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.”
2. just because someone approaches you in a lather does not mean that you have to respond with the same or even higher level of vitriol and anger
3. it is amazing how a soft answer can often soothe a savage beast, sometimes embarrassing him that he lost control when he sees how calm you were
4. witness Paul’s reply to Festus (Acts 26:22-32)

Conclusion

Psalm 120 is brief and very much to the point. The psalmist’s neighbors have used their false tongues to injure his welfare and he is happy that God has delivered him from them. Let’s make certain the false tongue does not ever belong to us and when we are its victims, let’s pray and stand fast.

Psalm 121: I Will Lift Up My Eyes to the Hills

Introduction

Psalm 121 continues a long series of psalms called the Songs of Ascents, which might have been sung as Jewish pilgrims made their journeys to Jerusalem to celebrate great feasts. This song has been called the traveler's or soldier's psalm because it seems to describe the path of one marching from place to place, wondering about the safety and success of his journey. [Read Psalm 121:1-8.] This pilgrim song, then, has four stanzas that begin by declaring the writer's source of help before progressing to an expression of the faithfulness of that assistance.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. From Whence Comes My Help (1-2)

1. some suggest that this psalm may actually be a responsive song, sung between the Old Testament priest and the worshipers, but it is just as easy to imagine it being sung out on the highway during a long journey

2. one can imagine the traveler looking up into the hills on either side of him, perhaps weary and downtrodden, but because of his faith, he is still strong

3. ancient people acknowledged even more gods than people nowadays do and so the psalmist specifies that he serves the true and living God who created the heaven and earth

B. He Will Not Allow (3-4)

1. along such a journey, there would be plenty of opportunities for feet to stumble, ankles to be twisted, knees to be scraped, but in a broader sense, God keeps his people's feet from stumbling

2. he watches his children without growing weary and seeks to protect them with his providence and his word

3. his people sometimes prefer to depend solely upon providence, or even hope against hope for a miracle, but the power of his word to prevent stumbling cannot be neglected without destruction

4. obedience to the word of God prevents so much sin and misery, but some are intent upon putting God to the test and they themselves end up being the ones who fail

C. The Lord is Your Keeper (5-6)

1. when we read about the relationship that Adam and Eve enjoyed with God in Eden or even the conversation that Cain had with God, we are struck by its familiarity and closeness

2. even as the first man and woman tended to the garden, God tended to them, and that was a blessed thing until they had something to be ashamed of

3. this writer is searching for a relationship that is similarly close, so that God can tend to him and shade him whether trouble threatens at day or at night

D. The Lord Shall Preserve You (7-8)

1. the psalm closes with a reminder of God's protective care, his interest in preserving his people during an onslaught of evil, whether on the way to the temple or in the long pilgrimage of life

2. if only this meant that no temptation or hardship would ever touch us, but it doesn't; it simply means that when the storms and waves crash upon us, we will not be left alone to drift away, but there will always be a life preserver nearby

II. Some Applications

A. Pilgrim's Progress

1. Abraham and Sarah were pilgrims who left their homeland to journey toward a land of promise (Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16)

2. and in a sense, we are pilgrims as well, called out of this carnal world to travel toward a land of heavenly promise, with the same potential to press on or turn back (First Peter 2:9-12)

3. it only makes sense to take a look at the path from time to time to make certain your feet are still on it, and to anticipate any obstacle that might be about to spring up

a. "Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established" (Proverbs 4:26).

b. "Can one walk on hot coals, And his feet not be seared" (Proverbs 6:28)?

c. “Better is the poor who walks in his integrity Than one who is perverse in his lips, and is a fool. Also it is not good for a soul to be without knowledge, And he sins who hastens with his feet” (Proverbs 19:1-2).

4. sometimes roads and streets turn and change so subtly that you don’t realize until too late that you have managed to bear left when you meant to go straight; help comes from the Lord who illuminates the strait and narrow and shows the way to get back on track

B. God Neither Slumbers Nor Sleeps

1. unlike the false gods of the Canaanites, the God of Israel who made heaven and earth does not slumber or fail to respond

a. on one occasion, Elijah challenged King Ahab and the priests of Baal to a contest on Mount Carmel to prove which God was real (First Kings 18:23-29)

b. naturally, Elijah’s God responded dramatically (First Kings 18:38-39)

c. Elijah joked that Baal might have been asleep or in the bathroom when his priests called, mocking the falsehood of their idol, but Jehovah God is never caught unawares or unprepared

2. God is reliable and dependable, not to do what we think is best, but to do what really is best, even if that means permitting us to travel through the valley of the shadow of death (First Thessalonians 5:23-24)

3. the question is not whether God will live up to his end of the covenant, but will I?

a. God will not take away all the ill effects of sin in the world, and he will not put an end to death until the place is right, and he will not take away my free will

b. in the midst of temptation, even persecution, perhaps facing my own mortality and through the exercise of my free will, can I choose right and resist wrong (Second Timothy 2:11-13)?

C. The Lord Is My Shepherd

1. part of Psalm 121 is reminiscent of the most beloved psalm of all—the twenty-third—but here the Lord is a keeper and protector, just like a shepherd

2. if you have ever carried a child from a car into a house while it is raining, allowing yourself to get soaked just to keep the child dry, that is what God does for us

a. God absorbs the apathy and even antipathy of a large swath of his creation just to provide cover for those who do believe that the might be saved and protected from loss

b. this becomes so clear on Mount Calvary, of course, but it is what Jesus had already described to his disciples (John 10:7-15)

3. “Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do his will, working in you what is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever” (Hebrews 13:20-21).

4. that is why it is so vital to be a submissive little lamb and not a rebellious old goat when the Lord’s staff guides our heads or his rod finds our backs; let him shepherd you

D. Preservation

1. working through the influence of his word in you and those around you, as well as through his providence, God strives to preserve you faithful and whole for the day of judgment

2. Jesus once taught, “Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it” (Luke 17:33).

a. losing life is about abandoning selfish, carnal, temporal motives, attitudes and in favor of those that are selfless, spiritual and eternal

b. too many use this life to accumulate meaningless baubles and dubious wealth, when the real purpose is to learn to serve God and become fit to surround his throne in Heaven forever

c. even some disciples are found struggling to maintain this carnal way of life alongside their discipleship and they end up losing what really matters

3. we need the kind of attitude that made Paul faithful and victorious (Second Timothy 4:16-18)

Conclusion

While traveling down that pilgrim pathway, it is good to look upon into the hills and recognize that true help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth, who preserves and protects us against every foe.

Psalm 122: O Jerusalem!

Introduction

Psalm 122 is ascribed to the prolific and poetic pen of David, but some commentators find this unlikely. Since the psalms' titles and subtitles are not inspired, it is unimportant. Clearly, the song was written by someone thrilled to be at his destination at last. We share that enthusiasm about gaining entry to our spiritual destination as well. Sometimes it is just the church building, but ultimately, we are bound for heaven. [Read Psalm 122:1-9.] This short psalm is another of the ascension group of songs written for the journey up to Jerusalem to worship, and can be studied in three parts. Verses 1-2 express the joy of entering the holy city. Verses 3-5 describe the worshiper's respect for Jerusalem and the psalm ends with prayers for the city in verses 6-9.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. I Was Glad (1-2)

1. on July 4, 2000, I was in New York City on vacation, with a ticket in my hand entitling me to sit in the narrow seats of old Yankee Stadium for three hours to watch Will Clark and the Baltimore Orioles take on the team in pinstripes

a. it was an afternoon game and we arrived about 45 minutes before the gates opened, so we had to stand around on the hot pavement under a 90 degree sun

b. the need for a big juicy hot dog, a Lemon Chill, or just a seat was almost unbearable, but so was the anticipation of seeing the stadium inside in person, walking through the monuments and hoping the Yankees would lose

c. the longer I stood there, the more impatient I became and then finally, the big gates swung open and we squeezed in and had a great time for the next three hours

2. the psalmist's story is a whole lot more spiritual than mine, but the overall emotion of anticipation and gratitude is the same—he was glad it was time to go to God's house and take his weary feet inside

3. the hope is that we can all have the kind of anticipation and gratitude about periods of worship, to be glad when it is time to go and not disturbed that our sleep will be shortened or our off-day from work will be stolen by God

B. Jerusalem Is (3-5)

1. if David truly is the author of this psalm, then he might be speaking prophetically about a Jerusalem that would come after his time, when the city would be built out and the house of the Lord would be a temple instead of a tabernacle

2. the compactness of the city could have more to do with the tight association of the worshipers than the narrowness of the streets, and that compactness, we admire

3. there also the Testimony of Israel—the ark of the covenant—found a resting place

a. the history of the ark traces all the way back to the early days of Moses' sojourn (Exodus 16:32-35)

b. the Testimony itself was just as special (Exodus 31:18)

4. throughout the year, festivals occurred at set intervals in Jerusalem and the Israelites would travel to the city to worship in the city of David, where his descendants would reign for many years

C. Pray for Jerusalem (6-9)

1. the psalm concludes with an invitation to pray for the city, that it might enjoy peace and prosperity

2. it was the presence of the temple that made Jerusalem something special, so that when Solomon's temple was destroyed by the Chaldeans, Judah was utterly lost, save for a small remnant that would return to build a new version

II. Some Applications

A. The House of the Lord

1. the psalmist is so happy to find that it is time to go visit the house of the Lord—he has the kind of enthusiasm that we see in children who appreciate their teachers and classmates and in adults who have not forgotten what a privilege it is to go to the house of the Lord and enjoy fellowship
 - a. when we speak of the house of the Lord, we are not so much talking about a physical structure as we are a collection of people who just happen to assemble in that physical structure
 - b. our affection for going to the house of the Lord does not depend on the paint on the walls or the beauty of the architecture, but the quality of the people and the service that really is the house of the Lord in any given location
2. when we speak of “going to church,” we are not talking about entering a building, but an activity—a time of fellowship and praise toward God
3. and so going to the house of the Lord involves associating with the church that Jesus died to build and ever lives to oversee (Ephesians 2:19-22)
 - a. Peter took that illustration and ran with it, describing individual Christians not only as priests in the temple of Christ, but as living stones that make up its structure (First Peter 2:4-5, 9-10)
 - b. after giving Timothy the qualities necessary for elders, deacons and their wives, Paul explains why he is writing (First Timothy 3:14-15)
4. conduct in the church is not confined to walking rather than running, speaking in a respectful volume and proper attire
 - a. conduct in the church means the way that we behave as we present ourselves as Christ’s disciples, members of his body and worshipers in that same temple
 - b. it involves honesty, diligence, compassion and confidence, so that the name of Christ is not blasphemed because of us and so that the church is not imperiled due to neglect or false things

B. Glad To Go

1. if we adopt the attitude of the psalmist, we will be glad to go to the house of the Lord whenever it is time for worship—Sunday mornings and afternoons (or evenings), Wednesdays or whenever classes might be conducted—even for week-long or protracted gospel meetings, and even such events with neighboring churches
2. we will do so with enthusiasm, hopefully because we will be glad to greet brethren whom we love, glad to greet visitors, some of whom might need saving, and glad to be able to praise God and learn of his will
3. why then are some so obviously unhappy about going to the house of the Lord?
 - a. some have stumbled because they do not understand the importance of worship and learning
 - b. some have stumbled because of persecution or tribulation
 - c. others because of the cares of this world or the deceitfulness of riches
 - d. others have simply lost their zeal, the exciting novelty of new love and have become lukewarm toward their faith
 - e. chances are they are also lacking in private prayer, home Bible study and soul-winning efforts
4. the Hebrew writer dealt with just such a problem (Hebrews 10:19-39)
 - a. very few people ever quit the church all at once; most take months or even years to fall away and they do so by cutting back on things like Bible classes at first and then worship
 - b. they pray less frequently, give up Bible reading and quit inviting others to visit a place they are not as committed to anymore
 - c. they have need of endurance, but have sapped their own strength through neglect
5. only by reordering your priorities and remembering from whence you have fallen can you regain your zeal and affection for going to the house of the Lord (Revelation 2:5)

C. A City Compact Together

1. the psalmist described Jerusalem as a compact city, and the local church is to have that sense of closeness as well
2. the church is joined and knit together so that it might experience growth and edification throughout its members (Ephesians 4:11-16)
3. when you are knit together as part of the fabric of the church, you get to participate in the flow of knowledge, wisdom and understanding (Colossians 2:1-3)

4. you also find protection from the temptations and concepts that would do you harm (Colossians 2:18-19)

D. Jerusalem Today

1. Premillennialists say prayers like the one in Psalm 122 for the modern and very divided city of Jerusalem, in which a Muslim mosque sits upon the traditional site of Solomon's temple

2. Jesus recognized the corruption of the city in his day (Matthew 23:37-39)

a. he predicted it would be destroyed so that even the third temple would be toppled

b. Jerusalem was laid waste about 40 years later and has never been the same, 1948 not withstanding

3. salvation for the Jews is not in rebuilding an ornate temple or waiting for a successor to Jesus Christ; nor is it in the Premillennial hope that all Israel will be saved in spite of its disbelief simply by Christ's return (Romans 10:1-4, 11:1-7)

a. the only way by which "all Israel will be saved" is if all Israel obeys Jesus (see Romans 11:26)

b. so many make excuses for Paul's countrymen and exempt them from hearing and obeying the gospel as he did, and they are helping to keep them lost

4. the only Jerusalem still necessary to God's plan is the heavenly one (Hebrews 12:22-24)

Conclusion

Psalm 122 is special for its statement of joy over going to the house of the Lord. Now we assemble with the church on Earth, but that is only a small portion of the joy of assembling with the church in Heaven.

Psalm 123: Unto You I Lift Up My Eyes

Introduction

The one hundred twenty-third psalm is another song of ascension, but one that combines a community lament with the familiar pilgrim theme. Christians in the midst of persecution may recognize its concepts as they sometimes carry their Bibles, travel to worship and profess their faith in a world that is often indifferent and occasionally in opposition. [Read Psalm 123:1-4.] This tiny song can be split into two equal parts. Verses 1-2 acknowledge the source of relief, while verses 3-4 reveal the singers' complaint about persecution.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Unto You (1-2)

1. in some ways, this psalm reverses things a little bit and for good reason
2. the psalmist expresses his hope before revealing what is threatening him, probably because he feels that his hope is so secure
3. and so the psalm reads like a prayer—the prayer of a person looking up into the heavens for an answer, without any doubt that he will receive it
4. God has always been understood to dwell in some invisible, spiritual sense, beyond the clouds, rather than under the Earth or somewhere beneath even that
 - a. Eliphaz understood God to dwell in the height of the heavens, walking above the circle of the sky (Job 22:12-14) while Nahum thought the clouds were like the dust of God's feet (1:3)
 - b. other psalms describe the clouds as his chariot (Psalm 104:3); "Clouds and darkness surround him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne" (Psalm 97:2).
 - c. ambition to be like God meant ascending above the clouds in some sense of the word (Isaiah 14:14)
5. of course, God is spirit and talk of his feet and chariot and location must be understood within a metaphorical context, for God is not confined as in a prison of flesh or atmosphere
 - a. there is something overwhelmingly hopeful and optimistic about looking up for hope, rather than looking down at doom—there is the human hope somehow to rise above our troubles and find relief
 - b. another psalmist wrote, "The LORD lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted. It is God who avenges me, And subdues the peoples under me; He delivers me from my enemies. You also lift me up above those who rise against me; You have delivered me from the violent man" (18:46-48).

B. Mercy (3-4)

1. this psalm describes total and utter dependance upon God, as a servant or maid looks to the hand of his master or mistress in loyalty and expectation of a duty to be discharged, yet the psalmist is primarily searching for mercy
2. the ones singing this song had been on the receiving end of more scorn from their contemptuous neighbors than they could bear any longer and because of that, they plead with God for mercy
3. we sometimes say, "It's only words," but when those words are like arrows invading your heart, they have a definite and negative impact
4. we imagine a group of people, awash in their own luxury, proud perhaps of their wealth or intellect, and contemptuous of any who would rise and go to worship and sacrifice for the God of heaven
5. from that sense of rejection and disdain, these worshipers ask for relief

II. Some Applications

A. Constantly Looking To Thee

1. the psalmist is not describing a religious lifestyle that is somehow confined to Sundays, but rather has in mind a mindset of intense loyalty and willingness to serve
2. commentator Albert Barnes says that in some eastern palaces, there were many slaves who stood at attention and in silence, just waiting to do the bidding of their masters, even staring intently at their master's hands to watch for some signal
3. a willingness to become God's servant in just that way is necessary to rising above a religion that is confined to a few hours a week, so that it becomes a lifestyle (Romans 6:16-22)

- a. the same truth that sets you free from sin and error will attach you to holiness and service, so that you are constantly looking unto God's word for some signal of his desire for you
 - b. lifting up one's eyes to heaven is accomplished in prayer, in meditation upon the Bible, and in simple, daily, trusting faith
4. Jesus warned that, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).
- a. it matters where we look for guidance and direction and purpose and hope because there are so many distractions and so many competitors for our trust, service and attention
 - b. people, things and ideas will fail you, but loyalty to God's will won't

B. Contempt

1. youth sports often have a mercy rule whereby a team that is losing by 10 runs for instance is put out of their misery by the game being declared over—they get to stop being thrashed
2. these singers would like to stop being thrashed for a while by the words of their neighbors who had no use for religion and held in contempt all those who did, "Who sharpen their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows—bitter words" (Psalm 64:3)
 - a. any faithful Christian who sees people like himself portrayed on television as a hypocrite, or a dolt or naive or extinct can understand what the psalmist is talking about
 - b. and sometimes such persecution becomes more personal, especially for young people who are taunted with the sins of their peers and made to feel immature for not joining in
3. Paul felt as if he was being treated like dirt (First Corinthians 4:9-12)
 - a. the objective of persecution, whether or not the persecutor knows it, is to destroy faith, because Satan is behind every instance of persecution
 - b. falling into the trap gives the devil a little victory and endangers your soul but nobody likes to be made a spectacle or laughingstock and some will hide or contradict their convictions to rise above the contempt of people whose opinions are highly suspect to begin with (Hebrews 10:32-39)
4. when you find yourself being treated with contempt because of your convictions, recognize that it simply validates your desire to live godly in Christ Jesus (see Second Timothy 3:12)
5. Jesus was ridiculed and crucified, the apostles were threatened, imprisoned and martyred, and others before you have been the victims of mockery and now it is your turn to claim a painful moral victory over your adversary; "And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for his heavenly kingdom" (Second Timothy 4:18)

C. Mercy

1. the worshipers plead for mercy, for relief, for an answer to their suffering (Second Corinthians 7:1-11)
2. and God is "rich in mercy because of his great love with which He loved us" (Ephesians 2:4) so that he will encourage and sustain us even if the persecution or other hardship must continue a while longer
3. Job's suffering did not conclude instantly, but the end intended by God was fulfilled when the answer arrived, the onslaught ended and Job was restored in the Lord's compassion and mercy (see James 5:11)
4. "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 20-21).

Conclusion

Psalm 123 is a help in times of hardship and especially persecution.

Psalm 124: The Lord Was On Our Side

Introduction

The one hundred twenty-fourth psalm continues the Songs of Ascents, a series of hymns to be sung as people made their pilgrimage to Jerusalem for worship or a feast. The series began back in Psalm 120 and will continue through number 134. In this song, which is attributed to David, worshipers are called to praise God for some recent deliverance from danger. Some commentators have found inspiration for the psalm in the perilous early days of David's reign when the Philistines meant to finish Israel off. [Read Psalm 124:1-8.] The one hundred twenty-fourth psalm is simple in theme—God was on our side and for that reason alone, we survived and gained victory over our enemies. Whether the enemy is internal or external, even today, victory is defined the same way.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. If It Had Not Been For the Lord (1-5)

1. sometimes in a battle or a game or some other kind of competition, in the aftermath of victory it becomes clear that triumph really turned on the contribution of just one special participant
2. that is what Israel is asked to acknowledge in this psalm—that victory was only obtained because of the special contribution of Almighty God to the effort
3. men rose up against her and would have devoured her like a monster or drowned her in doom, except that God intervened and prevailed
 - a. think of Israel confronted with the Red Sea in front and the pursuing Egyptians in the rear, only to find victory when the waters miraculously part into a one-way escape route
 - b. think of Gideon's tiny army, whittled down from an already insignificant thousands to hopeless hundreds, who overwhelmed a much larger enemy with divine assistance
4. some commentators find inspiration for Psalm 124 in later history, however (Second Samuel 5:17-25)

B. Blessed Be The Lord (6-8)

1. the writer suggests that Israel had been like a harmless bird trapped in a fowler's snare until the Lord had loosed the trap and ensured her escape
2. when people escape from disease, threat of death, misery or other hardship, they are likely to express gratitude to any number of helpers, some imaginary and some real
3. some will thank their lucky stars, but how many will make this their reply: "Our help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and Earth?"

II. Some Applications

A. The Lord's Side

1. every society has a religious component and throughout history has believed that their god was especially on their side against every foe, at least until they found themselves defeated
 - a. even when the United States went to war against the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the battle was framed by some as a test for Allah and Jehovah, Muhammad vs. Jesus
 - b. most like to believe that God is on their side, as David fought Goliath believing that Jehovah would help him upset the giant, and as Elijah struggled with the idolatrous priests to prove whose God could devour the sacrifice best
2. two questions
 - a. which God is true, or if many are real, which is strongest?
 - b. how can you be certain that God is on your side?
3. naturally, we believe in the God of the Bible as the only true and living God (John 17:1-5)
 - a. getting him on our side depends upon our getting on his side, for "he who keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the spirit whom he has given us" (First John 3:24)
 - b. obedient faith puts us on the Lord's side, while disobedient anything makes us part of "the other team" (James 4:1-4)
4. being on the Lord's side liberates us from the attitudes that cripple others
 - a. covetousness (Hebrews 13:5-6)

b. fear (Romans 8:31-39)

B. Birds of Prey

1. throughout the psalm, the writer imagines Israel as the prey of some awful monster, wild animal or fowler
2. members of spiritual Israel are sometimes subjected to the same creeping sense of being targeted by evil men, persecutors and enticers (Philippians 3:17-21)
3. here we are on the Lord's side and yet we also find ourselves ensnared by the devil and his agents
 - a. sometimes we are ensnared because of ignorance (see Proverbs 7:23)
 - b. or our words are too many (see Proverbs 18:7)
 - c. or we act impulsively (see Proverbs 20:25)
 - d. or we fall under the influence of some not on the Lord's side who seem to hold the key to happiness or popularity (see Proverbs 22:25)
4. but we must be reminded, "The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe" (Proverbs 29:25).
5. instead of being caught in the cords of our sin (see Proverbs 5:22) or entangled in the things of the world (see Second Timothy 1:4-7, Second Peter 2:20-22) as prey to the fowler, wisdom teaches us to anticipate the snares we can and to appreciate the times when we must depend upon a helping hand to ensure our escape

C. Tempests of the Spirit

1. on the other side of his metaphors, the psalmist envisions Israel as a city swept under by a storm or a flood
2. our internal vexations are similar to those storms, although the psalmist probably had in mind a much more literal and tangible force
3. internal vexations are times of depression, sadness, doubt, guilt, fear and grief
 - a. they appear at first like dark clouds distant on the horizon and then approach swiftly and ominously until the rains pour down and the flood rises up around us—a flood of tears in our spirits and even upon our faces
 - b. at least twice as his prison ship was tossed by storms, Paul told his fellow sailors to "take heart" (Acts 27:22-25)
4. Peter becomes the perfect illustration of how internal vexations can make it seem as if we are sinking (Matthew 14:22-31)
 - a. you see, whether or not you build your house on the rock or on the sand, the same rains and wind are going to appear to buffet it throughout your life
 - b. that you cannot entirely prevent, but if you build your life on Christ, you will be sustained
 - c. build, not with apathy or doubt, but with hope and trust and you will be sustained
5. hope is the key to surviving tempests of the spirit—"rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer" (Romans 12:12)

D. The Snare is Broken

1. in those moments when we feel threatened as if by a monster, a predator or a storm, we are looking for the kind of refuge and rescue that the psalmist describes
2. "God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1)
3. he makes the way of escape for every enticement the devil conjures up that you might be able to bear it (see First Corinthians 10:13)
4. and as surely as in Psalm 124, he is our help, who made heaven and earth.

Conclusion

So many of the psalms create this same theme of trust and security in the Lord that it makes one wonder why so many Christians are racked with depression and anxiety. If God is on your side, who can oppose you?

Psalm 125: Like Mount Zion

Introduction

Psalm 125 is another in a series called “The Songs of Ascents” (120-134), which were customarily sung as pilgrims ascended into Jerusalem and its temple for worship. [Read Psalm 125:1-5.] This particular psalm is a national affirmation of faith in the security of righteous people as well as a warning to those who choose to be wicked.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Those Who Trust in the Lord (1-2)

1. it is a small and special class of people who trust in the Lord for their guidance and preservation and the psalmist takes a moment to acknowledge that God holds them dear to his heart

2. they are blessed with a strength and stability that is virtually unknown to the world at large, making them steadfast like an immovable mountain or surrounded by an invisible protective force that sustains them against the mightiest onslaught

3. yet when one considers the history of Israel and Jerusalem, he finds that the part about trusting in the Lord is not cultural, but personal, and that devolving into idolatry and other sins is a forfeiture of that protection

a. Amos prophesied about these same people: “Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying: ‘You only have I known of all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities’” (3:1-2)

4. still, trusting in the Lord is the one key to true security

B. Do Good, O Lord (3)

1. verse three is somewhat difficult to place in chronology because it seems to promise that some reigning foreign power would not be permitted to remain in control of the land of Canaan for long lest Israel become tempted to follow in their evils

2. there are various points in Hebrew history where this psalm might fit, but it is hard to reconcile the promise with each period and what actually became of the foreign power

a. after the exile, for instance, foreign powers ruled over Canaan for hundreds of years until after the time of Christ when Israel as a state ceased to matter

b. perhaps the Egyptians are meant or the Babylonians, who ruled only briefly before the Medes and Persians began a much milder rule that resulted in the restoration of a Hebrew remnant

3. in any event, God recognizes that even the righteous will be tempted to reach out their hands to iniquity if they are surrounded by it and compelled to watch as it seemingly goes unpunished and becomes the cultural norm

C. Crooked Ways (4-5)

1. the psalm closes with a sort of prayer for Israel’s peace in the midst of these challenges

2. the psalmist simply asks God to do good to those who are upright in their hearts—those who trust in the Lord described earlier in the psalm, and as for the wicked, he pleads that they be led away from influencing the righteous as workers of iniquity

II. Some Applications

A. The Lord Surrounds His People

1. the heart of this psalm is the obvious contrast between those who trust in the Lord and these workers of iniquity who carry a scepter of wickedness

2. just as the Lord made a distinction between his children and those of the Egyptians on the first Passover, so God continues to distinguish his son’s disciples as those who trust in him (First Peter 2:4-12)

a. here we are among unbelievers and sectarians as God’s special people with the responsibility of behaving ourselves to keep our trust in God consistent and active

b. “For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe” (First Timothy 4:10).

3. the prophet Elisha found himself in terrible danger one time, but he survived precisely because

he trusted in the Lord who surrounded him with security (Second Kings 6:8-17)

4. trusting in the Lord is more than calling yourself a Christian or attending church on Sundays; it is a way of thinking and living that defines your existence by submissive faith (Hebrews 2:10-13)

B. Scepter of Wickedness

1. the psalmist felt like an immovable mountain because of the stability that God lent to him through his word and protection

a. Christ, his church and the Bible—when followed—give to man and society incredible stability
b. churches that use the Bible as their only creed are not constantly reviving their convictions with ever shift in sentiments and digression into apostasy
c. families that root their love in God’s model are not given to division and infidelity
d. even the individual who centers his decisions around the example of Jesus is blessed by moderation and stability

2. still, there is an inescapable scepter of wickedness held by the god of this age—the devil—who seeks to infiltrate those safe places with the suggestion of immorality and indulgence

a. righteous Lot lived in Sodom and “was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked” and “tormented his soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds” (Second Peter 2:7-8)
b. at some point, Demas the disciple forsook the apostle Paul, “having loved this present world” (Second Timothy 4:10)

3. “Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits” (First Corinthians 15:33).

a. whatever good habit you have—worship attendance, class attendance, sobriety, purity of speech, thought and entertainment, sexual morality, sharing—all can be corrupted if you choose your companions unwisely

b. influence is a two-way street and otherwise fine Christians have been utterly destroyed because they let down their guard and invited evil companions into their lives by dating, friendships or other associations

c. they all thought they could handle it or that a little poison wouldn’t kill them, but it did

1. Proverbs 7 tells the tale of a young man who was enticed by an immoral woman: “For she has cast down many wounded, And all who were slain by her were strong men” (26).

2. there is a similar warning in Proverbs 22:24-25: “Make no friendship with an angry man, And with a furious man do not go, Lest you learn his ways And set a snare for your soul.”

d. people given to violence and immorality will corrupt your good habits if you give them access to your heart—you will either become their victim or their disciple

C. Led Away

1. the psalmist had to acknowledge that, “they are not all Israel who are of Israel” (Romans 9:6)

2. the scepter of wickedness had corrupted some in his nation so that they were led away with the workers of iniquity, just as it is today and in the future (Luke 13:23-27)

3. workers of iniquity are sometimes blind leaders of the blind and both fall into the ditch if left alone (Matthew 15:14)

a. Peter warned about false teachers (Second Peter 2:18-22)

b. John likewise warned about false prophets (First John 4:4-6)

c. Paul identified dangerous teachers like Hymenaeus and Philetus, “who have strayed concerning the truth” and “overthrow the faith of some” (Second Timothy 2:17-18)

4. the last thing you want is to be led away by a worker of iniquity disguised as an angel of light

a. Gentile Christians had formerly been led away by “dumb idols” (First Corinthians 12:2)

b. gullible people are led away by various lusts (see Second Timothy 3:6)

c. “You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (Second Peter 3:17-18).

Conclusion

Psalm 125 is a statement of trust, but also a warning about those times when our trust wanes and we cozy up to things in the world that would harm our prospects for eternity.

Psalm 126: Like Those Who Dream

Introduction

Psalm 126 finds us back in the midst of a series called “The Songs of Ascents” (120-134), which were customarily sung as pilgrims ascended into Jerusalem and its temple for worship. This particular song seems to center around the return of the remnant from Babylonian captivity to settle again in Jerusalem. The writer finds his return to be like a dream, but he recognizes that all of Israel’s woes have not been resolved by this alone. [Read Psalm 126:1-6.] One commentator summarized Psalm 126 in this way: “The gladness of this psalm is unmistakable, and yet there is a sense of tearfulness, as if the expected blessings (Psalm 126:1) ought not to have turned into depression in Psalm 126:5 ... The message of the psalm is that there is no simple solution on earth for the problems of the people of God, no single act of God that could bring them into unbroken joy, rid them of trials and temptations, or establish them in perfection this side of heaven!”⁴

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Narrative (1-2)

1. few, if any, of us have experienced anything like what these people are rejoicing about
 - a. perhaps if you have returned to your hometown after many decades of absence or been reunited with long-lost loved ones, you understand a tiny fraction of what they are so happy about
 - b. after three generations’ worth of exile in Babylon and Persia, the descendants and remnant of those that survived the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar are now being permitted to go back home, just as God had promised
 - c. King Cyrus is financing their pilgrimage and insists that they rebuild Jerusalem, its temple and religion
 - d. there really was not much more they could have hoped for—it was like a dream already
2. the psalmist even states that the other nations of the world recognized the hand of Jehovah in their return, probably in a way unseen since their hearts melted as Joshua’s armies first stormed across Canaan

B. Song (3)

1. the third verse is like a little song within the psalm—“The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad.”
2. sometimes people forget to acknowledge God as giver at all and other times they wonder just how much he has to do with their prosperity as they consider their own diligent effort, but the events behind Psalm 126 leave no room for doubting his involvement

C. Prayer (4)

1. verse four shifts immediately to a prayer that God would continue this restoration and augment it with the revival of blessing upon a nation beginning its second infancy
2. as the river beds dry up during the hot, dry summers in the desert, the people beg for relief and here the writer is echoing that hope that blessing might rain down upon Judah

D. Promise (5-6)

1. the psalm closes with a somewhat surprising refrain about sowing and reaping
2. strangely enough, the thing sown is tears and the harvest reaped is joy
 - a. we hear of someone investing his blood, sweat and tears into some endeavor, and maybe that is the same idea found here
 - b. one must invest his emotion and his hope in everything meaningful that he does or is sure to fall short of what might have been

II. Some Applications

A. Captivity

1. according to fulfilled prophecy, the captivity of Judah lasted 70 years from beginning to end, when the remnant returned by royal decree and began the work described in Haggai and Zechariah
 - a. this captivity was a punishment, an embarrassment, a shock, a devastation and a necessity

b. it got Judah's attention and led to reformation of many ills, thinning out the population of idolaters and infidels so that a purer remnant could emerge and maintain the bloodline of David to the time of Jesus

2. and from Israel's earlier Egyptian captivity, combined with the more recent lessons learned there in Medo-Persia, the Bible writers assemble great wisdom about liberation from enslavement

a. Jesus started that line of thinking among a population even then under the thumb of Caesar so that they could not appoint their own monarch or enforce the Law of Moses completely (John 8:31-36)

b. becoming free indeed is what they should have been after, but instead, they were not even honest about being citizens of a Gentile empire, from which God had no obvious interest in liberating them

3. the picture of Christ involves liberation from a more powerful enemy—Satan himself, who employs temptation and deception to enslave the weak and heavy-laden

a. in Romans 7, Paul describes mature man as “sold under sin” and captive to the law of sin which enslaves his body (14, 23)

b. as sure as Judah struggled to survive in Persia, sinners languish in iniquity without mercy from the despotic lord of their blemished spirits, yet Christ wants them to “come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil” through repentance (see Second Timothy 2:26)

4. in a better vain than the Mosaic demand that Pharaoh let God's people go to worship, Jesus lays down his life that believers might escape the snare of sin and guilt (Hebrews 2:14-15)

a. Paul writes that Jesus ascended on high and led captivity captive as he gave gifts to men, explaining that he descended into the tomb like any other man but emerged back to life like none before him or since (Ephesians 4:8-10)

b. obedient believers become “the Lord's freedmen” regardless of their own stations in life (see First Corinthians 7:22)—children of God and heirs of eternity (see Galatians 4:7)

B. Among The Nations

1. we also gain a reminder in this psalm that the nations roundabout the kingdom of God are interested in its affairs, sometimes from a perspective of admiration and envy, but at other times with disdain and hatred

a. in the case of the restoration the psalmist describes, the nations acknowledged God's blessing upon the remnant of Judah

b. later peoples would openly oppose the restoration work, including the reconstruction of the city walls in the time of Nehemiah

2. what do the nations see when they look at us—not Europeans looking at Americans, but unbelievers and sectarians looking at churches of Christ?

3. sometimes they look on with admiration and envy—when they see a band of people basking in morality, forgiveness, joy and peace (Galatians 5:22-23)

a. when we display all the fruit of the Holy Spirit, they cannot help but envy the results of a godly lifestyle even if they are unprepared to make the same commitment

b. this is especially true when Christians hold up well under trying circumstances (Philippians 1:12-14)

4. yet the same sentiment that made righteous Lot an object of hatred in Sodom is alive today among those who expect to find spiritual peace in humanistic endeavors that deny the God who made them and revile the people who serve him (First John 3:10-13)

5. our relationship with the world around us is sometimes complicated, but really only when we entangle ourselves in sordid affairs

a. we must refuse to become of the world even while remaining in it (see Romans 12:1-2)

b. we must endeavor to let our light shine into its darkest recesses (see Matthew 5:13-16)

c. we must be prepared to defend our faith before seeker and scoffer alike (see First Peter 3:15)

C. Sowing Tears and Reaping Joy

1. the return from Babylon to Judah was not without its hardships and disappointments; ultimately, the people took almost two decades to rebuild the temple after they became distracted by their own circumstances and then were distressed at the simple results

2. here is an unexpected lesson on perseverance, for great joy often comes only at the other end of an investment of tears, emotion, hope and longsuffering

3. as the sinful woman invested her tears in anointing the feet of Jesus, disciples today must invest

their efforts and capital in the hope of winning converts to Christ from among a lost and dying world (Second Corinthians 2:14-17)

a. Jesus wept over Lazarus and Paul reported soaking his epistles with tears of concern and regret (see Second Corinthians 2:4)

b. we may even shed a few tears when our best efforts at sharing Christ seem to fail, when we are rebuffed, perhaps even with malice, but we only fail if we fail to try or to continue

4. if you hope to bring in any sheaves at the harvest time, you must begin now sowing tears of expectation and even occasional disappointment

Conclusion

The one hundred twenty-sixth psalm is a song of triumph which acknowledges that great victories are gained through many tears. Don't be afraid to shed a few and pin your hopes on serving Christ with patience and hope.

Psalm 127: Unless the Lord Builds the House

Introduction

The Songs of Ascents continue with the eighth installment, called Psalm 127. Two of our most cherished Bible quotations originate in this work that is often attributed to Solomon and does indeed consider the same theme as the book of Ecclesiastes. [Read Psalm 127:1-5.] Although the psalm is readily divided into two sections, the entire song is about human endeavors that will only succeed with the favor of God. Verses 1-2 touch on building houses and protecting cities, while verses 3-5 describe the blessing of the home.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Unless the Lord (1-2)

1. at least one American President has taken the oath of office with his hand upon this particular text, in recognition of the fact that without God, every undertaking is destined to fail
 - a. the psalmist did not have America in mind, however, but more simply, the house in which any family lives
 - b. unless we couch every endeavor in God's will and seek to glorify him with every construction, we are laboring in futility
 - c. when families are made without consideration of shared convictions and decisions are made without concern for God's approval, we begin building a house without the Lord and our labor is vain at best
2. in the same vein, the watchman cannot protect a city if the Lord is not interested in guarding it
 - a. in spite of his best, caffeinated efforts, the watchman's cries will be but futile if God wants the city to be disciplined
 - b. he might as well turn in early if God is not for him
3. but then again, it is also vain to rise early to get to work or stay up late to work overtime if God does not approve what it is you are working at; you will only eat the bread of sorrows, not success
4. unless the Lord approves your effort, it must fail

B. Children (3-5)

1. part of building a house goes beyond brick and mortar to the people that truly comprise the house even when they are not in it
2. children are a gift from God—a heritage and reward to help sustain the house
3. especially in that bygone era, having children—especially sons—offered a patriarch strength and defense against enemies
4. for that reason, Solomon compares children to arrows in the hand of a warrior or in his quiver

II. Some Applications

A. Building a House

1. the lesson of the first part of Psalm 127 is that whatever we undertake to do, it must meet with God's approval or be utterly in vain
 - a. Solomon's father learned this lesson when he decided to build God a temple (First Chronicles 17:1-10)
 - b. likewise, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter wanted to build three tabernacles for Elijah, Moses and Jesus, but the Lord did not wish it (see Matthew 17:4-5)
 - c. Solomon's own building has been called reckless, in that his kingdom became a wasteful disgrace and his multiple marriages an insult to the one true God
2. Jesus warned, "Every plant which my heavenly father has not planted will be uprooted" (Matthew 15:13).
 - a. we need to ask the same question that Peter asked before he began gathering building supplies—"Lord ... if you wish"
 - b. what do we endeavor to build?
3. Proverbs 14:1 says that, "The wise woman builds her house, But the foolish pulls it down with her hands."
 - a. a truly wise woman like Hannah, the mother of Samuel, or Eunice, the mother of Timothy,

builds her house upon natural affection and upon spiritual things

b. she sees to the physical and religious nutrition of her family, offering them a good example to follow and sound discipline in trying times

4. we also seek to build up the church, but may we attempt to do so through any means at all or in ways that God approves?

a. God approves church-building with evangelism, or teaching his word, for the gospel is his power to salvation and faith comes by hearing God's word (see Romans 1:16, 10:17)

b. there is no room in church-building for bribery, trickery, and carnality

5. people also tend to love their country and hope for its survival; Psalm 33:12 says, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, The people he has chosen as his own inheritance."

a. of course, that is not America, but a statement about God's people

b. it is hard to argue that Jehovah is America's God when he has been expelled from the schoolhouse, dismissed from the courthouse and sometimes even ignored at the church house

c. unless the Lord approves us, we are building in vain

B. Vigilance

1. what about the watchman who strives to stay awake, but the psalmist says he is wasting his waking hours unless God wants the city to survive?

2. vigilance still matters to us today, even without city watchmen sitting in a tower ready to cry out

a. "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2)

b. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (First Peter 5:8).

c. "be serious and watchful in your prayers (see First Peter 4:8)

d. "But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (Second Timothy 4:5).

3. that's a fair amount of vigilance, in prayer, temptation and contemplation, not to mention in ministry and also by those who shepherd the flock (see Hebrews 13:17)

a. but what difference does it make "unless the Lord guards the city"?

b. well, now, we are not talking about cities, but about individuals, and Christ is our Chief Shepherd, with whom we cooperate when we are watchful over ourselves and others as well (Luke 21:34-36)

c. when you are watchful in prayer, temptation, ministry and shepherding with the intent of overcoming sin and upholding holiness, you can know that the Lord is likewise on guard (Hebrews 7:24-25)

C. Sleep

1. Psalm 127:2 sounds pretty good to teenagers on summer vacation or college students about any time of year—"It is vain to rise up early"

2. but this is not to encourage idleness, but to remind the reader that your best efforts are futile if God does not approve

3. sleep, however, is a subject that we rarely touch upon in our Bible studies, yet it is a blessing of God for our bodies, souls and spirits

a. much of our physical healing and emotional healing takes place while we sleep; body aches are eased over night and hurts of the heart seem less acute by morning's light as well

b. one commentator says that, "Often when we are doing nothing for ourselves God is doing most."

4. people can ruin their lives by not getting enough sleep or by being idle too much, by sleeping through appointments that matter—like study, worship, class and work

5. sleep is part of God's construction of the body and it is necessary to renew the spirit as well

D. Children

1. children are a heritage of the Lord—an expensive and exasperating heritage

a. so why do people keep having them?

b. because in spite of all the expense and frustration, they bring more joy and hope into life than anything else except for redemption itself

2. they are a gift from God that must be stewarded and shepherded with him in mind, or we are simply building in vain again

- a. Proverbs 10:1 says, “A wise son makes a glad father, But a foolish son is the grief of his mother.”
- b. how much of that is dependent upon the parent, however (Proverbs 22:6, 15)?

Conclusion

Psalm 127 gives us two great quotations, but the theme is singular. Unless God approves your effort, it must ultimately fail.

Psalm 128: Blessed Is Everyone Who Feels the Lord

Introduction

If I told you the great blessing of heeding Psalm 128 would be the presence of olive plants around your table, you might not be too impressed. The ancient language, of course, meets the limitations of our modern comprehension, but there is something splendid about the promise of this short song as it regards our families. [Read Psalm 128:1-6.] In Psalm 128, we learn that families are blessed when their members trust in God. It is the ninth Song of Ascents with family as its theme.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Blessedness in the Lord (1-4)

1. there is a connection between fearing God, walking in his ways and receiving his blessing
 - a. nowhere is that more evident than in the history of Israel whose fear of God resulted in obedience and national blessing until idolatry and apostasy intervened and eventually God divorced the whole country
 - b. blessings can be the simple fulfillment of needs or something beyond that; blessings can be purely spiritual and emotional; blessings can be entirely future and eternal—but blessed is everyone who fears the Lord
2. fearing the Lord is not complete unless it translates into an obedient lifestyle; walking in his ways is submitting to his guidance and his will especially when it might initially seem to conflict with our own
3. and the blessing in this song is about the state of a man's home when he fears God
 - a. he will find honest labor that allows him to supply all of his needs
 - b. his wife will be faithful and fruitful as the heart of his home
 - c. his children will be vigorous and vital
4. but this blessing suggests more to us than that the man simply let go and waited for it to happen; he labors diligently and honestly, supports his wife and makes her know she matters to him, and leads his children with discipline and affection

B. Benediction (5-6)

1. the last two verses form something of a benediction to the song, binding together the state of the family with the condition of the nation
2. family and the home have always been the backbone of every society and when homes become broken in large numbers, societies usually begin to fail as well
3. we admire those homes that persevere in this age of celebrated immorality and hat-drop divorce
4. one of the other great blessings of such homes is the eventual presence of grandchildren

II. Some Applications

A. Fearing the Lord

1. the fear of the Lord is a very common Bible subject and one supposes that it was easy to comprehend in the days when Jehovah would thunder from a mountain or strike sinners dead on the spot, but such is not his way of communicating today
 - a. the fear of God is a favorite subject of the largest pure repository of wisdom known to man, the Biblical proverbs (Proverbs 3:1-12)
 - b. part of fearing God is departing from those things he judges to be evil and the outcome is improvement in one's physical and emotional health, because the guilt of sin takes its toll as long as a person is excusing his iniquity rather than confronting it
2. fearing God and keeping his commandments is described as the whole duty of man, and "Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before him" (Ecclesiastes 8:12).
3. the fear of God is sometimes an expression without teeth, for to fear God requires walking in his ways, and anything less is not real fear
 - a. when Jonah fled from the face of God onto a ship to Tarshish, he informed the sailors: "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and dry land" (Jonah 1:9), but his fear did not make him obedient

- b. Noah found grace in God’s eyes because he sought it by walking in integrity (see Genesis 6:6-9)
- c. Moses found grace because his heart was inclined to serve the Lord in everything (see Exodus 33:17)
- d. Jonah was graciously freed from the fish’s belly when he repented of his stubbornness
- 4. many, however, don’t want the judgmental, demanding God of the Old Testament, but the gracious, kind God of the New Testament, yet they are one in the same
 - a. Peter writes simply, “Fear God” in First Peter 2:17, while John cautions against allowing that fear to become terror (First John 4:17-19)
 - b. fear with respect, but not terror is obedient without complaint or doubt, knowing that every law of God is for man’s good

B. Happy

- 1. modern people seem to be obsessed with creating their own brand of happiness; we are inundated with hobbies, activities, self-help manuals, and pills to take away the pain
- 2. to listen to some preachers, anything that makes you happy has the divine stamp of approval, but to listen to others, God doesn’t care if you’re happy or morose
- 3. Psalm 128 is about how people can be happy at home without resorting to sin; happiness, or joy, is fruit—evidence or result—of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and having influence over our own spirits (Galatians 5:22); a lack of joy suggests that we are not making enough room in our hearts for him at all
- 4. happiness does not require sin, of course, and should evaporate because of guilt; “Happy is the man who is always reverent, But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity” (Proverbs 28:14).
 - a. this concept of happiness is one of blessing just like the psalm and just like the beatitudes; there is an unbreakable connection between receiving divine blessing and enjoying true happiness and hope
 - b. “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; But happy is he who keeps the law” (Proverbs 29:18).

C. Prosperity of the Community

- 1. the development of the nation of Israel shows how one family with 12 sons evolved into a nation of 12 tribes, and also how the nation that resulted was dependent upon the moral soundness of the families that made up those tribes once their population reached hundreds of thousands
- 2. empires and nations have continued to depend upon the family for cohesiveness, and the modern practice of creating breakable families has become a great threat to our society
 - a. whether it is carelessly making children outside of wedlock or subjecting them to broken homes afterward, the sexual sin and selfishness involved bring great harm upon succeeding generations
 - b. sadly, Christians are not immune from this and are sometimes the victims of a sinful spouse and we have nothing but sympathy for them
- 3. the question must involve what we can do to prevent familial breakdown (Colossians 3:18-21)
 - a. father, in spite of working hard and desiring to pursue hobbies and interests, must be engaged with his wife and children and grow with them as a true leader in the home, not an absentee caretaker
 - b. mother, in spite of modern liberties to work outside the home and pursue many other interests, must understand that her first priority is not self, but the home—being a helpmeet to her husband and loving manager to her children (cf. First Timothy 5:14)
 - c. children, in spite of peers who are left to fend for themselves, must respect their parents and let them into their lives and activities (cf. Ephesians 6:1-4)

D. Grandchildren

- 1. few realize that since 1978, the Sunday after Labor Day each year is designated Grandparents’ Day, “to honor grandparents, give grandparents a chance to honor grandchildren and to make children aware of the great source of knowledge that can be gained from the elderly”⁵
- 2. Psalm 128 ends with the hope each person has of living long enough to bounce his children’s children on his slightly arthritic knee
- 3. according to the Bible, “Children’s children are the crown of old men” (Proverbs 17:6) and “A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children” (13:22).
- 4. surely the finest way to honor grandchildren and leave them an inheritance is to be serious about fearing God and walking in his ways (Psalm 103:15-18)

Conclusion

Psalm 128 is full of wisdom, especially in a time in which man has pursued his own wisdom to his own injury.

Psalm 129: All Those Who Hate Zion

Introduction

The one hundred twenty-ninth psalm is another song of ascents, thought to have been sung by Hebrew pilgrims as they traveled to Jerusalem for worship. Like Psalm 124, the writer is obviously concerned with his enemies, and the psalm reflects that as it is broken down into two parts. The first four verses are an expression of trust, but the last four verses form an imprecatory request against those enemies. [Read Psalm 129:1-8.] The language strikes Christian readers as unusual because it is so openly opposed to its enemies. And that is where we can make some application—not necessarily of the imprecation, but the revolutionary thoughts of Christ that followed.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. They Have Not Prevailed (1-4)

1. throughout this part of the psalm, Israel is personified as if the entire nation were but one solitary, persecuted individual

2. verse one appears to call for a responsive reading of what appears in verses two and three, if you can imagine such a thing

a. the afflictions of Israel's youth included arduous slavery in Egypt and wandering through the wilderness between there and Canaan for 40 long years (see Hosea 2:15)

b. most societies would have collapsed under the genocidal pressures of the Pharaoh or the nomadic lifestyle of Moses, but Israel survived and even thrived, gaining what was promised after the first generation perished because of complaining and idolatry

3. the plowers plowed on Israel's back—that is, welts were left upon her history as if she were whipped with cords until her injuries appeared as deep as furrows in the field

4. her redemption, though, was from God, so that the cords that held the yoke of slavery around the neck of Israel were cut and she was set free

a. God said about this period, "I remember you, The kindness of your youth, The love of your betrothal, When you went after Me in the wilderness, In a land not sown" (Jeremiah 2:2).

B. All Those Who Hate Zion (5-8)

1. the second half of the psalm is its imprecatory section, in which the psalmist declares his disgust with all those who despise and wrong Israel

2. his wish was that they would be like the grass on a housetop, an image borrowed from middle eastern architecture in which a thin layer of soil is applied to the rooftops of buildings to provide insulation from the extreme heat of the climate; when a rain shower finally came, the grass in the soil sprang to life and sprouted, but the shallowness of the rooftop soil and the return of the hot sun caused it to wither away quickly without bringing about anything that could be useful

3. Zion, or Jerusalem, is very special to the psalmist, in representing God's people and their hopes

a. in some ways, this Zion of the psalm extends beyond a middle eastern city to the promise of the law going forth into all the world to bring redemption to the masses

b. Zion represents hope for the ideal, trust in goodness, and promise for the future, but to see it laid waste by enemies and invaders is to mar that purity and threaten that promise, so the psalmist is not reluctant to oppose such foes, even with dire imprecation

II. Some Applications

A. Zionism

1. the city of Jerusalem was originally a citadel of the Jebusites, inhabitants of the land of Canaan, and the city's name appears at least 400 years before the time of David (Second Samuel 5:6-10)⁶

a. Zion becomes then the city of David and the term begins to encompass not only the city limits, but also the temple hill where the presence of God was manifested (see Isaiah 4:5)

b. the poets and prophets use Zion as a parallel term for the whole city

2. today, we are familiar with the term, "Zionism," which is the "Movement founded by the Viennese Jewish journalist Theodor Herzl, who argued in his 1896 book *Der Judenstaat* (*The Jewish State*) that the best way of avoiding anti-Semitism in Europe was to create an independent Jewish state in Palestine. Zionism was named after Mount Zion in Jerusalem, a symbol of the Jewish homeland in

Palestine since the Babylonian captivity in the 6th century B.C. The movement culminated in the birth of the state of Israel in 1948.”⁷

a. that homeland carved out of the largely Muslim Middle East, is the epicenter of so much conflict even today that sometimes the fate of the world seems to hang with it in the balance

b. to Protestant Premillennialists, its expansion back to Israel’s ancient borders is the key to establishing God’s mythical earthly kingdom⁸

3. there are seven references to Zion in the New Testament, each one pointing Israel not in the direction of national restoration, but spiritual redemption

a. Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15 are parallel accounts of Christ’s entry into Jerusalem where the Messiah would be hanged upon a cross: “Tell the daughter of Zion, “Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey”” (Matthew 21:5).

b. Peter and Paul both made reference to the coming of Christ as a stumbling block to obstinate, unbelieving Israel: “Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, “Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on him will by no means be put to shame” (First Peter 2:6; cf. Romans 9:33).

c. the potential for massive salvation in Israel did not rely upon a powerful general or nuclear weapons, but humility at the feet of peaceful, teaching savior they chose to reject (Romans 11:26-27)

d. the Hebrew writer looked right past the Zion on the map to an invisible one that numbered Jews and Gentiles among its purified population (Hebrews 12:18-24)

e. the last word on Zion is not about military conquest or earthly thrones, but heavenly peace (Revelation 14:1-5)

4. opinions on Zionism, the state of Israel and a Palestinian homeland are mostly matters of temporal politics, with little direct bearing on the kingdom of Christ; our focus should remain on preaching the gospel to Jews, Muslims and anyone who will listen, for Christ is the savior for all mankind

B. Enemies

1. the words of imprecation in the Old Testament always sound very harsh to modern ears trained on the doctrines of Christ and his apostles

2. in Psalm 129, the writer inveighs against the enemies of the state with withering animosity, but we must remember that he wrote in a different time under a different covenant

3. our attitude about our enemies cannot include hatred toward them or a desire to do them violence (Matthew 5: 43-48)

a. complete discipleship has no room for such bitterness, instead choosing to assault one’s enemies with kindness and goodness

b. sometimes, because of the gospel, “a man’s enemies will be those of his own household” (Matthew 10:36), but even then he must rise above the temptation to seek advantage or vengeance (Romans 12:17-21)

4. the key in approaching one’s enemies—especially “enemies of the cross” (Philippians 3:18)—is to remember that we were all once sinners and enemies of Christ (Colossians 1:21-22)

C. The Cords of the Wicked

1. what rescued us from that sinful lifestyle was not our own perfection, but Christ’s perfect sacrifice and our faith in it

2. like the psalmist who saw Israel’s yoke of bondage cut by God and Moses, so the disciples of Christ are emancipated by a heavenly redeemer whose truth set us free (John 8:31-32)

3. the next challenge becomes remaining free (Proverbs 5:21-23)

4. Paul writes, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (Galatians 5:1).

a. sin is deceptively enticing and false doctrines appear to promise liberty and license, but are in reality just disguised forms of new slavery (Second Peter 2:19)

b. “You therefore ... be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus ... No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier” (Second Timothy 1:1,4)

Conclusion

That is where we can make some application—not necessarily of the imprecation, but the revolutionary thoughts of Christ that followed.

Psalm 130: Lord, Hear My Voice!

Introduction

With the imprecation of Psalm 129 behind us, the writer of Psalm 130 turns his ascending mind to the matter of his own need for divine mercy. From the darkness of sin and guilt, he reaches out to the Lord who alone possesses such mercy and compassion. Psalm 130 is one of the seven so-called penitential psalms, in addition to being a song of ascents. [Read Psalm 130:1-8.] Long before the coming of Christ, soft-hearted sinners recognized their lost condition and earnestly sought a solution that would allow them to escape iniquity and regain God's favor. The humble and contrite attitude expressed in this song was what put them on that path toward redemption in Jesus yet to come.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Hear My Voice (1-2)

1. the psalmist begins this portion of his ascent to worship with a desperate cry of anguish out of the depths of sorrow

2. many are brought to such desperation by life-changing or life-threatening circumstances like the death of a loved one, a grave personal illness, immersion in danger, the illness of a child or national tragedy like 9/11 or the Great Depression

3. others are brought to a sense of emptiness when their souls are chilled by the sudden awareness of their own personal sinfulness

a. King Josiah rent his clothes in terror and disappointment when the Law of Moses was discovered in a temple remodeling project and he understood how much Judah had violated God's will (see Second Kings 22:11)

b. Ezra the restorer tore his robe and garment and even plucked out some of the hairs from his head and beard in utter astonishment that his countrymen had mingled their lives and faith with the heathen (see Ezra 9:3)

c. Nehemiah, his contemporary, wept and mourned and fasted and prayed for many days when he heard about the condition of the Jerusalem that he loved and which this psalmist is approaching

4. when one finds himself under assault by the devil and no one on Earth is capable of helping him, his only hope is that God will be attentive and listen to his supplications, and there is no pit deeper or blacker than guilt

B. Who Could Stand (3-4)

1. guilt, however, is in no wise assuaged if God simply keeps a permanent record of everyone of man's sins without offering some means by which the ledger can be zeroed out

2. who could stand if God simply marked iniquities the way a teacher paints with red ink the homework of a poor student?

3. with God, though, there is grace by which man is moved to reverence God in gratitude and worship

4. this is the part of the process that Jonah could not understand and did not want to see extended to his enemies, for God desires to show mercy to all men and whosoever will submit to the gospel invitation can be redeemed and made to stand before him

C. I Wait For The Lord (5-6)

1. as the watchman stands in the tower waiting for the first evidence of a breaking dawn, so the writer waits for the Lord and hopes in his promises

2. no matter how long or dark or stormy the night becomes, morning always comes eventually and brings light and life out of the shadows and into plain view

3. think of a child afraid of the dark and the thunder and unable to sleep or the student or businessman suffering insomnia because of anxiety for the following day

4. and then apply all of that anxiety to guilt over sin and gratitude for grace—that is where the psalmist cries out from

D. Hope In The Lord (7-8)

1. his anguish is eased a bit because of God's promise of mercy and abundant redemption

2. when you give a bum on the street a quarter, you have eased his burden slightly, but if you should give him a home and a job and a family and a purpose, you have redeemed him abundantly
3. you might say that he does not deserve it and you might be right, but neither do you when it comes to what God does in the interest of providing you with abundant redemption from the darkness into which you walked willingly

II. Some Applications

A. God's Attentiveness

1. in Lamentations 3:55, Jeremiah wrote, "I called on Your name, O LORD, From the lowest pit. You have heard my voice: 'Do not hide Your ear From my sighing, from my cry for help.' You drew near on the day I called on You, And said, 'Do not fear!'"
2. many people sometimes question the attentiveness of God, but in this psalmist's request, there is no such doubt in evidence
3. Solomon made that kind of request at the dedication of his temple, and God also made reply (Second Chronicles 7:12-14)
4. David, another psalmist, wrote from the depths of guilt that, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:17).
 - a. penitence and humility get God's attention in a world full of self-will, excuses and rebellion (James 4:7-10)
 - b. penitence and submission do not guarantee that one will receive everything he prays for, except in the department of forgiveness, and in the end, that's the only category that carries eternal weight anyway

B. Marking Iniquities

1. forgiveness is a matter of erasing marks of iniquity from the massive ledger in the mind of God which records every deed done among men; Job said, "If I sin, then You mark me, And will not acquit me of my iniquity" (10:14).
2. if God simply added debits and credits to our account, we would always be lacking in balance; the only solution to the marks in the sin column is grace wrought by the blood of his own perfect son
3. the will of God is that you do not sin, but there is a solution if you do sin, but don't take that as permission to go ahead and sin (First John 2:1-2)
4. the solution includes a confession of sin (First John 1:5-10)
 - a. public confession requires some degree of discretion, but enough specificity so that others can understand what it is that you regret and need help in changing
 - b. private prayer can be completely open for there is nothing about which God is ignorant
5. an omnipotent, omniscient God has the power to make our sin as if it never occurred (Hebrews 10:15-18)

C. Patient Soul

1. we live in an impatient age of rocket ships to the moon, microwave popcorn in two minutes and the expectation that God will hear and grant our every wish in 30 minutes or the pizza's free
2. somewhere, though, we have to regain the patience of the psalmist who was willing to wait on the Lord with a sense of expectation tempered by trust and patience (James 5:7-11)
 - a. Paul recommends a lifestyle marked by "patient continuance in doing good" as we "seek for glory, honor, and immortality" (Romans 2:7)
 - b. he told Timothy that a servant of the Lord must be patient (Second Timothy 2:24), for the patient and faithful inherit the promises (Hebrews 6:12)
3. the ironic thing is that patience is produced when it is tried (James 1:2-4)
 - a. patience is produced by waiting at red lights, watching water boil, and helping a four-year-old learn to tie his own shoes
 - b. patience is produced by sweating out anxious moments, waiting for test results and refraining from jumping to pessimistic conclusions
4. patience forbids us to seek personal vengeance upon our enemies or immoral solutions to our problems (solutions like lying, cheating or stealing) as we wait on God to sort things out in his time and way (Romans 12:17-21)

D. Abundant Redemption

1. when he does sort things out, the resolution is one of abundant redemption through mercy (John 10:7-11)
2. abundant redemption is not about riches or popularity or power, but about being delivered from a body of death by obeying from the heart that form of doctrine which is the gospel (see Romans 6:17)
3. God might not lift us out of the depths of illness or bankruptcy or disappointment right away, but abundant redemption means he will raise us up forever when he does

Conclusion

The humble and contrite attitude expressed in this song was what put them on that path toward redemption in Jesus yet to come.

Psalm 131: Like a Weaned Child Is My Soul

Introduction

Psalm 131 is yet another song of ascents (120-134), which were hymns sung as pilgrims traveled up to Jerusalem to celebrate the great feasts. This particular prayer of humble trust is brief and attributed to the pen of David. [Read Psalm 131:1-3.] In just a few words, the poet eloquently recounts his own experience with a God who soothed his troubled spirit in some moment of great despair. Despite its brevity—actually because of it—this song takes a sweet place in the heart of every saint who hopes in the Lord.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. My Heart Is Not Haughty (1)

1. if anyone ever had reason to make himself arrogant and aloof from God and man, it might have been King David, the handsome young warrior and eventual mighty king
2. and perhaps that is exactly his point—in spite of his blessings, David refuses to allow himself the luxury of pride, of a haughty heart or lofty eyes which look down upon his subjects with disdain and apathy
3. David recognized that there were certain matters that were beyond his human comprehension and he was content not to know the answers to such questions
4. haughtiness is often found among the rich, the educated, the attractive, the innovative, and sometimes even among the religious, but it has no place among men, for God promised to “save the humble people, But ... bring down haughty looks” (Proverbs 18:27)

B. Like a Weaned Child Is My Soul (2)

1. Hebrew children were often not weaned from the breast until three years old, but David compares himself to a secure and contented child beside his patient mother
2. most people think that a life of self-centeredness and proud accomplishment will render them happy and fulfilled, but by its very nature, such a life is more likely to bring isolation and disappointment, as God and others are left behind in the pursuit of self-will
3. David had his moments, but to be a man after God’s heart, he surely learned very hard lessons about finding contentment, calmness and quiet in truth and righteousness instead

C. Hope in the Lord (3)

1. the final verse of the short song seeks to share this blissful attitude with a broader community
2. hoping in the Lord must include the kind of trust that derives from humility, contentment and calm
3. what would the world be like if the principles of Christ were followed universally?

II. Some Applications

A. Profound Things

1. the word of God is not without profundity, but the essence is revealed in simplicity (see Second Corinthians 11:3)
 - a. questions of morality, worship, the nature of man and God are really not all that complicated
 - b. they only become complicated to us when sin intervenes and one is looking for a loophole or an escape clause, to validate sin as a choice
 - c. believers tend to divide, not over what the Bible says, but what it does not say
2. as David lay dying, he cautioned his son and successor to choose a simpler life (First Kings 2:1-4)
 - a. that final audience has always reminded me of the words of a famous poem by Rudyard Kipling, entitled “If”

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings - nor lose the common touch;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute

With sixty seconds' worth of distance run -
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you' ll be a Man my son!

b. in spite of the fact that these men were kings, they were yet required to keep the commandments of the Lord, which today are plunged into derision by modern thinkers and sinners who deride such simplistic notions as objective truth, absolute morality and biblical clarity

3. the temptation for the rich, educated, attractive or innovative is to distance themselves from those they deem common, to look down their noses as the poor, ignorant, ugly or old-fashioned, but the result is usually a very warped perspective and limitation on one's influence (Romans 12:16)

a. be careful about being wise in your own opinion; "Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips" (Proverbs 27:2)

b. there is no greater fool than the man who fancies himself wise

c. the essence of wisdom is recognizing not how much one knows, but how little (cf. First Corinthians 3:18)

4. as for the wisdom of the world, it so often contradicts the clear insight of the Bible and must always be tested against what God has already explained (First Corinthians 1:17-31)

5. and beyond that, there are certain matters of both knowledge and wisdom which are far beyond man's ability to discover or comprehend

a. part of David's contentment was the intellectual acceptance that he could not know everything

b. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29).

B. A Weaned Child

1. David tries to illustrate his contentment by drawing a picture of a weaned child beside his mother

a. David had many opportunities to take Saul's crown for himself, but he always refused to murder the Lord's anointed, even though Saul was constantly trying to kill him

b. in that long ordeal, "He had been as humble as a little child about the age of a weanling, as manageable and governable, and as far from aiming at high things; as entirely at God's disposal as the child at the disposal of the mother or nurse; as far from taking state upon him, though anointed to be king, or valuing himself upon the prospect of his future advancement, as a child in the arms," writes Matthew Henry⁹

2. in spite of Joshua's frustrated disappointment after losing the first battle of Ai, contentment is never found on the other side of the Jordan

a. Joshua said, "Alas, Lord GOD, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all—to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan" (Joshua 7:7)!

b. for us, the other side of the Jordan is a life outside of Christ, lived in sin and futility, and in spite of the fact that we must battle the tempter like tireless soldiers, we must find victory and dwell in the land of promise and its temporal earnest, the church and body of Christ here on Earth

3. beyond intellectual contentment, we must learn to be content with our wages (see Luke 3:14) without growing covetous and materialistic (Hebrews 13:5-6)

a. even if we lose every luxury of life, we must learn the calmness of that weaned child (First Timothy 6:6-12)

b. in whatever state you find yourself, learn to be still

C. Hope in God

1. David hoped that all Israel would share his contentment and develop a sense of hope from it, for hope is "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast" (Hebrews 6:19)

2. when all else fails, hope survives—hope for a better existence, possibly in this life, but certainly in the next

3. Proverbs 13:12 warns "hope deferred makes the heart sick, But when the desire comes, it is a tree of life"

a. temporal hopes are often deferred while we wait for our prayers to be answered in the right time, but eternal hope is certainly deferred until our lives here are finished

b. hope's twin then must be patience (First Thessalonians 1:3); in fact, the Old Testament was

preserved so “that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4)

c. the end intended by the Lord always includes compassion and mercy and the stories of the Bible emphasize this point so that modern readers can gain patience and comfort as they wait and hope

4. “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5)

Conclusion

Psalm 131 is a very brief song about the power of humble trust in a world of arrogance toward spiritual things.

Psalm 132: Lord, Remember David

Introduction

Psalm 132 is a royal psalm and a song of ascents, with emphasis first upon King David (1-9) and then the ark of the covenant (10-18). Each part begins with a petition on behalf of David or upon his descendants at the very least. [Read Psalm 132:1-18.] Matthew Henry suggests that Solomon is the probable author of Psalm 132 and that it was sung at the dedication of the temple, and indeed verses 8-10 find their way into that account in Second Chronicles 6:41-42.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Remember David (10)

1. the writer begins by asking God to remember David and his affection for the Lord, for whom he yearned to build a house of worship
2. David's dream of building him a temple, however, was sidetracked by his own presumption (Second Samuel 7:1-10)
3. like Peter, who thought to build three tabernacles for Jesus, Moses and Elijah, David's heart was in the right place, but it was difficult for him not to presume that the plan had divine favor, as is evident from the hyperbole of verses 2-5
4. so the writer points not to himself, but to David, whose intentions were so pious and whose plans laid the groundwork for the temple to which these worshipers now ascend
5. verses 6-9 seem to describe the period in which the ark of the covenant was not in Jerusalem, but in the fields of the woods, or Kirjath Jearim, during the lifetime of Samuel (First Samuel 7:1-2)
 - a. it remained there until the time of David (First Chronicles 13:1-14)
 - b. but a temple was not constructed until his son took power (Second Chronicles 6:40-7:1)

B. The Lord Has Sworn to David (11-18)

1. God made a covenant with David, who was a man after his own heart, to perpetuate his reign upon the throne of Israel by setting up his descendants to reign after him (Second Samuel 7:12-16)
2. Zion, or Jerusalem, was God's choice for the location of the ark of the covenant, the symbol of his presence, authority and providence, but every part of that milieu merely pointed toward the establishment of the church of Christ
3. Jesus is the son of David who sits upon his father's throne even now, reigning over the kingdom (Matthew 21:1-11)

II. Some Applications

A. Best Laid Plans

1. I think we can all understand David's yearning to build the temple, and although God resisted his plan, it was not because David was only thinking of himself or was planning to build it on the backs of the poor
2. God rejected David's plan because it was presumptuous—David presumed that God needed a house to give him more glory, but clearly he did not for “God, who made the world and everything in it, since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24).
3. earlier we mentioned Peter, who had a similar construction crisis (Matthew 17:1-5)
4. sometimes there is a disconnection between our own plans and what we are hearing from Jesus through the New Testament, and for that reason, individuals enter into sin and call it righteousness and churches enter into recreation, business and other extensions of the social gospel and call it religion
 - a. hearing Jesus and the apostles prevents the kind of presumption that both David and Peter approached
 - b. everything we do, individually or collectively, becomes couched in terms of Christ's will rather than our own (cf. Colossians 3:17, James 4:17)
5. put simply and somewhat tritely, the end does not always justify the means and even a noble end does not justify unscriptural means, no matter how harmless they may appear
 - a. the silence of God must be honored, so that we refrain from presumption, the sin of the self-willed (cf. Second Peter 2:10)
 - b. God's word is sufficient to direct us into any necessary and good work, without leaving it to

us to presume in the fashion of David (Psalm 19:7-14)

B. Hands Off

1. in the midst of the story, we meet a man named Uzzah, who was helping to transport the ark, although not in the way that God had commanded
 - a. Exodus 25:14 and Numbers 4:15 stated that the ark should have been carried by poles placed through rings in the ark
 - b. David, however, presumed again to construct a new cart to make the move easier, or perhaps more dramatic, but it did not turn out to be more functional, for the oxen stumbled and the ark was disturbed
 - c. Uzzah carelessly stretched out his hand to catch the box, but by touching it, he irreverently sinned and was immediately struck dead by God as a punishment
2. most would defend Uzzah for his good intentions in the heat of the moment, or that he was the victim of David's scheming, and while all that might be true, it does nothing to change what he did
 - a. the Bible has fallen into such disregard among religious people that most churches have their own creed books and are only too willing to abandon the New Testament when it conflicts with modern morality or the plans they envision
 - b. it is hard for most to accept that some works and plans and deeds are off limits and out of bounds
3. true reverence bends before God's will and never asks it to bend for the human mind, speaking only as his oracles and doing all things by his authority (Ephesians 5:8-10)

C. After God's Own Heart

1. in spite of his occasional petulance and ignominious sins, David was a man after God's own heart, because he was penitent, contrite and willing to do all of God's will (cf. Acts 13:22)
2. David learned harsh lessons from events like these, and he learned that greater devotion comes from humility and submissiveness, rather than constant assertiveness and self-will
3. we seek to be people after God's own heart, that is, of his character, who have received with meekness the implanted word which is able to save our souls (Second Peter 1:2-4)
4. daily recall that God is love and becoming people after his own heart means allowing love to permeate more deeply in our souls and to be expressed more thoroughly among our neighbors (First Peter 2:22-25)

D. Jesus, Son of David

1. Jesus Christ is the eternal creator of all the universe and yet in the interest of human salvation, he humbled himself to become the son of one of his creatures, the son of David (Matthew 22:41-46)
2. it would humble, or even humiliate, me, to become submissive or somehow inferior to my own son, who is but 33 years my junior, yet Jesus was willing to be perceived as a mere descendant of David, whom he created
3. when we talk about the sacrifice of Christ, we are not only talking about the indignities that occurred on the cross (Philippians 2:5-11)
4. Jesus, the son of David, is our Lord and God (Second Timothy 2:8-13)

Conclusion

Psalm 132 is a royal psalm and a song of ascents, with emphasis first upon King David and the ark.

Psalm 133: Running Down the Beard of Aaron

Introduction

Psalm 133 is the next-to-last song of ascents and a wisdom psalm also in its own right. It is a good and pleasant song, even if its imagery is a little unusual to modern ears. [Read Psalm 133:1-3.] The whole song is about one essential idea—that brotherly unity is good and pleasant.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Dwelling Together (1)

1. few things in life are both good and pleasant and even when people choose to dwell together, it often does not remain both good and pleasant for long
 - a. it is sadly true that familiarity breeds contempt, and before long college dorm roommates, military people and even spouses find it hard to describe their dwelling together as either good or pleasant
 - b. brethren do not as often dwell together in such close quarters, but they travel together through life in local congregations as part of “the household of God, which is the church of the living God” (First Timothy 3:15)
2. it is only good and pleasant when they dwell, not just together, but in a state of unity
3. how sad it is to witness fleshly siblings who cannot get along and who are constantly at each other’s throats, but when it occurs among spiritual siblings, it dishonors Christ and brings the church under suspicion and derision among outsiders

B. Aaron’s Oily Beard (2)

1. I doubt that too many people here today would have equated Aaron’s oily beard with the ultimate in goodness and pleasantness, but there is a reason for such odd language
2. this precious oil was the holy anointing oil, by which Aaron the priest and his successors, could come to minister before the Lord, and it was strongly perfumed with a scent sweetened by nature and deity
 - a. the holy anointing oil was olive oil mixed with four of the best spices known to the Israelites (see Exodus 30:22, 25, 30)
 - b. it was poured over the head of Aaron and ran down his face, even to the collar of his coat, as if there was no limit or restriction to the overflow of the blessing and grace it symbolized
3. brotherly unity is like that when it exists in profusion rather than under threat, limitation and dearth

C. The Dew of Hermon (3)

1. moreover, brotherly unity proves fruitful in evangelism and stability, like the copious volume of dew which fell on Mount Hermon and with its life-giving draught upon Zion
2. spiritual Zion, the church, is even better-equipped to drink in the blessing of unity and the objective of life forevermore for as many as will walk the old paths

II. Some Applications

A. Brotherly Unity

1. when we think of brotherly unity, there are many negative examples throughout the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, where fleshly family defines the kingdom
 - a. the disunity of Cain and Abel readily illustrates the modern issue that arises when brethren are divided because of error, pride or envy (Genesis 4:1-8)
 - b. Abraham and Lot were actually uncle and nephew but the strife in their relationship is also familiar to us when we struggle to remain united amidst competing agendas and ambitions (Genesis 13:5-8)
2. the kingdom of Christ is not just a physical family like these, for we become brethren by rebirth rather than birth, and yet often our unity is threatened by many of the same designs
 - a. that we should be united is beyond question (John 17:20-23)
 - b. what unites us is not the same thing that unites business partners or teammates, but a higher, brotherly love, for “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is the Christ is the born of God, and everyone who loves him who begot also loves him who is begotten of him” (First John 5:1).

c. it is a matter of mutual concern and edification that defines our brotherhood (Ephesians 4:11-16)

3. but it is more than affection that defines unity; it is also an agreement about our convictions, the truth that sanctifies the Christian and sets him apart from unbelievers and heretics

a. in matters of opinion and personal scruple, we are united in spite of differences, but in matters of the faith and divine direction, we must be “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (First Corinthians 1:10)

b. and that doctrinal unity takes effort (Ephesians 4:1-6)

4. “let brotherly love continue,” says the Hebrew writer (13:1); this we do by pursuing “the things which make for peace” (Romans 14:19)—“and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14)

5. we must not stop loving our brethren and hoping for unity, even when it is threatened by selfishness, or worse, error (Galatians 5:13-15)

B. Good and Pleasant

1. few things in life are both good and pleasant, but the anointing oil running down the beard of Aaron was one of those things and the dew of Hermon and Zion was another

a. brotherly unity and love are good for God, for they bring glory before him in submission to his will

b. brotherly unity and love are good for people, who are blessed with peace, growth and companionship as a result

2. how bad and unpleasant it is when brethren dwell together in disunity or suffer a division because of doctrine or judgment

a. things were tense enough in Philippi that Paul had to write to them to discourage such disunity (Philippians 3:20-4:3)

b. cultural differences threatened the church’s unity in Rome (Romans 14:1-4)

c. a brother named Diotrephes was single-handedly threatening the unity of a church (3 John 9-11)

3. within both the assembly of the local church and its continuous relationship, we hope to find a sense of unity in purpose and affection, so that it appears to be both good and pleasant even to one who is yet outside of it

a. to answer Micah’s prophecy: “Then the remnant of Jacob Shall be in the midst of many peoples, Like dew from the LORD, Like showers on the grass, That tarry for no man Nor wait for the sons of men” (5:7)

b. our mutual love, peace and unity should make the church seem to be a benefit to those lacking direction

C. Life Forevermore

1. in the body of Christ, enjoying unity and producing fruit, God has commanded and reserved the ultimate blessing, which exceeds anything we can enjoy on Earth as but an earnest of “life forevermore”

2. “Your God has commanded your strength; Strengthen, O God, what You have done for us” (Psalm 68:28).

3. in this brotherhood, which we love (cf. First Peter 2:17), we strive together toward “the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14)

a. here we “bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:1-2), “exhort one another daily” (Hebrews 3:13) and sharpen the countenance of our friends in the faith (cf. Proverbs 27:17)

b. life forevermore is the goal of every disciple and taking as many with us as possible is a product of unity in Christ

Conclusion

Psalm 133 is about a commodity which is under threat today by error, selfishness and even apathy. We ought to desire it and protect it like a precious oil or the dew of heaven.

Psalm 134: Behold, Bless the Lord

Introduction

Psalm 134 is the benedictory conclusion to the long series of psalms that have been called songs of ascents (120-134). They were evidently psalms sung by pilgrims as they traveled up to Jerusalem to worship. [Read Psalm 134:1-3.] In just three short verses, the unknown but inspired writer captures the significance of the moment when priests are summoned to address their praise to the God of heaven and earth. Our hope is that we might also learn to bless the Lord as his servants.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. All Who Serve By Night (1)

1. this final song of ascents is a fitting conclusion to the series as it accompanies the worshiping pilgrims on their arrival at the house of the Lord

2. this is the time of the evening sacrifice and the priests are summoned to attend to the evening service (see Psalm 141:2)

B. Lift Up Your Hands (2)

1. only the ordained priests could pronounce the Mosaic blessing, so their participation in the joy of pilgrimage and worship was essential

2. their uplifted hands in the sanctuary signified this blessing (Numbers 6:22-27)

C. May The Lord Bless You (3)

1. the short song closes with the promise that those who bless the Lord with their worship and discipleship will likewise be blessed in return by the creator

2. there was a very simple blessing in just going to the Jerusalem temple for worship and this parting speech should have inspired the worshipers to remember that although they were now returning home, they need not leave their God behind

II. Some Applications

A. Servants of the Lord

1. much of this psalm centers on the work of the Old Testament priests, a small subset of the nation of Israel ordained to the worship business and supported by the other tribes

2. the Aaronic priesthood was the clergy of its day, but the New Testament did not perpetuate or replicate this priesthood, instead placing responsibility for such matters into the hearts and hands of each believer (First Peter 2:9-11)

a. like the people who first sang the words of Psalm 134, Christians today are pilgrims and priests

b. the inspired apostle Paul informed the Corinthian church that they were the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelt in them (see First Corinthians 3:16); “therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (First Corinthians 6:19)

c. in fact, we are to “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1)

3. we are not only the pilgrims coming to Zion, but the priests awaiting them, and that makes us servants with just as much obligation to prove faithful and diligent (John 12:23-26)

4. moreover, servants of the Lord are servants of his people as well (First Corinthians 9:19-23)

5. the last thing a servant has to remember is that no matter how esteemed his service becomes, he always remains just that—a servant (Luke 17:6-10)

B. Uplifted Hands

1. uplifted hands are associated with prayer and holiness throughout the Bible, but especially in the Old Testament: “Hear the voice of my supplications When I cry to You, When I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary” (Psalm 28:2).

a. Psalm 63:4 reads, “Thus I will bless you while I live; I will lift up my hands in your name.”

b. the writer of Lamentations very emotionally stretches out his hands to the Lord (Lamentations 2:19, 3:40-42)

2. it was Moses, however, who advanced the act of stretching out one's hands more than any other perhaps, using that motion of supplication to effect changes in the heavens (see Exodus 9:29-33) and to prevail in battle (Exodus 17:8-13)

3. there is not as much emphasis on outstretched hands in the New Testament, but one passage does leap to mind (First Timothy 2:8)

a. it would seem that perhaps "The early Christians turned up their palms towards heaven, as those craving help do."¹⁰

b. the Jews even washed their hands before prayer (see Psalm 26:6), but the emphasis here is not on the literal cleanliness or placement of the hands during prayer, but the holiness of the heart in figurative terms

c. "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully" (Psalm 24:3-4).

d. whether one prays in private, as a leader of others or by following along in the assembly, the holiness of hands will affect the effectiveness, if not the fervor, of his supplications

e. holiness includes avoiding wrath and doubting, for such attitudes and deeds undermine the sincerity and purity so essential to gaining an audience from the Almighty (see Isaiah 59:1-3)

C. May the Lord Bless You

1. in the world today, the imposition of blessing is probably heard more than it was even in ancient Israel, but with far less meaning

a. unfortunately, God's blessing is most often wished only when someone has the misfortune to sneeze; otherwise, it is mostly confined to the interior of religious facilities

b. this is evidence of the success of the secular humanist movement, working through scientists, governments, the courts and in our schools

2. in Psalm 134, God's blessing is rooted in man's devotion to serving him, and the same should hold true among us today, regardless of its popularity in the world around us (Hebrews 6:9-20a)

a. Peter told the Jews, "To you first, God, having raised up his Servant Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities" (Acts 3:26)

b. if your sins are forgiven you, you are blessed beyond what most people will ever imagine or experience, even if you're living paycheck-to-paycheck otherwise

c. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ" (First Corinthians 10:16)?

3. so blessed are we that we can actually afford to bless those people around us who would be our enemies, "For You, O Lord, will bless the righteous; With favor You will surround him as with a shield" (Psalm 5:2)

a. "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Romans 12:14).

b. but our blessing must be more than just words (James 3:5-10)

Conclusion

Psalm 134 brings to an end the songs of ascents with a parting message of blessing and service.

Psalm 135: For I Know That the Lord is Great

Introduction

Psalm 135 is a hymn of praise toward God that might have proven useful especially during the Passover celebration. In many ways, this psalm seems to introduce the final 16 songs which also focus on praise and worship as themes, but the Holy Spirit actually borrows many of the ideas and even words for Psalm 135 from other psalms. [Read Psalm 135:1-21.] The first 14 verses comprise a general exhortation to praise God for his goodness and love. This is followed in verses 15-18 by a denunciation of the false gods and another message of encouragement to bless the name of Jehovah in verses 19-21. While some might overlook the practical nature of the song, it is clearly a simple theme of the importance of regular, sincere, true worship.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Praise God (1-14)

1. similarly to the song that precedes it, Psalm 135 begins with a summons to the temple priests to arise and prepare for worship, but the call also extends further to everyone in Israel

2. right up until she crucified the son of God upon a cross, Israel had always enjoyed almost exclusive access and fellowship with Jehovah as his special treasure; through the prophet Amos, God told them, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (3:2)

3. Psalm 135 also repeats its predecessor’s claims about the Creator, expanding them here to state that he does whatever he pleases as master of water, wind and lightning

4. that power had been on display during the Exodus and conquest of Canaan when God executed the Passover in Egypt and strengthened the Hebrew armies that invaded the Promised Land

5. yet God’s interventions were not merely part of the past, but an indicator of present concern and ability as well as he continues to vindicate his servants

B. Idols of the Nations (15-18)

1. and so the psalmist contrasts Israel’s condition with that of the idolatrous nations around her—worshipping idols made by human hands of gold and silver

2. in a rare moment of inspired sarcasm, the psalmist acknowledges the deafness, blindness and dumbness of the idols and announces that, “Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them” (18).

3. idols were easier to identify in that day because they were obvious replications of animals and personages meant to replace or augment the one true God, but apparently that did not make them any easier to resist

C. Bless the Lord (19-21)

1. the psalm closes with one last summons to the kind of praise that will characterize the remaining psalms

2. it is a call to all those who hold reverence in their hearts for the God of heaven and are willing and yearning to express it in true worship

3. to bless the Lord is not to wish him well, but to render unto him gratitude for blessings already received, and it remains man’s duty to acknowledge the giver of every good and perfect gift

II. Some Applications

A. God is Good

1. and that is where we begin—acknowledging the goodness and graciousness of God

a. Job asked, “What is man, that You should exalt him, That You should set Your heart on him?” (7:17), but Job was concerned about the Watcher of men was subjecting him to the great trials Job had to face

b. in the midst of the great evils that Satan had inflicted upon Job, he temporarily forgot about the goodness of God, and that even great trials of life do not indicate any wickedness on his part

2. Moses commented about the Old Testament law, which became such a burden to hard-hearted individuals (Deuteronomy 6:17-25)

a. the law is for man's good, not necessarily God's, and even when it seems otherwise, it is only because our perspective is blurred, or we are suffering from some ignorance, or our hearts are growing cold

b. when God's will seems wrong or unnecessarily restrictive or burdensome, we are developing a problem with God's goodness rather than his goodness failing

3. Jesus said that no one is good but God (see Matthew 19:17), indicating that perfection dwelt alone in the Father, whom these people did not acknowledge to dwell in Jesus as well, and that goodness is what draws us to him again and again as we understand that he neither tempts man to evil nor has fellowship with those who live in it

a. the story of Job proved that God is not bad (James 1:12-17)

b. in him is no dark side or shadow of change (First John 1:5-7)

4. the people who blame God for bus crashes and hurricanes and tumors are simply being deceived by the devil who is the father of lies and the one who is actually to blame

5. more than anything else, "God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

B. Passing Over

1. and this even holds true on the original Passover night, referenced in Psalm 135, when God finally persuaded Pharaoh to let his people go (Exodus 12:29-31)

a. the Israelites, however, had been protected from this plague of death (Exodus 12:21-24)

b. perhaps this psalm was used in conjunction with that annual observance

2. is there some way in which God passes over in our favor today?

a. truly, as a lamb was slaughtered on that first passover night that its blood might be applied as evidence of holiness to God and protection from death, so Christ became the Lamb of God, slain upon a cross that his blood might be applied to the disciple for holiness and protection

b. "... you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (First Peter 1:18-19).

3. the gift of his passing over is always described as a motivation for grateful submission (First Corinthians 5:7-8)

a. it is not a passover in the sense that God will overlook the sins of Christians and tolerate some degree of wickedness in favor of those who went through the motions of obedience; Paul asks, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" and answers, "Certainly not" (Romans 6:1-2)!

b. rather it is a passing over in the sense that all sin and fall short of perfection, but God invites every person to enjoy the gift of eternal life through obedience to the gospel and an abundant life of genuine discipleship (see Romans 3:23, 6:23; First Peter 4:17-19)

4. his death is ineffective in combating sin if all it does is permit Christians to sin without consequence (Romans 6:7-14)

a. "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (First Corinthians 15:3)

b. "How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it" (Romans 6:2)?

C. The Lord's Name

1. the gratitude for his sacrifice flows naturally toward an enhanced reverence toward God and even his name so that it is not used in a way that is careless, blasphemous or presumptuous

2. God's name endures forever and his fame lasts throughout generations, but mankind has often applied to all kinds of evil, including the premature condemnation of his neighbor to hellfire

3. in the 10 commandments, God warned against using his name in vain by swearing falsely or speaking of him frivolously, but the three of the four most common ways in which one hears God's name fall under this condemnation

a. some speak of God reverently and there is no reason to fear writing or speaking his name if that is case

b. others use his name to make oaths, such as "I swear to God," usually with little thought about the one they are calling as witness

c. others use God's name in a way that is blasphemous and full of doubt and disrespect as they attribute qualities to him that are ugly and false, often for the sake of humor or shock

d. others simply use his name very carelessly as an exclamation or indication of disgust

4. Jesus taught against false swearing in his sermon on the mount, urging his disciples not to swear such oaths at all, but simply to be honest and industrious in keeping their promises and obligations (Matthew 5:33-37)

a. truly, whenever we are using God's name carelessly, we are behaving disrespectfully and "for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36).

b. and this should include the obvious euphemisms like golly, gosh, gee, jeez, etc.

D. Idolaters Are Like Their Idols

1. such a God is true and living, but the idols that littered Canaan before and after the Israelites invaded were blind, dumb, deaf creations of their owners, and the psalmist joked that the idol-worshippers were just as ignorant as the blocks of gold and silver they adored

2. Isaiah also mocked this kind of foolishness (Isaiah 44:13-20)

3. early Christians grappled with this issue as Jews and Gentiles merged into one man and one church (First Corinthians 8:4-7a)

4. today's idols are not generally as recognizable as those statues in the likeness of animals and personages, but show up more subtly in the form of things that people adore in a way that competes with God for command of their hearts (Matthew 6:24)

a. cars, trophies, video games, houses, other people, oneself, and just about everything else on Earth can become an idol if given enough attention

b. and in the end, our idols are just as powerless to save us

Conclusion

Psalm 135 is a call to worship, but before we can worship properly, we must have a reverent attitude about our work before God.

Psalm 136: The Great Hallel

Introduction

Psalm 136 is sometimes called “The Great Hallel,” meaning praise and giving us part of the word, “hallelujah,” which adds to its praise the name of God as object. Psalm 136 is another hymn of thanksgiving like the one before it and finds its way not only into Solomon’s temple, but also Jehoshaphat’s army. The fact that the mercy refrain repeats in each verse is a unique feature to the song, which is otherwise not titled or attributed to any author. [Read Psalm 136:1-26.] We might divide the psalm into five sections: three opening verses of praise to the Lord (1-3), followed by six notes of praise to the Creator (4-9), six more about deliverance from Egypt (10-15), and seven concerning the journey through the wilderness and the entrance into Canaan (16-22). In the last part of the psalm, we find four verses of personal thanksgiving for mercy (23-26).

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Praise the Lord (1-3)

1. the early theme of Psalm 136 shows up in the dedication of Solomon’s temple and its connection to that amazing event is unbreakable (Second Chronicles 6:40-7:3)

2. it is God’s mercy, or lovingkindness (NASV), that proves to be the enduring refrain from this psalm, however, as the writer extols God’s history of steadfast love toward his people in Israel

B. Praise the Creator (4-9)

1. that lovingkindness is evident throughout his work in nature as the one who made everything that was made and spread the earth out above the waters and under the stars of heaven

2. here again the potential to harmonize modern evolution hypotheses with the Bible come up short, for no godless explanation of the universe would comport with the praise for a Creator here

C. Deliverance From Egypt (10-15)

1. the writer blazes through history to the time of Israel’s exodus out of Egypt and into Canaan by describing the lovingkindness of the Lord in rescuing his people from their persecutors

2. Stephen and Paul would later retell this same familiar story, one that should have inspired the pilgrims to permanent faithfulness and one that should always remind us that God’s outstretched arms are at once merciful and powerful

D. Exodus (16-22)

1. clearly, some of those original pilgrims were less than thrilled with the fare of their 40-year wandering journey, but the psalmist is able to capture the mercy of God as he preserved the nation and prepared them to enter Canaan

2. perhaps Sihon and Og would argue the point about God’s lovingkindness, but only because they tried to get in his way as he sought to give his people their heritage land

E. Thanksgiving (23-26)

1. the psalm closes with three more reasons to give praise to this merciful God—he remembers his people in their low estate, he has rescued them from their adversaries and he gives food to all flesh

2. the instruction of Psalm 136 is to give praise to the Lord, for he is good, and surely the minds of every ancient Israelite and modern Christian can agree and comply

II. Some Applications

A. God’s Mercy

1. the Bible goes to great lengths to portray our God as merciful and anyone with knowledge of the atoning death of his own son would have trouble disputing that attribute (Exodus 34:6-7)

a. there are two sides to the mercy coin and here is where skeptical people find fault, for they expect God to extend mercy universally, arbitrarily and unconditionally

b. sin, however, is what gets in the way—and not even all sin, but only that sin which is maintained against every chastening and rebuke

c. God is thoroughly merciful, gracious, longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth, but it does not follow that he will thus reward the wicked in spite of their stubbornness

2. another psalmist wrote, "Also to You, O Lord, belongs mercy; For You render to each one according to his work" (62:12), indicating that judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy or interest in holiness

a. even then, God extends an invitation to mercy a bit further, coming out to find prodigal children and suffering long that more might return home (Luke 15:20-24)

b. Nehemiah said this, "They refused to obey, And they were not mindful of Your wonders That You did among them. But they hardened their necks ... But You are God, Ready to pardon, Gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, Abundant in kindness, And did not forsake them" (9:17).

3. as happened in the parable of the prodigal son, sometimes it is the ever-faithful older brother who actually finds fault in the abundance of divine mercy and celebration of restoration (Luke 15:25-32)

a. as Christ explains his mercy then, so it has always been and is today

b. it is the unsatisfying lesson that the prophet Jonah had to learn, forgetting how the lovingkindness of God rescued him from the sea and the fish and even his Ninevite audience (Jonah 4:1-11)

4. when this mercy is understood and embraced, people proclaim, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (Second Corinthians 1:3)

B. Thankfulness

1. and when they bless God, they know also to be thankful and to express that gratitude in a trusting, confident demeanor (First Corinthians 15:56-58)

2. it is neat how the psalmist closed with an assurance that God gives food to all flesh, for food is so much involved in our times of thanksgiving

a. "For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (First Timothy 4:4-5).

b. and more importantly, the Lord's Supper must only be observed after a prayer of thanksgiving (First Corinthians 11:23-27)

3. Paul wrote, "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of his knowledge in every place" (Second Corinthians 2:14).

a. in other words, the disciple appreciates God for leading him and using him

b. everybody wants to feel useful and if he is willing to accept divine guidance through the Bible and the church, he can be useful in the kingdom

4. gratitude is the key to happiness and contentment in life (see Philippians 4:4-7) and it is also the key to willing, regular worship (Hebrews 13:14-16)

C. The Exodus Lesson

1. the Exodus of Israel out of Egypt and into Canaan is a journey that took 40 years, although the vast caravan actually arrived on the threshold of the promised land in only 11 days (Deuteronomy 1:2)

2. the New Testament writers appeal to that history over and over again to make a point to Christians about developing unbelief and complacency, which prove fatal on the trip to Heaven (Hebrews 3:12-19)

a. all the complaining and regret was fed by the spies' pessimistic outlook so that only Joshua and Caleb survived from the original band to lead its second generation into Canaan

b. disbelief is defined not only by waning faith, but is evidenced by obvious disobedience

3. one of the things written before for our learning is the story of that journey (First Corinthians 10:1-13)

Conclusion

Psalm 136 is a call to praise for all those who acknowledge the goodness and mercy of God, but understand that repentance and restoration are vitally necessary to the whole process.

Psalm 137: By the Rivers of Babylon

Introduction

Psalm 137 certainly has an imprecatory tone to it, at least in the end. The writer and his cohort seem to be among the Jewish captives by the rivers of Babylon, where Nebuchadnezzar had taken them to conquer Judah in the days of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the sons of Josiah. [Read Psalm 137:1-9.] Verses 1-6 express a love for Jerusalem and community lament for her destruction, while verses 7-9 finish the psalm with an imprecation against the Edomites and Babylonians who gloated over its fall.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. How Shall We Sing? (1-6)

1. the opening verse sets the stage for Psalm 137, finding the anonymous writer along the rivers of Babylon where the Hebrew exiles remained during and after the demise of Jerusalem

a. Jeremiah and other faithful men had tried to bring about restoration in Judah, but the reformations of Josiah a few decades before had worn out what little piety remained in the nation and false prophets had assured the people that it didn't matter anyway because God needed them

b. turns out, they were fatally wrong (Second Chronicles 36:15-21)

2. and so, like Jeremiah the weeping prophet and probable author of the Lamentations, this psalmist finds himself sitting by the river in tears while remembering Zion's former glory

a. maybe you have suffered the death of someone close to you and you can remember not wanting to listen to any music or watch television or even visit with other people; your grief was so severe that you had no heart for merriment

b. these exiles simply hang their harps upon the willow trees, so disinterested are they in joy

3. so many of the psalms emphasized fellowship with God and the security of Jerusalem, but now that it lay in ashes, all that seemed rather hollow

a. if the Chaldeans were asking the Jews to sing such songs, it might be that they were mocking them, just as the crucifiers implored Jesus to call upon Elijah to save him

b. a foreign exile was not the place to sing God's inspired psalms, at least not then

B. Against the Sons of Edom and Daughter of Babylon (7-9)

1. the transition is sudden and swift in Psalm 137, changing to a fiery imprecation against the people of Edom who rejoiced to watch Babylon sack the holy city

a. the Edomites were Israel's brothers, descended from twins Jacob and Esau, but like those two, the nations that sprang from them had always had their sibling rivalry

b. the Edomites dwelt in the clefts of the rock, Petra, its capital, being 5000 feet above sea level and seemingly impervious to invaders

c. they could watch from security as Jerusalem was humbled, but their complicity in the atrocity went beyond passive observer (Obadiah 10-14)

d. "'Edom also shall be an astonishment; Everyone who goes by it will be astonished And will hiss at all its plagues. As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah And their neighbors,' says the Lord, 'No one shall remain there, Nor shall a son of man dwell in it'" (Jeremiah 49:17-18).

2. the psalmist then directs his rage at the daughter of Babylon, the conquering nation, on whom he wishes nothing but what she had administered to Judah

a. although God used Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian armies to punish his people in Judah, the conquerors acted according to their free will and would face punishment for their brutality and presumptuousness (Jeremiah 50:11-16)

b. the Medes, Persians and a timely drought combined to take away Babylon's luster within a few years

II. Some Applications

A. Remember Zion of Old

1. imagine again the psalmist sitting by the river, crying over his memories of Jerusalem, just as we might sit under a tree and stare at pictures of departed loved ones

2. there is something very human about nostalgia and the bittersweet examination of the past, even though most people are incapable of remembering that much that was negative existed in the past as well

3. while it is profitable to examine the past and to learn from what occurred, it is unwise to dwell upon the past, to relive it perpetually and to ruin the future with such melancholy and discouragement

a. the writer of Ecclesiastes said, “Do not say, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’ For you do not inquire wisely concerning this” (7:10).

b. the former days usually seem better because people have a way of recalling the positive and forgetting much of the negative (e.g., ‘50s nostalgia remembers simplicity and morality, but forgets Sputnik and Korea)

4. God actually told the exiles’ children, “But now I will not treat the remnant of this people as in the former days” (Zechariah 8:11)

a. Ezra tells us that when the exiles finally returned to rebuild, “many of ... the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of” the second temple was laid because it was smaller (3:12)

b. when the construction resumed 15 years later, they asked, “Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing” (Haggai 2:3)?

5. we might be tempted to remember the churches of Christ as they were growing explosively in the middle twentieth century or America when it was more religiously-minded, but that trip down Memory Lane is not going to do anything to lend us courage and determination today

b. Jesus told one potential disciple that, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62) and maybe some of that looking back is misguided, pessimistic nostalgia, that cripples the disciples who might otherwise drive to the future

c. we must look forward (Philippians 3:12-15)

B. Tears and Mirth

1. tears are often associated with weakness or femininity, but nothing indicates this psalmist was either of those

2. there is nothing shameful about weeping, even over significant earthly losses such as fellow Christians, beloved objects or affairs of state; even Jesus wept over something that he could repair (see John 11:35)

3. Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that he had preached among them with tears day and night for three years (see Acts 20:31), but it was their parting a few moments later that really brought out the emotion of the moment (Acts 20:36-38)

4. this is where we learn to “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15)

5. it is James, however, who most clearly captures the sentiment of Psalm 137 for New Testament times (James 5:13-18)

a. “To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven ... A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance” (Ecclesiastes 3:1,4).

b. you are permitted the luxury of weeping and mourning when events demand it, or when your spirit is broken and your heart is aching, even if some tell you to cheer up and put on a happy face

c. yet you must not remain on the riverbank of Babylonian depression forever

C. Standing on the Other Side

1. the Edomites were convicted of standing on the other side and taking pleasure in Judah’s downfall, but the danger of that is that God will repay such gloating with an even more severe penalty

2. consider this warning in Proverbs 24:17-18

3. and remember that standing idly by as a brother or neighbor stumbles to his death is sinful neglect (Proverbs 24:11-12)

D. Imprecation

1. it is always the case that Old Testament imprecations against enemies make us uncomfortable, and it is no less so when the psalmist hopes to see Babylon’s children dashed against the rocks

2. much of this is due to the fact that Israel was a geographic and military nation, with orders to conquer and defend against real foes

3. when Christ came, he inaugurated a different kind of kingdom, not of this world's type, and distanced it from physical battles and confrontations (cf. Second Corinthians 10:1-6)
4. the disciples of Christ are thus liberated to pray for their enemies and wish for their conversion instead of needing to see them bloody and defeated upon a field of battle (Romans 12:17-21)
 - a. although Paul quotes from the Old Testament, the proverb has much more meaning to someone who knows the peace that comes through grace
 - b. but imprecation is not entirely missing from the New Testament, for in closing his second letter to Timothy, Paul adds, "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works" (4:14)
 - c. likewise, Paul occasionally places the title of anathema or accursed upon those who twisted the Scriptures (see Galatians 1:8-9, 5:12; First Corinthians 16:22)
 - d. he warned the Philippians, saying, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction" (3:18-19)
5. the love that we have for people should never overpower the love that we have for God and his word and his will, so that we begin to favor tolerance of sin and error that they might not be embarrassed
 - a. perhaps if the Lord rewards those who do evil in this lifetime, they will be moved to repent and God cannot do other than repay them eternally if they refuse him
 - b. for those who wrest the Scriptures, there is no indulgence (Revelation 22:18-19)

Conclusion

Psalm 137 is almost like two psalms in one, uniting the themes of nostalgia for old Jerusalem with the animosity felt toward those deemed responsible for its demise. We learn from it to look forward with confidence.

Psalm 138: Great is the Glory

Introduction

The one-hundred thirty-eighth psalm is registered as a work of David, in which Israel's greatest king thanks God for his blessings and expresses confidence that God's glory will only extend wider as time progresses. [Read Psalm 138:1-8.] Wholehearted praise was surely the theme of David's life, considering the vast number of psalms that he penned and meditations that he recorded. From Psalm 138, we gain a reminder of the majesty of our God and his word.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Wholehearted Praise (1-5)

1. wholehearted praise is probably a lot harder than it sounds—life is filled with distractions and disappointments that compete for our attention and loyalty to the degree that our hearts are sometimes divided
2. nonetheless, David thanks God for all he has done for him and assures himself that the Lord is watching over him
3. the gods of verse one could have reference to three different personages
 - a. in Psalm 8:5, angels appear in that mix (*Elohim*)
 - b. in Exodus 21:6 and Psalm 82:6, princes among men are called “gods”
 - c. and as recently as Psalm 97:7, inanimate idols were called “gods”
4. David's confidence was that he could and would worship the true and living God in the presence of anyone that might either support his effort or argue against it; moreover, he would never be moved to worship any of those entities as many others have done
5. God's goodness is sealed when the psalmist recognizes how God is on high, yet hears the petitions of the lowly, and in times of desperation, all men certainly feel very low
 - a. when men have the sense to recognize divine answers to their prayers, it doubles in power as they strengthen their faith in gratitude
 - b. God promises to be near the lowly, but to remove himself from those too proud to see their need for him: “The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, The haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day” (Isaiah 2:11).

B. Though the Lord is High (6-8)

1. even so, David continues to rely upon the Lord for his security and revival, anticipating that he would also overthrow David's enemies
2. this series of David's psalms is quite imprecatory in nature, but one must remember that David was fighting flesh-and-blood, life-or-death battles against the enemies of the kingdom and God, where our conflicts tend to be more spiritual and individual, and rarely involve physical threats to the church
3. Israel was a civil and military kingdom, but the church is spiritual and its wars are as well

II. Some Applications

A. You are Gods

1. we barely acknowledge the existence of other so-called gods in our minds today, even those like Allah with a following of millions, yet the Old Testament does countenance their influence if not their reality
2. sometimes, the designation is almost facetious, as if the writer is begging the dignitary to prove his ability
3. few and far between are men like David Koresh who imagine themselves to be divine, but it is not nearly as rare to see people worshiping things that do not deserve it; even the apostle John mistakenly fell prostrate before some angels as he received the Revelation from Christ
4. the apostle Paul dealt with idolatry in a real-world environment where his audiences and neighbors were as likely to worship a statue or a story as the true God of heaven (First Corinthians 8:4-6)
5. sometimes that adulation is directed at men like Koresh, or politicians or generals, and it is just as misplaced
 - a. “It is better to trust in the Lord Than to put confidence in princes” (Psalm 118:9).

- b. “Do not put your trust in princes, Nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help” (Psalm 146:3).
- 6. some would even worship angels (Colossians 2:18-19, 23)
- 7. whether the so-called gods that draw men are other men, idols, angels or anything else, the key is in worshipping only the God of heaven and refusing such distractions

B. Magnify the Word

1. David writes to magnify the word of God, which Christ said would be the standard by which all men would one day be judged “in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ” (Romans 2:16)
 - a. today, millions of people pay almost no attention to the Bible, avoiding the church and neglecting to instruct their children about the Lord, but one day they will be called to account for their choices
 - b. let us never be guilty of that neglect or of neglecting to apply the word in our lives and evangelism
2. we magnify the word of God by reading it, studying it, sharing it and talking about it—by purchasing Bibles and using them for something more than pressed flower containers or bookshelf fillers
 - a. the Holy Spirit expressed the command that his word be read in the churches (see Colossians 4:16, First Thessalonians 5:17)
 - b. but how many churches are putting more emphasis upon the wisdom of their preachers and the questionable insights of bestselling authors, de-emphasizing the sacred text because it is perceived to be antiquated and ineffective for modern sensibilities?
3. what must never change is the attention in churches of Christ trained upon book, chapter and verse—in sermons, instruction, application and execution (First Peter 4:11)
4. we must hold on to our love for God’s word no matter what happens in the world at large, our not-so-Christian nation and the churches throughout our community (First Peter 1:22-24)

C. Great is the Glory

1. David’s focus in Psalm 138 is upon thanking God for hearing his prayers and rescuing him from his enemies, who were likewise enemies of the kingdom
2. can we expect God to grant us strength in a similar fashion? (First Peter 5:8-11)
 - a. but that strength only flows when one is connected to its source; for those who disconnect from God by not praying or reading or worshiping, it is drained away, shrivels up and can even die
 - b. Paul wrote, “I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (Second Corinthians 12:10).
 - c. one can be strengthened spiritually even while being weakened physically, by any of these conditions or by age or illness
3. a few months earlier, Paul had urged these same people to “ Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong” (First Corinthians 16:13) and David’s confidence helps us all get to the point where we can take risks to be true (Hebrews 11:30-34)
 - a. “out of weakness” they were made strong—they were not all Samsons, some only became valiant when the word of God mixed with their genuine faith (see Hebrews 4:2)
 - b. John has the answer: “I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and **the word of God abides in you**, And you have overcome the wicked one” (First John 2:14).

D. High and Lowly

1. “For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones’” (Isaiah 57:15).
2. the element of humility is so thoroughly developed in Christianity that it clearly runs counter to the pride of most men as they struggle for personal advancement and material success through power and acquisition, but “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6)
 - a. and then comes Christ, strong enough to endure 40 days of fasting in the wilderness and wise enough to confound the sages of his time who tried to entrap him, yet confident enough to be “gentle and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:29)
 - b. his doctrine pronounced blessing upon the meek and poor in spirit rather than the mighty and proud so valued in that environment by philosophers and conquerors (see Matthew 5:3-5)

3. the mission of Christ involved the subjugation of the proud and exaltation of the humble (see Luke 1:52)

a. James taught that money does not determine God's favor, but humble obedience does (James 1:9-12)

b. for that reason, we seek to "be clothed with humility" (First Peter 5:5)

4. this is the lesson of the parable of the great supper (Luke 14:1, 7-14)

Conclusion

Psalm 138 is a song of thanksgiving, but also a promise of wholehearted praise. We praise God not just in our periods of worship, but in lives that magnify his word's influence and prominence when we make applications that are consistent and holy.

Psalm 139: He Knows Me

Introduction

Psalm 139 is also attributed to the prolific pen of King David, who writes here to reflect his calm assurance in the fact that God knows him so well. [Read Psalm 139:1-24.] The psalm contains three parts. Verses 1-6 indicate David's awareness of God's omniscience and omnipresence in his life. Verses 7-18 apply that understanding to God's personal interest in the conception and life of David. The psalm closes in verses 19-24 with an imprecation and petition regarding those who would ruin David's existence. Just as God knew David, he likewise knows us—our infirmities and weaknesses, our strengths and courage. And that is comforting so long as you desire for God to be on your side and over your shoulder.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Hedged In (1-6)

1. David sends this song to the Chief Musician to emphasize the personal nature of one's relationship with God
2. how can it be anything else when it begins by saying, "O Lord, you have searched me and known me"?
 - a. few people feel this well-understood by anybody around them—whether that be their spouses, parents, children or therapists
 - b. quite frankly, that is one of our chief complaint about life—that we are too complicated in demeanor and perspective to be comprehended by anyone, except here David confesses that God knows him quite well
3. how did David come to this conclusion?
 - a. their relationship and the Lord's place in providently participating in his life, while hearing his prayers and granting that which was best
 - b. David took the time to size up his life with God and overwhelmingly concluded that God knew him better than he knew himself and was always ultimately proven to be correct in what he did for David

B. Where Can I Go? (7-18)

1. it is not that David wanted to flee from God, but that he happily acknowledged that such a plan would be futile anyway
2. sometimes small children are terribly afraid of the dark, but the simple presence of a parent and the touch of mom's hand are enough to chase away the fears and make it all right
3. that is how David considers the omnipresence of his God, which followed him from morning until evening, and would follow him in life and beyond
 - a. remarkably, David even asserts that God knew him before he even suckled at his mother's breast
 - b. truly this is a poet's way of describing God's role in the conception of every child and not just those that grow up to be kings or prophets or apostles
 - c. God values life so much that he sculpts it carefully, and even those vessels which appear to be dishonored have a place in his scheme
4. we sometimes send people cards, letters or e-mails that only say, "I was just thinking of you"; that is what David acknowledges in this psalm—that God is clearly thinking of him

C. Perfect Hatred (19-24)

1. the reader will note in Psalm 139 that David's hatred for his enemies is not entirely rooted in their animosity toward him, but more in their opposition to God and his will
2. they were bloodthirsty men, where David only succumbed to that impulse in moments of great moral stress
3. Christians are discomfited by David's perfect hatred, but is there not a place for esteeming them pitiable who oppose the will of God and try to bring it to destruction?
4. the psalm closes with a note of consistency as David pleads with God to try him and show him any hypocrisy that needs to be corrected, so that he would not become like those whom he despised
 - a. Nathan was God's agent in revealing this very thing to David, as was Abigail

b. hopefully we all have the confidence and desire to be right that will cause us to seek out correction and guidance

II. Some Applications

A. Omniscience

1. is it a good thing or a bad thing that God knows us so well, can peer into our private rooms and even into our minds to discern what kind of people we truly are (Romans 11:33-36)

2. there is no barrier or disguise which can thwart God's inspection of his creatures, for he has perfect knowledge of everything, being all-knowing, all-seeing and all-hearing

a. Zophar asked Job, "Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth And broader than the sea" (Job 11:7-9).

b. another psalmist will write, "Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; his understanding is infinite" (147:5).

3. as David came to understand, "His understanding is unsearchable" (Isaiah 40:28) and beyond human estimation, reaching even to the individual interests of six billion souls at one time (First John 3:16-21)

a. for one who is determined to go to heaven no matter what, this good news because it means he has help, but for one who is intent on saving face, avoiding embarrassment and only feigning piety when it is convenient or traditional, this is terrible news, for it lays open a false character better left hidden

b. this realization promises immediate assistance and eventual analysis (Hebrews 4:11-13)

B. Flight From His Presence

1. David talks about fleeing from the presence of God as someone who understood flight, having eluded the long arms of King Saul for a long time, but David was not interested in severing himself from God's attention, only in extolling the wonders of being known so intimately by such a good friend

2. Jonah was the one most noted for taking flight from the Lord, hopping a ship bound for Tarshish when commissioned to preach in brutal Nineveh, but God has great fish designed for just that kind of reluctance

3. when Jesus met Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, he told the future apostle, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 9:5)

a. "The metaphor of an ox, only driving the goad deeper by kicking against it, is a classic one, and here forcibly expresses, not only the vanity of all his measures for crushing the Gospel, but the deeper wound which every such effort inflicted upon himself."¹¹

b. Saul was fleeing from truth while persecuting the church and he was about to find that out in a most striking way

4. so many today want to avoid God by averting their attention from their spirits, his son, the Bible and his church, while even some who have put on Christ are also trying to be elusive disciples by neglecting or even forsaking the assembling of the saints and by refusing the Holy Spirit any influence or participation in their lives and character (Galatians 2:19-20 and Colossians 3:1-4)

C. Prenatal Identity

1. one of the most memorable things about Psalm 139 is David's assertion that God knew him even before he was born, when he was conceived in secret and wrought in the womb of his mother as a substance not yet formed

2. today that substance comes to be called an embryo or a fetus, but in those early days, people had the sense to understand that human babies were what filled mother's belly

3. every person at the point of conception possesses life in the knowledge of God and the potential for an earthly existence

a. when young Jeremiah balked at being called to prophesy to brutal Jerusalem, God told him, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations" (1:5).

b. people argue about when life begins, but God knows and fetal viability is not the key; rather the conception of a human being, invested with an immortal spirit made by God is

4. abortion, of course, destroys that, perhaps killing the next Picasso, Washington or Einstein

- a. it is hard for some to make the leap from destroying a tiny, unseen human to the designation of murder, but is that not the definition of killing a human outside of justice?
 - b. God protects that unborn life (Exodus 21:22-25)
5. only six percent of the 1.4 million American abortions each year occur because of a threat to the life of the mother or baby; the only 94 percent are selfish decisions of parental convenience
- a. 25 % want to postpone childbearing until a more suitable time
 - b. 21 % cannot afford to have a baby
 - c. 14 % are following the choices of the baby's father
 - d. 12 % are too young and have been made to abort by their own parents
 - e. 11 % fear a child will disrupt their careers or education
 - f. 8 % want no more children
 - g. 3 % fear a risk to baby's health
 - h. 3 % fear a risk to the mother's health
6. pregnancy, of course, is preventable, and so are most abortions, by simply following the moral code of the God of heaven which prescribes abstinence from sexual immorality before and outside of marriage, and faithfulness within (First Thessalonians 4:3-8)
7. "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4).
- a. murder after sexual immorality is the same strategy employed by King David when he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite
 - b. it is an attempt to avoid taking responsibility and rendering repentance and it will fail

D. Perfect Hatred

1. ultimately, this psalm is about David's calm assurance that God is watching over him even in the midst of his many enemies, who are first enemies of God and whom David proclaims that he hates with a perfect hatred
2. hatred is a dangerous emotion even when it is directed at sinners who would topple the king, or abduct children or rape women or burn houses or crash planes into skyscrapers
 - a. hatred directed outward eats away inwardly anyway and the hater ends up being destroyed from the inside out by bitterness and something quite ungodly
 - b. how could David experience and even boast of "perfect hatred"
3. after all, the Proverbs teach us that under any covenant, "Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all sins" (Proverbs 10:12), but this is among friends
 - a. "Whoever hides hatred has lying lips, And whoever spreads slander is a fool" (10:18).
 - b. "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, Than a fatted calf with hatred" (15:17).
 - c. "He who hates, disguises it with his lips, And lays up deceit within himself; Though his hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness will be revealed before the assembly. Though his hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness will be revealed before the assembly" (26:24-26).
4. hatred is clearly listed among the works of flesh by which one is made ineligible for kingdom inheritance (see Galatians 5:19-21), so how can there ever be "perfect hatred"?
 - a. is it not tempting to hate "enemies of the cross" (Philippians 3:17-19)
 - b. and some even preach the cross with bad motives (Philippians 1:12-18)
5. even so, Paul does not claim to hate them, and when Jesus praises one church for its hatred, it is also not the hatred of enemies (Revelation 2:4-7)
 - a. years before, Jesus had taught that hatred on a personal level could never be perfect again (Matthew 5:43-48)
 - b. instead it is love and forbearance and patience that are perfect

Conclusion

Psalm 139 is a remarkable song in a long collection, one that focuses on the goodness of God's omniscience and the greatness of a life that relates to him.

Psalm 140: Dwelling in Your Presence

Introduction

The one hundred fortieth psalm is another imprecatory psalm of King David, who clearly spent as much time in terror of his enemies as he did sitting confidently upon the throne that bears his name. This time, David's enemies are plainly out to ensnare him, embarrass him and dethrone him. Except for the throne part, we've all been there. [Read Psalm 140:1-13.] We can study the psalm in three parts, beginning with verses 1-5 where David issues his complaint against violent men who plan evil things. In verses 6-11, David petitions God for assistance in resisting their evil before closing in verses 12-13 with a statement of confidence in his plea.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Deliver Me From Evil Men (1-5)

1. David begins with a familiar request to readers of his psalms, for like most people, his heart tends to pour out more freely in moments of intense distress than at any other time
2. David was a worshiper of God in moments of victory and exaltation as well, but in the psalms, we tend to find him in pits of despair or in threat of his life
3. David's opponents were evil, violent, wicked and proud—never a good combination and certainly a dangerous one to the king who had to deal with their conspiracies and plots
 - a. it is conjectured that David wrote the psalm while pursued by King Saul and disappointed by Doeg the Edomite, who pointed the mad king in his direction and led to the slaying of the priests who had fed him (First Samuel 22:20-23)
 - b. maybe this psalm dates elsewhere in Hebrew history and maybe its attribution is misdirected, but plainly something serious is troubling the author as he sees so much evil about him
4. in particular, David has recognized that his enemies are interested in watching him stumble, so that they have set snares for him, much as the Pharisees and scribes tried to ensnare our Lord in his words
 - a. paranoid people feel as if someone is out to get them all the time, but even paranoid people are right every once in a while
 - b. the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles instruct us that David is far from paranoid and that it is actually King Saul who has fallen into that mindset
5. yet in the workplace, classroom, playground and elsewhere, it is not uncommon to get the feeling that someone is out to get you

B. Hear My Supplications (6-11)

1. David and every other beleaguered believer has something at his disposal that can help him survive those times when opponents are snapping at their heels—when the Lord is your God, someone will listen, lend strength and give protection
2. sadly, the schemes of the wicked sometimes succeed temporarily, even unto the end of life, but the truer victory is not defined or won on Earth's battlefields, but before Heaven's judgment seat
3. David won many battles and lost others and both Saul and, later, Absalom succeeded for a while in making his life miserable, but through perseverance and trust, David emerged victorious
4. once again, David completes his denunciation of his enemies with an imprecatory request that they be punished and overthrown

C. I Know (12-13)

1. the psalm draws to a close with the poet's message of confidence that God has heard him and will respond positively, and his confidence reaches beyond the eventual insignificance of so much in this life
2. God will maintain the cause of the poor and afflicted and the righteous and upright will bless him and dwell in his presence
3. God's justice is sometimes delayed—sometimes into eternity—but it is as certain as it can be

II. Some Applications

A. Violent Men

1. David's opponents were brutal, violent men, who not only wished to harm his reputation, but also to take away his very life
2. only bullies, criminals and terrorists are so bloodthirsty today, but our enemies tend to fall into more psychological and emotional categories, being opponents of truth, champions of moral decay or personal detractors (Romans 3:10-18)
3. there is nonetheless a certain violence involved in contending for error or inflicting pain upon the spirit of another person through ridicule and mockery of his appearance, abilities or convictions
 - a. violence can define a person who has no respect for others, for "A man shall eat well by the fruit of his mouth, But the soul of the unfaithful feeds on violence" (Proverbs 13:2).
 - b. violence can be verbal as well as physical, when "Blessings are on the head of the righteous, But violence covers the mouth of the wicked" (Proverbs 10:6; cf. verse 11).
 - c. violence is very self-destructive—"The violence of the wicked will destroy them, Because they refuse to do justice" (Proverbs 21:7; cf. Psalm 7:16).
 - d. the upright must beware the false impression that violence is creating success (Proverbs 4:14-17 and Proverbs 24:1-2)
4. without regard to whether it is physical, verbal or psychological, violence is listed among "those things which are not fitting" and are "deserving of death" in the judgment of God (see Romans 1:30)
 - a. God hates the hands that shed innocent blood and the heart that devises wicked plans (see Proverbs 6:16-19), and while that would include the terrorist, rapist and murderer, might it not also include the kids at school who make fun of others and plot against one another?
 - b. might it not also include the petty rivalries at work that devolve into open hatred and often draw others into the gossip and backbiting? (Proverbs 16:27-30)

B. Strength of My Salvation

1. David endured all these conflicts because he was always convinced that God had placed a helmet of protection upon his otherwise ordinary head
 - a. when he volunteered to fight with Goliath the Philistine giant, cowardly King Saul proffered him his armor, but it was too large for David's body and too small for his soul (First Samuel 17:45-50a)
 - b. Goliath's helmet was bronze and large and no one but David could see the helmet upon his head that day, but David seldom removed it for the rest of his life
2. David's helmet was his salvation, the same one described in the Christian's spiritual armor in the New Testament (First Thessalonians 5:8-10)
 - a. the hope of salvation protects the mind from enticements, doubts, disappointments and excuses
 - b. in the head dwell all of our thoughts, emotions, fears and hopes, and when that part of the person is left unprotected, it is a grave danger for the devil knows well how to exploit the vulnerability
3. David knew that, "the Lord does not save with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord's" (First Samuel 17:47)
 - a. the Christian's armor is spiritual and figurative, as are his most important battles, and protecting the mind against evil that would penetrate and bludgeon it is the function of our hope for eternal life (First Peter 1:13-21)
 - b. think on things that are noble and hopeful and holy so that your mind is not polluted by temptation, doubt, tragedy and defeatism (see Philippians 4:8-9)

C. Burning Coals

1. David's imprecation is familiar by now, and yet we still find it difficult to accept the depth of his perfect hatred for these enemies of his
2. perhaps, though, his allusion to burning coals helps us put his mindset into a better New Testament perspective; "Let burning coals fall upon them," he asked in verse 10
 - a. in fact, the image of the inner earth and the knowledge of its volcanic apertures led them to associate punishment with burning coals, especially after the rebellion of Korah was put down (Numbers 16:31-35)

b. in the wisdom of God, however, there is something better, though, regarding one's enemies (Proverbs 25:21-22)

3. Paul quotes from this proverb when teaching Christians against the yearning to avenge themselves when they have been wronged (Romans 12:17-21)

a. the temptation in such circumstances is to make the animosity permanent by responding in kind when someone has insulted you or taken advantage or made fun

b. the more peaceable path is to turn the other cheek and rise above the fray with dignity and godliness

c. sometimes enemies can be turned into allies if we prove to them that there is nothing detestable in our character and that we pose no threat to them, but would rather come to their aid

4. on some level, it is just to hope for the plans of the wicked to fail, just as David did, and even to take heart in the knowledge that God will judge and punish the unrighteous, but the hope of salvation that we wear so prominently should extend also to the desire that all men repent, come to a knowledge of truth, and be saved from themselves

D. I Know

1. David is nothing if he is not confident that God will hear him and preserve him, and his confidence holds true even when Goliath towers over him or Saul smells his blood or Absalom drives him out of Jerusalem

2. how wonderful it would be if we could gain that same confidence, in spite of the atheists and humanists around us who deny its source and mock our trust

a. here is that confidence again in Paul, who said, "For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to him until that Day" (Second Timothy 1:12).

b. and John says that we should all share it (First John 5:11-14)

3. it comes from participating fully in the fellowship of God and his kingdom and some of us plainly do not have the time or inclination (Ephesians 1:15-18)

a. doubt becomes cyclical and self-fulfilling as some never rise above it, but simply sink deeper into it

b. our mutual place of abode is abandoned by lukewarm faith and too much love for this present world (First John 2:24-29)

4. some Christians doubt their salvation and some do so for good reason, for their hearts are elsewhere; "Beloved if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God" (First John 3:21).

Conclusion

How many things do you know—really know? Do you know you are going to heaven—really know it?

Psalm 141: Make Haste to Me!

Introduction

Psalm 141 is David's lament regarding his hopes of being delivered from temptation and the danger that comes from the wicked who sometimes seek to destroy our faith, but other times simply seek to teach us compromise. [Read Psalm 141:1-10.] We often are heard to pray that God would guard, guide and direct us and this psalm is written with that same sentiment in mind.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Guard, Guide and Direct Me (1-5)

1. Psalm 141 is a spiritually sensitive poem written by a man who was targeted by evil people, but did not want to sink to their level in seeking retribution

2. if the best revenge is living well, David had cornered the market, with the near exception coming when Nabal the fool offended him

3. David's hope in the midst of all his trials was that he would simply be pleasing to God; perhaps that helps to explain the depth of his remorse when he realized what he done to Uriah the Hittite

4. David had been straightened out by a courageous friend named Nathan who wisely rebuked him so that he might repent and sustain his relationship to God, and in this psalm, David dedicates himself to accepting such reproofs from righteous men who would strike his head with the excellent oil of correction

a. in essence, his prayer is that God would help him guard his mouth from wicked speech and his heart from evil ideas

b. as much as David was tormented by his foes, he desperately wanted to keep away from hypocrisy by doing unto them what they had done unto him

B. Deliver Me (6-10)

1. one of the truest restraints against sin is the fear of eternal punishment, which David applies to his evil enemies, but in our age, most believe that Hell is reserved for only the vilest offenders and that even atheists and the apathetic will earn Heaven by virtue of their charity or lack of criminal record

2. David took no refuge in the false hope that he might earn a place beside God based on merit or that he might escape God's attention by flying below his radar; his refuge lay in his faith where his soul was never left destitute or wandering through snares

3. while David hoped for his own deliverance, he likewise wished for his enemies to fall into their own nets

II. Some Applications

A. Prayer is Like Incense

1. many psalms are very much like prayers and Psalm 141 is certainly that; in fact, many of the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs that we sing today are clearly set forth as a petition to God

2. David's hope is that his prayer song will rise up to God like sweet incense and the evening sacrifice

a. the people of that day were accustomed to burning incense with their sacrifices (Exodus 29:38-41)

b. according to Exodus 30:34, the incense used in the tabernacle service was concoction of spices, perfumes and frankincense, and the law clearly prohibited the offering of any "strange incense on this altar" (9)

c. in the offering of incense, burning coals from the altar of burnt offering were carried in a censer and then placed upon the altar of incense as the fragrant incense was sprinkled upon the fire, making for an aromatic environment for worship as the smelly smoke rose

3. animal sacrifice is completely absent from New Testament worship, but the imagery they created persists, especially in the death of Christ and dedication of disciples

a. death of Christ (Hebrews 10:1-4, 11-14)

b. dedication of disciples (Colossians 3:1-7)

4. the burning of sweet-smelling incense was figuratively applied as well to the works of faith done by believers

- a. a life that gratefully imitates Christ is sweet to his father (Ephesians 5:1-4)
- b. sharing is a sacrifice that creates a sweeter environment as well (Philippians 4:15-20)
- 5. just before the angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias, “the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense” (Luke 1:10)
 - a. perhaps the pleasant atmosphere and rising smoke well illustrated the sweetness of prayer, for that image returns throughout the New Testament (Revelation 5:8, 8:3)
 - b. the prayers that you speak are like bowls of incense, burned before God and rising up to his throne
 - c. “Therefore by him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name” (Hebrews 13:15)

B. Learning Their Ways

- 1. David’s prayer in this psalm was that he would resist learning the ways of his enemies, imitating them to gain advantage or revenge or to satisfy the lusts of his soul
- 2. chances are that most of our friends, classmates and coworkers are going to possess a lower level of religious dedication and moral conviction than do we, possibly allowing for immodest dress, a little salty language, occasional sexual immorality, skipping worship and so on
 - a. the temptation is to accept that influence in small doses or to aspire to gain maturity, popularity or acceptance according to fictional standards from television programs, movies and magazines
 - b. it takes maturity to be your own person, or rather God’s person, and care not who is displeased, but that means standing up for your convictions without any spirit of compromise, no matter how insignificant or temporary it might seem (Hebrews 5:12-14)
- 3. exercise your senses to discern right and “if sinners entice you, Do not consent” (Proverbs 1:10)
- 4. “Make no friendship with an angry man, And with a furious man do not go, Lest you learn his ways And set a snare for your soul” (Proverbs 22:24-25).
- 5. keep watch over who is having the influence in your relationships and in your entertainment choices; is it you or the less spiritual one? (First Corinthians 15:33-34)?

C. Let The Righteous Strike Me

- 1. the language is shocking, yet genuine—David says, “Let the righteous strike me” in Psalm 141, for he is thinking about the blows of rebuke which come raining down upon the one who has gone wayward
 - a. David reasons that such reproof is painful in the moment, but is of such lasting benefit that he can compare it to being anointed with excellent oil
 - b. that makes for an interesting application of rebuke in the New Testament, especially if spiritual weariness and sickness are under consideration (James 5:13-16, 19-20)
- 2. rebuke is like the anointing of oil upon a receptive head, for it brings back vigor and vitality (cf. Matthew 6:17), yet it often feels more like being struck upon the head as David acknowledged
 - a. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Proverbs 27:6)
 - b. anybody who has any interest in going to heaven is going to have to adopt David’s attitude about correction and accept the reproofs of righteous men as oil rather than blows
 - c. “As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17).

D. Refuge

- 1. David closes this psalm by identifying God as his refuge, even though his enemies were bound to come crashing down over the cliffs of despair
- 2. the sons of Korah sang that, “God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1)
- 3. prayer might be the last refuge of a scoundrel, but it is the first impulse of the righteous man when he feels himself imperiled or in guilt; “In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence, And his children will have a place of refuge” (Proverbs 14:26).
 - a. there is an undeniable, but often overlooked connection between this genuine reverence for God and the effectiveness of prayer
 - b. some want to live in the flesh and still expect God to hang on their every prayer when they get around to it, but their investment in him and in prayer is so hypocritical that it becomes futile

c. for your prayer to be effective, it must be rooted not only in the fervor of a moment of desperation, but the spirituality of a righteous lifestyle (see James 5:16)

d. sincere penitence is a part of that and that part most often overlooked when irreligious people find themselves in dire straits

4. the concept of refuge here is much more permanent than simply finding temporary port in a storm (Hebrews 6:17-19)

5. "The wicked is banished in his wickedness, But the righteous has a refuge in his death" (Proverbs 14:32).

Conclusion

Psalm 141 is David's reason for hope for refuge in prayer that God would guide, guard and direct him.

Psalm 142: I Cry Out to the Lord

Introduction

Psalm 142 is subtitled as a contemplation of King David when he was in the cave, making it an individual lament when the future monarch hid from King Saul in the cave of Adullam or En-Gedi, circumstances which we will consider in this study. David's life in between the slaying of Goliath and his coronation was marked by intense persecution at the hands of King Saul. David was continuously in a cave of desperation and frustration. [Read Psalm 142:1-7.] We can divide Psalm 142 into three sections. Verses 1-2 indicate the depth of his supplication. Verses 3-4 speak of his overwhelmed spirit. Verses 5-7 identify God as his refuge.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. I Cry Out (1-2)

1. most of us have been in caves, but I would guess that few of us have actually hidden from bloodthirsty, jealous monarchs within caves
 - a. caves are usually damp, dark and cramped places where the walls and ceiling always seem to be getting closer and creepy, crawling things are about
 - b. things have to be pretty grave for a person to seek out a cave as a hiding place, especially before the age of artificial illumination
2. at least twice during his retreat from King Saul, young David hid in caves to avoid having to face and possibly kill the king
 - a. after he had been fed by the priests in Nob and feigned madness before the king of Gath, David moved into a cave (First Samuel 22:1-2)
 - b. things were even more interesting, though, after David had left another refuge in the wilderness of Ziph and En Gedi (First Samuel 24:1-7)
3. these reports of David's cavernous sojourns seem to be fairly pleasant, even humorous to a degree, and they show that Saul's madness was driving the hearts of the people away
 - a. perhaps David's psalms result from other cave experiences, or just as likely, these histories do not consider the concerns and anxiety that David felt in spite of what is to us an obvious position of ascendancy and strength
 - b. sometimes those who appear to others to be rising stars possess the most doubts and fears
4. and so somewhere David poured out his "sad musing" before the Lord—a complaint which is not necessarily indicative of whining and self-pity, but simple disappointment and anxiety
 - a. sometimes a complaint is only a concern rather than an accusation
 - b. in fact, Psalm 62:8 counsels, "Trust in him at all times, you people; Pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us."
 - c. when it turns to self-pity and wondering, "Why me?", however, it is a complaint

B. When My Spirit Was Overwhelmed (3-4)

1. David poured out his complaint before God because his spirit was overwhelmed and the emotion needed to be released so that he might find some relief
2. it plainly made David feel better to tell someone what was on his mind and it also helped David to collect his thoughts and to assemble them in a petition, which when spoken and considered further came into better perspective
3. the sense of isolation was what bothered David the most—that no one cared about him at all, which was exactly the same complaint made by his tormenter, King Saul (First Samuel 22:6-8)
 - a. both men felt threatened by the other, but one leaned on God for companionship and direction, while the other sank deeper into self-pity and delusion
 - b. what do you do when it seems that no one cares about you and that you are isolated and alone? (Psalm 42:4-5)
 - c. "From the end of the earth I will cry to You, When my heart is overwhelmed; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I" (Psalm 61:2).

C. My Refuge (5-7)

1. and that is what David did in composing the thoughts of Psalm 142, making God his portion in the land of the living where so many others had forsaken him
2. his refuge was not in the people who could fail him, but the God who never had, and he did not consider this present hardship to be God's failure, but Saul's
3. the soul can know no harsher prison than the false perception that God has placed it there

II. Some Applications

A. Imprisoned In The Cave of an Overwhelmed Spirit

1. of all the Bible writers, David seems to be the most personal and sensitive, often appearing to write from deep anxiety and even depression, being honestly touched by his suffering and his sins
2. stress, anxiety and depression continue to slay people even today when bloodthirsty kings and Philistine giants are in short supply
 - a. some such conditions are more physical than spiritual, resulting from chemical imbalances in the brain that allow for violent mood swings and depression or from other body issues
 - b. many depressions, however, have a spiritual and psychological cause, which must not be overlooked and which cannot be treated as easily with sleep, dietary changes or medications
3. depression is generally most serious among the divorced, widowed, unemployed, guilty, and lonely
 - a. someone suddenly feels threatened or without worth and stress, anxiety and depression begin to build
 - b. and when that person feels somehow severed from God, the condition is sure to deteriorate
 1. people feel separated from the God of all comfort because they are guilty, because they are not prayerful, or because their prayers are not being granted
 2. and while medication can help alleviate some of the symptoms of such depression, it can never treat the underlying spiritual causes
 4. we can prevent some anxiety simply by being prepared for its inevitable arrival and eventual departure (First Peter 4:12-13).
 - a. when loneliness is the cause—because of divorce, widowhood or isolation, the answer is found in approaching God and his people with their companionship in mind: “Draw near to God and he will draw near to you” (James 4:8).
 - b. “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted And saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18).
 - c. so many who complain of loneliness expect their isolation to be cured without their participation, but that rarely happens; instead one must insert himself into the company he wishes to obtain by spending more time with the saints and inviting visitors and friends

B. Complaints Poured Out

1. we tend to look down on complaining, but only when it is done by someone else; our complaints are always justified and reasonable
2. of course, we often complain about things that don't really matter and overlook the good things which God supplies in abundance and which do matter much more
3. these complaints of David are not so much complaints as they are concerns and petitions; they lack the “woe is me” self-pity so prevalent in the words of Saul
4. in fact, the Bible says, “Cast your burden upon the LORD and he will sustain you” (Psalm 55:22) and you cannot do that without identifying and articulating that burden
 - a. prayer has a way of sorting out which complaints are truly severe and which are really bearable, avoidable or excusable
 - b. prayer helps us to assemble our thoughts and feelings and to prioritize them so that we better recognize what matters and what does not
5. prayer is a time to pour out one's complaints (Luke 22:39-46)
 - a. Jesus was restored when he prayed, but the disciples, who had slept from sorrow, were told to rise and pray lest they enter into temptation
 - b. sometimes the temptation is not to commit gross immorality, but to allow anxiety and depression and fear to take control
 - c. wallowing in self-pity and sorrow will only make things worse (cf. Philippians 2:12-16)

C. Refuge Has Failed Me

1. part of David's pain lay in the fact that he felt isolated and abandoned—caves have a way of making you feel like that—his usual refuges in his brothers and friends had failed him because he was on the run and it seemed that no one cared about him

2. Proverbs 18:1 says, “A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; he rages against all wise judgment.”

a. it is unwise to disconnect yourself from your neighbors, family and brethren by being unsociable, irascible and selfish, yet some follow that course and then complain when people take flight

b. people do not tend to make conscious decisions about avoiding grumpy, moody, mean people, but over time they learn to avoid them so as to avoid being brought down

c. by contrast, people are subconsciously drawn to those who are pleasant and happy and selfless

3. like David, we sometimes drift into depression because of feelings of abandonment—perhaps by our friends, parents, children, the church, neighbors, etc.

a. Elijah sat down under a broom tree and prayed to die because he felt like he was alone

b. Job told his friends, “I loathe my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone, For my days are but a breath” (7:16).

c. elsewhere David wrote, “Turn to me and be gracious to me, For I am lonely and afflicted” (Psalm 25:16, NASV)

4. when human refuge fails, one must put his hope in God and continue night and day to pray and to ask God for help (see First Timothy 5:5)

a. Jesus showed that a solitary place, while otherwise unpleasant and depressing, was a good place for prayer (see Mark 1:35); “He himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed” (Luke 5:16).

b. when human refuge fails, God “will deliver the needy when he cries, The poor also, and him who has no helper” (Psalm 72:12)

D. Surrounded By The Righteous

1. David prayed that God would rescue him from this prison of despair and surround him again with the righteous

2. the lonely want companionship and the people of God should certainly provide it whenever possible, but the lonely should not prevent it at all by their own unkindness and unapproachability

3. while I don't believe for a moment in the social gospel, the church has an undeniable role in the association of its members who ought to enjoy one's another's company and be present in times of joy and sorrow

4. my responsibility in that is partly in not forsaking the assembling of myself with others (cf. Hebrews 10:24-25), but also in choosing godly company—“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals’” (First Corinthians 15:33, NASV).

Conclusion

David sought in that cave what we seek in life today—“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).

Psalm 143: Hear My Prayer, O Lord

Introduction

The one hundred forty-third psalm is yet another poem of David and another lamentation with an underlying theme of penitent grief. David compares himself to a thirsty land in his longing for the Lord to revive him. [Read Psalm 143:1-12.] The psalm begins with six verses of complaint and closes with another six verses of fervent petition toward God.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Complaint (1-6)

1. David begins this psalm with a fear common to every soft-hearted person whose conception of grace is limited by personal guilt and astonishment that the Lord could be so forgiving
 - a. David pleads with God not to judge him purely according to his works, for he recognizes how far short of perfection he constantly falls—and this from a man after God’s own heart
 - b. it is that acknowledgment, however, that makes David so much a man after God’s heart, for all men sin, but far fewer truly repent
2. as in the previous psalm, David’s complaint centers on the conduct of his enemies, persecutors who had overwhelmed his spirit, ruined his life and made him wish he were dead
 - a. when people think of David, they think either of his victory over Goliath or his dalliance with Bathsheba
 - b. few even know that David expressed this kind of spiritual sadness, even as stress, anxiety and depression rage around us in modern times
 - c. there is nothing new under the sun and if you are enslaved to one of these emotions, King David might have gone before you, judging from the poems that he wrote
3. the sliver of hope that David held onto was a recollection of God’s past grace and the supposition that it could be repeated now; therefore, his soul longed for refreshment from God like a dry, thirsty land begs for rain

B. Petition (7-12)

1. this is the last of 15 times the psalmist asks God to teach him his statutes and judgments
2. David also knows that God’s grace is attached to man’s faith, and that although God sends rain on the just and the unjust, he reserves the deeper elements of grace for those who believe and submit to him
3. David’s prayer is to depart the land of thirst for revival in the land of uprightness where he would be obedient and resist temptation to sin
4. what would a Davidic psalm be without a parting shot of imprecation; David asks God to make a distinction between his servant and his enemy

II. Some Applications

A. Faithful to Answer

1. David writes from a pit of despair, a place in which many believers would feel justified in entertaining a little doubt and even in some idle accusations against God
2. for his part, David complains in the form of his petitions, but he couches them all in humility and promises of faith no matter what
 - a. “Therefore know that the Lord your God, he is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love him and keep his commandments” (Deuteronomy 7:9)
 - b. prayer is designed to be persistent, but in order for that to be so, one must be convinced that someone is listening on the other end and that it can make a difference (Luke 18:1-8)
3. put simply, we must be thoroughly convinced that God is faithful or else we will be tempted toward unfaithfulness (First Corinthians 1:4-9)
4. if we start to doubt God’s reality, compassion or fellowship, our faith is at risk and our prayer, study and worship habits will provide the evidence (Hebrews 6:11-15)
 - a. if Abraham had to endure patiently before obtaining the promise, why should our faith be shaken on the same grounds?

b. if Abraham had to travel hundreds of miles, stare down murderers, and make difficult choices—some of them very wrong—why do we think that we should obtain the same promise but be exempt from the suffering?

c. the Bible warns, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22)

5. but God is faithful (First Corinthians 10:12-13)

B. God’s Judgment

1. so God is faithful, but is man, who sins and falls short of God’s glory (cf. Romans 3:23)?

a. Paul’s estimation of the Jews and Greeks was that, “There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one” (Romans 3:10-12).

b. since the wages of sin is death, who will deliver the sinner from this body of death (cf. Romans 6:23, 7:24)?

2. the hopeful answer lies in the fact that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11), “but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (Second Peter 3:9)

a. David worried that God would judge him purely according to his works, which on balance were mainly noble, but also clearly imperfect

b. his conscience bothered him because sin clung to him in spite of his repentance, being ever before him in spirit and in practice (Hebrews 10:1-4)

3. long after David died, God executed his plan by which the kind of graceful judgment David desired was made possible (Hebrews 10:11-18)

a. remission is a beloved word today, but mainly because it is used to declare freedom from cancer

b. that is well and good, but the word “remission” has more lasting reference to God’s forgiveness of man’s sins (Acts 2:36-41)

4. judgment is yet according to works (see Jude 15, Revelation 22:12, Second Corinthians 5:10), but God has applied the atoning blood of his sinless son to the analysis, allowing for believers to find salvation by grace through faith—obedient, imperfect, penitent faith

C. My Distressed Soul Longs For You

1. David is writing because he feels lost and he wishes he were dead, considering the way people are treating him; probably every one of us has felt like that at one time or another—some more seriously than others

a. statistics reveal that there are 730,000 suicide attempts each year in the United States, with 32,000 of them being successful¹²

b. suicide is the eleventh leading cause of death in the United States (homicide is fourteenth, meaning that more people kill themselves each year than someone else)¹³

c. an estimated five million living Americans have attempted suicide at one time or another¹⁴, obviously unsuccessfully and usually regretfully because their lives do improve and they are happy to be alive

2. David was lonely, threatened and overwhelmed by the affairs of his life, but he looked in the one direction that saved him—like a dry, thirsty land he pleaded with God for refreshment and he received it

3. the apostle Paul longed for God in this way, because in spite of spending his life in perils of waters, robbers, countrymen, Gentiles, the city, wilderness, the sea and false brethren (cf. Second Corinthians 11:26), he was afflicted with some mysterious thorn in his flesh, which might literally have been a thorn in his flesh, or something entirely different (Second Corinthians 12:7-10)

a. Paul learned what David meant when he wrote these psalms and prayed these prayers and things did not instantly improve

b. no miracles were extended to make David’s persecutors vanish into thin air or Paul’s detractors dry up and wither away

c. it may just be that the objects of your prayers have staying power and defiance as well

4. so what will you do when your distressed soul longs for God like a thirsty land?

a. learn that divine strength is made complete in human weakness and that the negative evaluation of humanity in Romans 3 is not designed for resignation and acceptance, but as a challenge for

believers to understand God and rise above the world: “And he has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us; for in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:26-28).

b. understand the will of the Lord and abide in him (First John 2:20-27)

D. Teach Me To Do Your Will

1. Jesus said, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed” (John 8:31) and that is the kind of objective abode that David sought when he pleaded with the Lord to “Teach me to do your will.”

2. there is far too much subjectivism in Christianity today, that permits men to craft God and the faith according to their own fancy and modern moral devolution

3. what succeeds before God is the humility to ask to be taught (Luke 6:43-49)

4. and the wisdom to obey

Conclusion

Psalm 143 is David’s plea for wisdom and instruction and it is one that we can understand and apply today when we ourselves feel downtrodden and desperate for direction.

Psalm 144: Blessed Be The Lord My Rock

Introduction

Psalm 144 is subtitled again as a work of King David and the opening verses are obviously those of a monarch. His words, however, extend beyond the purpose of kings to the hearts of all men who choose to acknowledge God and put their trust in him. [Read Psalm 144:1-15.] The psalm is divided into two parts as the first eight verses beg God for fellowship and protection. Verses 9-15 close the psalm with a new song of prayer.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Blessed Be The Lord (1-8)

1. King David was one leader who recognized that he was no deified human, due more than the loyalty of his subjects, perhaps to the point of worship

a. David was grateful for their subjection, but even that he attributed to his subjection to his King—a God whom he called his Rock, instructor, kindness, fortress, high tower, deliverer, shield and refuge

b. is God all of that to us—few of us have many people in subjection to us, but how many of us think of God in the way that David did regarding the trials and temptations of life?

2. David was so awed by God’s mercy that he had to wonder why God on high would even bother with sinful mankind below, whose entire life was but a breath or shadow which vanish as quickly as they appear

a. Job had wondered the same thing, but under pressure from the devil who only made it seem as if God was obsessed with harming the man (Job 7:17-21)

b. Job mistakenly wanted God to go be mindful of the angels for awhile, mistaking the devil’s torment for divine malice

3. God is mindful of his servants, whether they are wealthy barons like Job, earthly kings like David, selfless preachers in the pulpit or ordinary Christians who fight their own good fights

a. but sometimes God’s attention can be a little frightening on its own; it was when God came down upon Mount Sinai to deliver the law to Moses (Exodus 19:14-18)

b. David had been trained for war was now pleading for God to stretch out his hand to rescue him from his enemies—foreigners with lying tongues and false promises of friendship

B. A New Song (9-15)

1. in the second part of Psalm 144, David suggests that he will sing a new song to his God of praise, salvation and deliverance

2. David was confidently anticipating that the Lord would hear his prayer and affirm it by rescuing him and all Israel in the process

3. his hope extends beyond personal security to something more idealistic—national prosperity and individual contentment throughout his kingdom

a. sons that grow like weeds, daughters that stand beautifully erect like sculptured palace pillars and barns and fields teeming with produce and livestock

b. when such is the case, David reasons that his people will be content and there will be no social upheaval among them

4. the psalm concludes with a certain truth: “Happy are the people whose God is the Lord!”

II. Some Applications

A. Trained For War

1. there is a hint of imprecation in Psalm 144, for David mentions his training for war and later asks God to conquer his enemies

2. in modern times, fewer and fewer Christians have the experience of serving in their nation’s military, making David’s reference more distant, but also adding curiosity to the many New Testament allusions to warfare and soldiering

3. while we all prefer peace and perceive its place in heaven to be the ultimate definition of contentment and success, we must also recognize that this world is filled with battles and strife, which sometimes engage us whether we like it or not

- a. and beyond that, at its root, our struggle to live a holy life is a real war with a real adversary in the devil of old (First John 3:1-8)
- b. the devil makes no truces, but wages quiet battles and noisy wars for control of your heart, hoping to add you to his misery in eternal torment
- 4. and often his influence leads to conflicts among people as well (James 4:1-4)
 - a. as much as David believed his hands were trained for war and his fingers for battle, our spirits must likewise be prepared to fight the devil and every evil impulse, else we will gradually adopt the manner of life common in this world and succumb to its pressures and vainglory
 - b. “And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (First John 2:17).
- 5. there is much truth and nothing violent or evil when we beg for the soldiers of Christ to arise (Second Timothy 2:1-7)

B. What Is Man?

- 1. although they lived a thousand years apart, David wondered as Job did why God on high bothered with man so low, “For we were born yesterday, and know nothing, Because our days on earth are a shadow” (Job 8:9) and “Surely every man is vapor” (Psalm 39:11)
 - a. David has mused on the same theme way back in Psalm 8:3-6
 - 1. we don’t tend to wash our rental cars, or change the oil in them or improve the stereo system in them for the few days we will drive them, because they are so very temporary
 - 2. if man is so temporary, why does God bother with him?
 - b. because man is not temporary—although his life on earth is but a span, his spirit is immortal and struggling between very permanent good and evil (Hebrews 2:1-9)
 - 2. “My days are like a shadow that lengthens, And I wither away like grass” (Psalm 102:11), but eternity awaits and my spirit will exist forever, though it can only be said to live if it dwells on high with God rather than far below in hell
 - 3. Job painfully asked, “If a man dies, shall he live again” (14:14)?
 - a. and that is why God bothers with man, because there will be a resurrection and a judgment and one eternity or the other
 - b. God wants you to dwell with him forever

C. Those Lying Foreigners

- 1. what stands in our way, but sin and those who would destroy our hope
- 2. for David, they were lying foreigners who feigned friendship while plotting his demise, but for us, they could be friends, family, neighbors, educators, pundits, officials and even strangers who gain enough negative influence over us that our faith and hope falter in the face of temptation
- 3. such was the case in Corinth (First Corinthians 15:1-4, 29-34)
 - a. as if the pagans and Judaizers weren’t trouble enough, a new false doctrine arose that questioned the resurrection of Christ and caused some disciples to abandon that truth as unscientific or something else
 - b. the lies they accepted did more than alter than theology, however; it destroyed their faith, returning them to the devil who foments all disbelief (Second Timothy 2:14-18)
- 4. evil company corrupts good habits and the most dangerous of all is that which seems to be only a little harmful (Second Thessalonians 2:9-12)

D. Happy Are the People

- 1. the psalm closes with a pleasant reminder that society is generally benefited when it is driven by contented believers; “Happy are the people who are in such a state; Happy are the people whose God is the Lord” (verse 15)!
- 2. it is always easier, though, to be content when there is plenty of rain, but not too much, ample food on the table, baubles on the wife and horsepower in the garage
- 3. the real trick is learning contentment even when such things are in short supply, as in recessions and depressions, or when jobs are lost or fortunes are devalued (Philippians 4:9-13)
- 4. the psalmist also wrote, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, The people he has chosen as His own inheritance” (33:12).
 - a. then it was Israel and today it is the church, not America, which is God’s choice and inheritance

b. tranquility and contentment is an issue for the body of Christ more than the several states or provinces of any geographical entity

Conclusion

Psalm 144 is a song of confidence and it echoes the confidence we should have in a God who will deliver us.

Psalm 145: I Will Extol You, My God

Introduction

The one hundred forty-fifth psalm is David's effort at writing an acrostic and personal hymn of praise toward the God he loved. We all ought to crave such a convinced, personal relationship with the Lord and maybe the psalms of David are a clue as to how we might achieve that level of devotion and certainty. [Read Psalm 145:1-21.] David extols the qualities of God in verses 1-9, followed by a magnification of his kingdom in verses 10-13, before closing with praise for his care in verses 14-21.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Blessed Forever (1-9)

1. King David addresses his king in Heaven as this psalm opens with a promise to bless his noble name forever

2. the writer is overwhelmed by the unsearchable greatness of God—that quality of goodness that transcends anything that mortal man can imagine

a. he meditates upon God's creation and sees the divine thumbprint on every part

b. where the flower blooms, the water falls, the trees grow and even in the storms that shake the ground

3. David's hope has been realized to the extent that each generation has continued to praise God and pass along his name and identity to the one that succeeded it

a. this is especially our responsibility as parents to tell our children and grandchildren something they won't hear in school or on PBS about a God who creates, sustains, redeems and resurrects

b. so much of modern society is devoid of such acknowledgment, but if we allow our homes to become that way, it won't be long before a certain generation knows not God much at all

B. All Your Works Shall Praise You (10-13)

1. the king's attention is turned to God's kingdom, a form of which David ruled for many years long ago, but which only hinted at the greater kingdom yet to come

2. David ruled in Israel's glory days before division struck and enemies exploited the weakness

3. he ruled in a time when people quaked at the simple mention of Jehovah and Israel, but that seemingly everlasting kingdom only existed for a few more centuries before falling into ruin

4. the psalmist is prophetic, however, in discussing an everlasting kingdom, for that is what God intended to create through David's descendant who would rule throughout the earth

C. The Lord Upholds All Who Fall (14-21)

1. this emotional psalmist has tempered his feelings thus far, but verse 14 opens them up again, as he realizes that, "The Lord sustains all who fall and raises up all who are bowed down."

2. there is an immediate condition placed upon this fellowship, in that those who look to God are the ones who enjoy the greatest blessing, but it holds true that God also blesses the unjust as well as the just with their immediate needs

3. God is righteous and kind and near to all who call upon him in truth and it is that sense of nearness that people crave when they cry out for help

II. Some Applications

A. Unsearchable Greatness, Goodness and Righteousness

1. this psalm is primarily about the unsearchable greatness, goodness and righteousness of a God who is kind and attentive toward those who love him (Romans 11:33-36)

a. before children reach an age at which they can support themselves, they are entirely dependent upon their parents to earn, provide and prepare their dwelling, meals, clothing and instruction

b. everything that they have, from the richest luxury to the most common necessity is due to the benevolence of a caring parent

c. in a greater way, everything that we have is due to the benevolence of God who creates, provides and prepares for us what we could not accomplish on our own

2. God's goodness is seen on the majestic rocky cliff, in the moist, teeming soil under the rock, in the soaring sky whether it is blue, gray or black, and in every home, heart and mind

- a. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17).
- b. both luxuries and necessities are gifts of God, from the richest to the ones that we take for granted like our daily bread and water
- 3. God’s goodness is even more apparent in the story of his son and his timeless message of the Bible (Titus 3:3-7)
 - a. Paul called the gospel “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8), encompassing something much more than just the provision of this life’s needs, reaching into those of the next life, available only through him
 - b. he is not only good and great, but also righteous and just enough to give man a chance to seek forgiveness for his betrayal; it is “the goodness of God leads you to repentance” (Romans 2:4)
 - c. the goodness of God calls us toward imitation (Second Thessalonians 1:11-12)
 - d. “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God” (3 John 11).

B. Unceasing Praise

- 1. David promises to God what we should all endeavor to provide—our unceasing, unrestrained, undivided praise, adoration and devotion
- 2. Paul called on Christians to “pray without ceasing” (First Thessalonians 5:17) and that indicates a continuous kind of fellowship that doesn’t become unmotivated, inactive or dubious
 - a. prayer without ceasing is not prayer even while sleeping, prayer even while singing, prayer even while chatting
 - b. prayer without ceasing is a way of life in which there is never a stage or period in which one has abandoned prayer
 - c. it is constant contact and communication for the same reason that David promised to praise God every day forever and ever—dependence
- 3. the passage of time and the days of our lives should intensify our understanding that judgment and eternity are coming and that we must be prepared
 - a. the passage of time should give us better perspective on the affairs of this temporary life on earth, so that we invest more and more in heaven and worry less about life’s little disappointments (Romans 13:11-14)
 - b. we are capable of unceasing praise because we are so very grateful for the hope of something better after this life than to be dead forevermore, or worse
- 4. David’s promise, however, should not be confused with overconfidence (Mark 14:27-31)

C. They Shall Speak

- 1. the psalmist was so impressed with God’s goodness that he convinced himself that each generation would dutifully instruct its children about him, and that has generally been the case for thousands of years (Deuteronomy 4:5-9)
- 2. observation has proven to me that there is much more to raising children than buying them clothes, sending them to school and explaining the facts of life; people are much more likely to find joy and peace in their lives, marriages, families and jobs if they are devoted first to Christ (Ephesians 6:1-4)
- 3. Peter was so devoted to the gospel that he told his persecutors that, “we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20)
 - a. that might be hard before people who want to beat you to death, and even among neighbors who are less than persuaded, but how hard should it be among our own children?
 - b. we and they will live to regret it if we neglect to teach them the weightier matters of God’s existence, the character of the church and discipleship
- 4. “Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

D. Upholding Those Who Fall

- 1. David the emotional psalmist spends much of this song addressing his belief that God would uphold those who fall
 - a. it is not that falling is all right or no big deal, for “If you faint in the day of adversity, Your strength is small” (Proverbs 24:10)
 - b. it is that that everyone falls occasionally, some harder than others, some more frequently

than others, but everyone sins or fails or disappoints or comes up short eventually

2. Peter and the apostles were so confident that they would not deny Jesus and yet they each fled from him when the moment of truth came and the Lord did not fight back

a. Peter certainly fell despite his overconfidence, but when the Lord was resurrected, so were Peter's hopes

b. his fall helped him to mature, perhaps more than the others because he had further to grow than they (John 21:15-19)

3. sometimes, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak and we do not do the things that we wish (see Mark 14:38, Galatians 5:17)

a. we fall because we take a detour from walking in the Spirit and because we are weak in some way or another

b. we stumble, but we don't need to stay down (Hebrews 12:12-15)

4. Paul tells the saints to "warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all" (First Thessalonians 5:14)

a. through one another, God continues to pick us up after we have fallen that it might not be permanent, but that it might cause us to grow so that we fall less frequently and stand more firmly

b. the devil is not going to quit trying to cause our fall (Philippians 1:27-30)

Conclusion

Psalm 145 is a hymn of praise and promise and if we heed its call to praise God daily and forever, we can see our faith through to the end as well.

Psalm 146: O My Soul!

Introduction

Psalm 146 is a personal hymn attributed to no particular author, but because it begins and ends with a call to praise the Lord, it is classified with the final four psalms as a hallelujah psalm. The lone major theme of the song, however, concerns the believer's trust in God rather than uncertain human help. [Read Psalm 146:1-10.] Verses 1-2 introduce the psalm with a call to praise, followed by a contrast between human and divine help in verses 3-4 and 5-9. The psalm closes with another call to praise in verse 10.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Call to Praise (1-2)

1. the psalmist did not imagine worship in quite the way that some of us do
 - a. some of us see going to church, or to worship, as a "game-day decision" in sports jargon rather than an expectation barring unforeseen circumstances
 - b. we will go to worship today if the mood is right and the weather is perfect and the gas tank is filled and we wake up early enough without assistance of any alarm and our big toe doesn't ache and the kids dress themselves and our dry cleaning is back and so on
2. to the psalmist and dedicated disciple, though, worship is a happy habit, and while I live and have my being I will praise the Lord

B. Uncertain Human Help (3-4)

1. the psalm shifts to its theme very suddenly in verse 3, reminding its readers and singers about the dangers in trusting in princes or sons of men
2. that almost seems strange, coming from Hebrew ink, when one considers how many great princes, patriarchs and sons of men led Israel, and yet nearly every one of them is remembered not only for his achievements, but his faults as well
3. and even the noblest of them was but a human, living all his life with death ahead of him, when his plans and abilities would depart the earth, leaving behind all those who depended upon him too heavily

C. Happy Is He Who Has God (5-9)

1. where princes fail, if only due to mortality, happy is he who has God for his help and hope
2. the psalmist has no reservations about identifying Jehovah as the creator of the universe and pointing to that display of power as evidence of authority and goodness
3. Isaiah would use very similar language in his prophecy (Isaiah 61:1-3)
4. and it is language that Jesus read and repeated
 - a. in claiming to be the personal fulfillment of the prophecy (Luke 4:16-22)
 - b. and in describing his ministry to the disciples of John (Luke 7:18-23)
5. the psalmist probably had little clue as his pen moved, but the greatest help that God provides is through his redeemer son

D. The Lord Shall Reign (10)

1. the psalm closes where it began, with a call to praise the Lord who will reign forever
2. Zion is the city of Jerusalem, a figure for all of the Hebrew worshipers who would learn this psalm and hopefully apply it to their own hearts
3. it is a reminder to us as well that worship must be a happy habit, not a grudging obligation or game-day decision

II. Some Applications

A. Singing Praises

1. worship is not a drudgery to those who are deeply mindful of and grateful for the kindness of God and sacrifice of Christ (First Peter 1:17-21)
2. we are pleased to have opportunities to gather to render those praises, but we do not wait for weekly exercises of our faith either
3. praises can be sung privately or in homes and it is great to be in the habit of singing praises

even more than reciting the lyrics to rock songs about Mr. Roboto or country ballads about cheatin' hearts

4. singing praises wherever we happen to land is one way by which we go out to Jesus and thank him for all that he has done and is continuing to do for us (Hebrews 13:12-16)

a. when Paul and Silas found themselves in a Philippian jail, they spent their incarcerated evening "praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25)

b. that is the kind of behavior that will get you thrown off an airplane nowadays, but in a proper setting, being able to sing praise to God will certainly benefit your own soul if not the prisoners around you

5. our minds are so filled with information and entertainment and responsibility that it is easy to lose space for songs of praise to reside, and just as easy to lose interest in singing them, but the human heart has always expressed itself through chants and verse and the lack of a melody in your heart should be cause for concern that the cares of this world are choking its tender side (Colossians 3:16-17)

a. it is more than singing because the song leader says to or because "that is what you do in church"

b. it is singing because there is a melody of faith, hope and love in your heart

B. Trust in Princes

1. even the most powerful princes are not dependable as sources of help—governors, legislators, judges all must answer to competing interests and their own consciences (sometimes)

2. yet Israel put her trust in the office of prince when prophet and priest did not seem like enough (First Samuel 8:1-9)

a. the Hebrews did not take the warning seriously, although Samuel went into great and accurate detail (10-18) because they so desperately wanted to be like all the monarchies around them

b. the monarchies, however, were malevolent dictatorships, given to idolatry and immorality, and eventually so was Israel

3. we must take care not to put so much trust in men that we lose faith in God, "that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (First Corinthians 2:5; read 4:1-6)

a. waiting for the government to take care of the poor, sick and homeless or to legislate morality upon us (e.g. V-chip in televisions)

b. allowing a preacher to hold such sway over our religion that we are incapable of coming to our own conclusions or defending them and are putty in his hands should he drift into error

c. becoming so enamored with preachers or elders, who when they stumble, cause our faith to be shaken because we imagined them to be perfect until then

4. eventually, everyone on earth will fail you, including me—we are none of us perfect and we err in our demeanor, behavior, reactions, even our teaching

a. trust me and anyone else only as far as the word confirms

b. give brethren the benefit of the doubt, thinking no evil, but never put so much trust in another person that your faith could not be sustained without them, for even if they do not fail you in some way, their spirits will eventually depart and their plans will perish, and where will you be?

C. He Who Has God

1. the psalmist wrote, "Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help" in contrast to those who trusted in men like Nebuchadnezzar or Darius or those today who trust in bureaucracy, theologians, candidates or jurists

2. God showed his power in creation and continues to show it by keeping truth forever and executing justice in the earth and above it, and by extending his grace to those in need

3. people used to call it "getting religion" when someone was suddenly converted from a life of immorality to one of faith and patience, but getting religion should really be about getting to know God in a trusting, abiding manner (First John 2:24-29)

4. is this relationship purely subjective, determined by feelings and maintained only by sincerity and motivation, or is it more objective?

a. who has God?

b. not the one who can calmly disobey him, for "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God" (Second John 9)

c. any positive, but subjective feelings of fellowship and grace should emanate from a grateful and obedient relationship (John 8:28-32)

5. "And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to

think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God” (Second Corinthians 3:4-5) “because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe” (First Timothy 4:10).

D. Jesus

1. even if the psalmist did not know it, his words suggested the ultimate expression of God’s grace in the ministry of his son who restored ability to the blind and righteous, but turned upside down the way of the wicked

2. Jesus was a healer, but his healing was not about eradicating blindness, dumbness or handicaps, but about even much better news (John 12:44-50)

a. he brought living water to people who tired—not of hiking to the well every day, but of thirsting for righteousness in their souls (see John 4)

b. he became the bread of life to those who hungered for mercy and instruction (see John 6)

3. “In him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7)

4. the really good news is not that cancer is cured or polio is eliminated, but that a vaccine against sin and the death that it portends is come into the world through the prince of peace, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (First Timothy 2:5-6).

5. the wicked seem to prevail in iniquity without consequence but his world will be turned upside down by the gospel (Acts 17:1-6)

a. some will repent while most will persist, but Christ shall reign forever

b. praise him while you live and have your being

Conclusion

Psalm 146 is another call to praise, but that call must be answered more than just weekly.

Psalm 147: The Lord Builds Up

Introduction

Psalm 147 appears to be a composite of three different early hymns. Verses 1-6 tell a story of the outcast of Israel who enjoy God's blessing as they return to rebuild. In verses 7-11, we learn about God's provision for his creation, including all life on Earth. And in verses 12-20, the psalmist writes of God's relationship with Israel through his word. (The Septuagint actually divides the psalm in two at verses 11-12 because the call to praise is repeated.) [Read Psalm 147:1-20.] Psalm 147 is clearly a collection of disparate themes, but what unites them is a praiseworthy God.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. The Lord Builds Up Jerusalem (1-6)

1. the first song within the psalm seems to concern the exiles who were returning from Babylonian captivity to rebuild Jerusalem and their worship; perhaps they are the outcasts and brokenhearted that God is encouraging in reconstruction (Ezekiel 39:25-29)

a. the reconstruction of Jerusalem was a long project, begun about half a century after its fall, but delayed by opposition and eventual apathy

b. even the temple saw its foundation laid and then abandoned for 16 years while the Jews concentrated on their own homes and separate lives (Haggai 1:7-9)

2. the pride of Israel that had been built on the corpses of the Egyptians and Canaanites was not destroyed by the Chaldeans and it remained for God to resurrect their confidence just enough to resume the march toward the messiah, but without making Israel a refuge for every idol in the vicinity

a. and so he healed the wounded and brokenhearted of Israel without making them again a great and mighty force

b. because his understanding was infinite, he lifted up the humbled people without giving them any more reason for the arrogance that caused their fall in the first place

3. it takes a special God to know not only how much trial a people can endure, but also how much blessing

B. Sing With Thanksgiving (7-11)

1. and so we begin the second song within Psalm 147 by singing praises to the Lord with thanksgiving

2. this song is all about God's providence within creation—rain, vegetation, flesh—that makes the earth livable for man, beast and plant

3. in a comfortable economy, these are the blessings we are most likely to take for granted because they seem to flow so naturally that we forget that God gives both the blessing and the prosperity

4. but at the same time, while all these things are physical blessings, the focus of God does not shift off of the spiritual, for he takes no delight in bodily strength, but has pleasure in reverence and obedience

a. no Bible character is a better study in the conflict between physical strength and spiritual immaturity than Samson who could singlehandedly level a battalion but could not resist the wiles of a crafty woman

b. our society makes millionaires of those who can jump the highest, throw the furthest and run the fastest but it is those who live by faith that will enjoy eternal riches in heaven with God

C. The Bars of Your Gates (12-20)

1. the psalm's final song repeats the call to praise God, but here for his protection

a. this was a nation that knew invasion, sieges and the famine that resulted, so that one could not take for granted something like security and wheat

b. peace by itself is an awesome blessing, but one rarely known even today among men, as nations threaten one another with weapons of mass destruction, neighborhoods erupt in gang violence, families dissolve into bickering and divorce, and even churches squabble over opinions and interpretations

2. God's word is personified as a messenger that races out into every corner of the earth with a message of safety, peace and provision, even exercising control over nature

3. but that once creative word is transformed into a message of redemption, especially toward the nation which he favors (Amos 3:1-11)
 - a. the caveat to that favor is that it brings with it increased responsibility
 - b. the blessed become accountable as stewards for whatever they receive from God, and such holds true today for God's special people

II. Some Applications

A. Gathering the Outcasts

1. the first song is focused on God's gathering together of outcasts and to many the church of Christ is surely that—a gathering of outcasts from society at large and among Christendom in particular (Micah 4:1-7)
 - a. they are outcasts who eschew not only immodesty, gambling, drinking and dancing, but also religious holidays, uniformed clergy, Calvinism, the social gospel and instrumental music in worship
 - b. Christians do tend to stand out in conversation, conduct and appearance when the world is bent on sin and even the churches are moved to tolerate it
2. Paul felt this was already true of the apostles in the first century (First Corinthians 4:7-13)
 - a. it is almost as if the church in Corinth as a little ashamed to accept the kind of ostracism that might result from taking firm stands on issues of morality and doctrine
 - b. they even became puffed up about tolerating infamous sin within the membership when one of their men took his stepmother as his wife (see chapter 5)
3. today many congregations are virtually indistinguishable from their denominational neighbors, showing the same looseness on moral issues, the same flexibility in doctrine, the same focus on recreation and body, and even an acceptance of Calvinism
 - a. many theologians, including the pope of Rome, are interested in reinterpreting Scripture to conform to the science of the day, which is sure to change by tomorrow
 - b. and there are those in the body of Christ who are eager to make the same concessions, some from conviction but others in pursuit of academic or denominational acceptance
4. to be a faithful disciple, one must be prepared to accept the criticisms of those who find us to be foolish in our beliefs and ignorant in our confidence toward God (First Corinthians 1:18-21, 26-30)
 - a. who is prepared to be considered an outcast, the offscouring of the world, consumed with the unity of the Spirit and disinterested in ecumenical surrender?
 - b. to be a peculiar people even to other believers who contend for compromise and are confused by such focus on speaking only as the oracles of God?

B. God Resists the Proud

1. part of Israel's problem all along was in forgetting that God had made her what she became, fighting her battles and giving her victory because it was promised to Abraham and necessary for Christ
 - a. Israel began to exist like an aging Olympic marathoner whose closet full of gold medals has led him to believe that training is for chumps and that victory is ensured because of the laurels upon which he already rests
 - b. Israel dallied with idols and invited all manner of immorality into the land until God finally proved his anger by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar; when the Lord chose to bring back a remnant of people to Jerusalem, he protected them against such inflation by pride in that Israel never became great and mighty again, in fact existing as a vassal state even until Jesus arrived
2. it might sound trite, but it will always be true that, "Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18).
 - a. if it isn't pride that is getting someone into trouble, it is often pride that keeps them there anyway—too much pride to accept correction, to admit error, to confess sin, to double back and start over, to be immersed in Jesus, to be added to a band of outcasts, to value changeless Scripture over evolving science
 - b. "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate" (Proverbs 8:13).
 - c. "For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world" (First John 2:16).
3. in fact, the Bible says once and again that, "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6, First Peter 5:5)
 - a. Peter calls upon his readers to be clothed with humility even to the point of submitting

themselves to one another, but how many of us can crucify our pride and present humility (Colossians 3:5-7)?

b. pride is not only arrogance in one's self-estimation, but it is also stubbornness about appearing right even when obviously wrong; "The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts" (Psalm 10:4).

c. illustration: man who refuses to ask directions or consult a map

4. "Oh, love the Lord, all you His saints! For the Lord preserves the faithful, And fully repays the proud person" (Psalm 31:23).

a. we are relieved when we read that God will never permit us to be tried beyond what we are capable of bearing (see First Corinthians 10:13)

b. but pride is also a matter of not allowing us to be blessed beyond what we are able to bear (Proverbs 30:7-9)

C. The Lord Takes Pleasure

1. God does not delight in the strength of the horse, by which we even measure the power of our engines today, or by the strength and speed of a man in his legs

2. in America, intellectuals, philosophers and evangelists take a backseat to athletes who make millions of dollars every year to play children's games before thousands of rapt spectators

a. for its part, horse racing is the sport of kings, but the King of kings is more concerned for the immortal spirit of man than his perishable body

b. even those passages that extol the virtues of athletics and competition are only metaphors for spiritual progress and excellence (First Corinthians 9:24-27)

3. many churches are spending thousands of dollars to build gymnasiums, softball fields and beach volleyball pits, and budgeting every year for equipment and other forms of recreation and entertainment, but our exercise is supposed to be spiritual (First Timothy 4:7-10)

a. when Paul argues that, "if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules," he is not recommending new regulations and penalties for the NFL or the Church Softball League, but reminding one Christian that he must exercise and train himself toward spiritual perseverance

b. the creeds of men are notably tolerant toward sin at the point at which they argue that the believer is once-saved, always saved, and that obedience is rather optional, but the Holy Spirit answers, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears him and works righteousness is accepted by him" (Acts 10:34-35).

4. the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him and hope in his mercy, who "now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

a. God takes no pleasure in insincerity in worship or teaching as doctrines the traditions of men (Malachi 1:6-10)

b. "So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:8) and "without faith it is impossible to please him, for he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

c. obedience is not optional (First Thessalonians 4:1-2)

Conclusion

Psalm 147 is a call to praise God who is our provider of life and all its necessities, but the favor he shows to us also makes us accountable as stewards of his blessings, grace and gospel.

Psalm 148: Praise Him

Introduction

If Psalm 147 was analyzed for containing two calls to praise, what must one think of Psalm 148 which is simply filled with such invitations? Praise is invited from the heavens in verses 1-6 and then from the earth in verses 7-14 in this “Hallelujah Psalm.” [Read Psalm 148:1-14.] In Psalm 148, every created thing and being is summoned to give praise to God in a way that is far too uncommon today when so much skepticism, apathy and materialism abounds. Where are you when this call is issued?

Discussion

I. The Text

A. From the Heavens (1-6)

1. any good Hallelujah psalm must begin as this one does, but then it just keeps going, invoking the praise of God from every direction above the earth

2. the hosts of heaven, both animate and inanimate, are called to praise God, but while it is easy to contemplate angelic worship, it takes a bit more concentration to comprehend the sun, moon and stars somehow praising God

a. “an innumerable company of angels” (Hebrews 12:22) is often portrayed as approaching God and speaking to him in songs and petitions

b. the constellations and other heavenly bodies, however, are not invested with that kind of consciousness, but as they shine reflect a semblance of God’s own glory on behalf of man who constantly needs to be reminded of something bigger than himself

c. it is here in the heavens of heavens where thunder and lightning emanate as well

3. they are all summoned to praise God because they are part of his creation, and a part that transcends the very limited life span of man

a. we look upon the same sun as Moses, David, Jesus and George Washington; the same moon hangs over our heads that inhabited the dream of Joseph and the thoughts of Job

b. if you cannot come to grips with how these heavenly bodies can praise God, then you need to spend an hour one evening staring at them until what the psalmist understood becomes clear to you

B. From the Earth (7-14)

1. the psalm shifts near the middle to solicit praise for God from the earth itself, that is, from everything that depends upon the Lord for providence to exist

2. nature is included again, but the progression eventually finds its way to mankind so that all people regardless of their age or status might learn to worship the Lord

3. the subhuman aspects of creation worship God in the same sense that the inanimate heavens do—by adding to the evidence of an intelligent designer and contributing to the beauty, thrill and wonder of the world around us and even beneath us

4. again the section closes with an explanation of the reasonableness of all this attention heaped upon God—his name alone is exalted because he has exalted the strength or dominion of his people near to him; if there is anything the church should be able to grasp, it is that

II. Some Applications

A. God Is Creator

1. the theme of Psalm 148 is clearly God’s worthiness of praise on the basis of his role as Creator

a. the universe displays unavoidable evidence of design and intelligence so that only a fool could suppose that there is no higher power behind it all and that nature, humanity and space exist only as unexplained accidents of evolution (Romans 1:20-23)

b. idolatry was the alternative chosen by the ancients who replaced the God of heaven with images of their own carving and molding, but today intellectualism is the fashionable response

c. God is rejected as Creator and the earth is attributed to a big bang of densely packed space matter hurtling through the heavens, the origin of which is utterly unknowable

2. the Bible’s account of creation is recorded in the opening chapters of the book of Genesis and accounts for every aspect of the known universe and in a way that is completely plausible as long as a supernatural voice is allowed to speak (Colossians 1:13-18)

a. creation in Genesis is attributed not just to God the Father, but to the Godhead, the divine

“We” and here the Holy Spirit further connects creation to a pre-incarnate Jesus Christ

b. it is not that Jesus is the first creature, but that he is superior to all creatures and the only member of the Godhood to assume “the likeness of sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3)

c. God the son became acquainted with creation in a most intimate way by enclosing his eternal spirit in a tabernacle of flesh and “learning obedience by the things which he suffered” (Hebrews 10:5, 5:8)

3. as much as anything the inanimate parts of the universe praise God by exercising their functions—illuminating the sky, beautifying the valley, electrifying the clouds, irrigating the village—and by defying the godless fantasy that all could have resulted by mere chance (First Peter 4:17-19)

B. The Fate of the Heavens and Earth

1. the heavens and earth are on display throughout the Bible, but only rarely are they summoned to praise God in this manner

2. in Psalm 148, they are shown in all their glory, and yet with the exception of the animate members, the heavens and earth are but temporary (Romans 8:18-23)

3. the adoption and redemption of the disciples of Christ is a reference to the day of judgment, a day which in other passages coincides with the end of the earth (Second Peter 3:7-10)

a. in the days of Noah, God promised a limited punishment upon an unbelieving world and the result was a vast flood that wiped out most of humanity and left behind traces of the destruction still visible today

b. years later, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were treated to a fiery punishment that wiped out every resident save for the few that managed to escape by the hand of angels

4. but the destruction that Peter foresaw goes beyond both of those, leaving no room for further evangelism or opportunities to repent (Revelation 21:1-8)

a. just as in those earlier devastations, a minority will be preserved according to God’s grace upon the penitent and faithful, condemning all those who wallowed in iniquity

b. the transitory nature of creation and, perhaps more immediately, our own lives, is intended to be a motivator toward better priorities and spiritual focus (Second Peter 3:11-13)

C. Everyone Praise Him

1. part of the human response has to be the kind of heartfelt praise this psalm describes—a confidence and affection toward God that hopes for new heavens and earth (Hebrews 2:10-13)

2. when creation is again called to worship God, it is because of Jesus Christ and a better redemption of the people of God, among whom you should be one (Isaiah 43:18-21, 44:23, 49:13)

3. a disinterest in “going to church” is indicative of a greater problem than oversleeping or social anxiety; it indicates ingratitude and unpreparedness when it comes to the purpose of the gospel

a. the one who chooses not to worship with the saints, or even at home, is making a quiet choice to do less for his creator than what is reasonable (Isaiah 43:22-28)

b. the Hebrew writer makes clear that we are not responsible for sacrificing bulls and goats or buying sweet cane or bringing grain offerings, but we are obliged to return to the Lord “the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name” (Hebrews 13:15)

4. we ought to create within us hearts that crave worship (Philippians 1:9-11)

D. His Name Alone is Exalted

1. the end result is that God’s name is exalted; “He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever: Holy and awesome is His name” (Psalm 111:9).

2. the 10 commandments have been nailed to the cross, but nothing in the New Testament liberates the people of God to take his name in vain by attaching it to false oaths, curses or carelessness

3. even the word “Hallelujah” itself contains God’s name at the end and every instance of it should be treated with respect

Conclusion

Psalm 148 is a study in the praise of God that goes on around us all the time. Heaven and earth, inanimate and animate, comprise a chorus of thanksgiving and honor, and it is shameful if we will not join.

Psalm 149: A New Song

Introduction

Psalm 149 celebrates Israel's victory over an enemy that is not specifically named in the song itself. It calls upon worshipers to sing a new song to the Lord, which is exactly what Psalm 149 is—a new song about the Lord, his people (verses 1-4) and his enemies (5-9). [Read Psalm 149:1-9.] Psalm 149 adds at least one great promise to the minds of those who read and sing it. It is the knowledge that God takes pleasure in his people and will reward them with salvation—surely a salvation greater than anything that earth could understand.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Let Israel Rejoice (1-4)

1. this hallelujah psalm begins with a unique invitation to sing a new song to the Lord—unique perhaps to the psalms, but not this psalm itself, for Psalm 96 had issued the same call: “Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord, all the earth.”

a. the thirty-third psalm even combined the process of singing with that of playing skillfully with a shout of joy (see verse 3)

b. when written, the psalms were just that—new songs—and there is something with deep potential for great praise in the composition of new poetry, songs and homages to the God of heaven

2. this particular new song is about Israel's Maker and King, and the psalmist hopes to motivate his neighbors to rejoice in their relationship to the one true God, even praising him in dance and upon musical instruments

a. very clearly, the Holy Spirit understood how to communicate such customs during the Law of Moses and is just as equipped should he desire to tell New Testament Christians to play and dance as acts of praise

b. clearly, however, he does not; moreover, dancing and playing instruments both stand or fall together, but few will argue for the former when they really only want to listen to others play their worship for them

3. it might not always seem like it, but God does take pleasure in his people

a. it does not always seem like a father takes pleasure in his sons and daughters either, for he must occasionally punish them or require them to do chores or abstain from certain fun behaviors

b. maturity reveals that such sternness was itself only more evidence that the parent took pleasure in the offspring and the same is true of our relationship to the Heavenly Father who will beautify the meek with salvation

B. To Execute Vengeance on the Nations (5-9)

1. the psalm takes a gentle shift in its second half as the saints' joy is addressed again with a focus upon their enemies

2. the image of them is singing upon their beds, which might have been the couches upon which they reclined while eating as well as the cots where they slept

3. their song is a violently victorious one in which they confound their enemies with a sharp two-edged sword of vengeance and punishment

a. the saints execute upon their enemies “the written judgment,” possibly a reference to the books of heaven in which the deeds of men are recorded or a reference to Scripture itself, the standard by which such works are judged

b. the role of the sanctified people of God during judgment is a fairly quiet theme of the New Testament, hinted at perhaps here in Psalm 149 where something much more immediate and physical was probably in view

II. Some Applications

A. A New Song

1. when the psalms were written, they were all new songs, just as each of the proverbs was once completely original and every word of poetry, teaching and homage were at one time pleasantly unfamiliar

2. we sometimes get the idea that all of our songs, for instance, must predate the Second World

War to be scripturally useful in worship, but that is obviously absurd

a. it might be that we prefer the older style of hymns or the familiar lyrics that we can sing without reading, but there is something to be said for newer hymns that maintain reverence while also adopting a more modern style of expression (the same principle is in play when deciding between a King James Bible and many more modern alternatives)

b. there is a certain benefit in shaking off the familiar, staying within God's will, but investigating songs that challenge us again to think critically, examine the lyrics and look for beauty and truth

3. just as one might write a new song, he might also write new proverbs and parables to explain the New Testament, or pen poetry and other homages to God his Maker

a. if God has given to someone an ability to create, then that one must steward his talent well and use it to glorify its giver (Acts 9:36-39)

b. Tabitha made tunics and garments where others might make songs and poems, but so many things can be good works by which people remember God as well as the person through whom he worked

4. Paul might have had a miraculous ability in mind when he urged Timothy "to stir up the gift of God which is in you" (Second Timothy 1:6), but the same can easily be said to any of us who have abilities that could bring glory to God, but which we are stifling or neglecting (Matthew 25:19-29)

B. Dancing Praise

1. the following psalm will focus much more on instrumental music in worship, but this psalm also introduces the dance as an expression of Old Testament praise

2. the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* says, "Dancing, that is, the expression of joy by rhythmical movements of the limbs to musical accompaniment, is scarcely ever mentioned in the Bible as a social amusement, except in a general way Of the social dancing of couples in the modern fashion there is no trace."¹⁵

a. the kind of dance that goes on at proms and homecomings is a subject for another day

b. this is a question of the place of dance in worship toward God

3. after the song of Moses commemorated the Dead Sea crossing, his sister Miriam commissioned a dance for the occasion as well (Exodus 15:19-21)

a. this seems to be a combination of the two other kinds of dancing—public rejoicing and overt worship

b. it was common to welcome a king or general or patriarch with music and dancing; we see it when Jephthah's daughter leads the maidens of Israel to dance before her father with tambourines in hand (see Judges 11:34) and later Israelite women celebrate Saul and David in much the same way (see 1 Samuel 18:6; 21:11; 29:5)

4. the more religious dance, which was more overtly an act of worship, is to be found in the Israelites' idolatry with the molten calf (see Exodus 32:19), the dance of the maidens of Shiloh at an annual feast (see Judges 21:19) and the leaping of the prophets of Baal around their idolatrous altar at Mount Carmel (see First Kings 18:26)

a. even David participated in dance worship (Second Samuel 6:12-15); it was this act that caused Michal to despise David in her heart because he became the object of adoration among the other young women of Israel (cf. First Chronicles 15:29)

b. the appearance of this dance is fairly uncertain, save for that it included whirling around, leaping, and great physical exertion—and separation of the genders (cf. Jeremiah 31:13)

5. dance was every bit as much a part of pre-Christian worship as instrumental music and the two continue to stand or fall together

a. we eschew the one for the same reason as the other, unless we are honestly inconsistent and confess that we love the sound of the piano, harp and flute, but cannot quite accept the image of the preacher whirling around the pulpit or the elders appointing a dance leader for each service

b. the authority of the Old Testament in commands and examples has been fulfilled and removed, so that animal sacrifice, Sabbath-keeping, instruments of musical worship and even dance would require New Testament reauthorization, which, unlike singing, they lack (Hebrews 8:7-8, 13)

C. Beautifying the Meek With Salvation

1. the real heart of Psalm 149 is at the end of verse 4 where the writer acknowledges that God takes pleasure in his people by beautifying the humble, or meek, with salvation

a. even in Bible times, people were concerned with beautifying their appearances with

clothing, cosmetics, jewelry and the like; before Esther or any of the other potential consorts of King Ahasuerus could enter the palace, she was subjected to 12 months' preparation with oils and perfumes (see Esther 2:12)

b. the ancients found beauty in objects that seem strange to us today like rings in the nose (see Genesis 24:30)

2. God's pleasure, however, is not a beauty pageant where physical poise and Vaseline-induced smiles bring favor; instead it is a pursuit of godly humility and meekness which the Lord wants to reward

a. Jesus quoted Psalm 37:11 in his sermon on the mount, which says that, "the meek shall inherit the earth, And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."

b. "A meek and humble people ... shall trust in the name of the Lord" (Zephaniah 3:12) by upholding justice, seeking righteousness and humility (2:3)

3. meekness is defined as "a calm temper of mind, not easily provoked"¹⁶

a. meekness is defined as well by the qualities that surround it (Colossians 3:12-15)

b. the meek submit to God, embrace his son and bear obedient fruit to the Holy Spirit by upholding justice and seeking righteousness and humility rather than conflict and advantage

4. only the meek are beautified with salvation (First Peter 3:3-4)

a. they wear their redemption like a royal robe and crown, not in arrogance of superiority, but in contentment of hope

b. and it is a beauty that is enhanced as the years pass and its consummation draws closer

D. Saints Joyful in Glory

1. the mildly imprecatory conclusion to Psalm 149 finds the saints of God praising him as judgment bears down upon the unrighteous

2. Jude likewise envisioned the saints of God taking part in the final judgment of mankind (Jude 14-15)

a. this might either be a reference to angels (see Matthew 25:31, Second Thessalonians 1:7) or to the dead among redeemed men (see First Thessalonians 3:12-13)

b. Paul asked, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world" (First Corinthians 6:2)?

c. the point is that the people of God should find joy in discipleship, especially in light of the judgment to come, although that will surely mean that some whom they love will be lost as well

3. we sometimes get so bogged down in the difficulties of this life that we comfort ourselves with thoughts of the joys of eternity, but to an admittedly lesser degree, joy is to reign in this life as well

a. Romans 14:17: "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

b. Romans 15:13: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

c. Romans 15:32: "that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you."

4. joy is a fruit of living in the Spirit and if your life is not bearing joy, something is amiss (Galatians 5:22-25)

a. so often, it is those passions and desires that rot the fruit or keep it from budding in the first place

b. it was true of the seed sown among the thorns of the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, which choked it to death (see Matthew 13:22)

c. what is it that you are allowing to choke your joy?

Conclusion

Psalm 149 has reminded us to praise the Lord with our creativity and energy, but in a fashion that respects his ideal and authority to define true worship.

Psalm 150: Doxology

Introduction

The one hundred fiftieth and final psalm in the Hebrew collection appears to be a doxology for the Fifth Book of Psalms or even for the entire collection. The doxology caps the series of praises with a final reminder to worship God and every bit of Psalm 150 is focused upon that proper goal. [Read Psalm 150:1-6.] The first two verses give reasons for worshipping God, while verses 3-5 instruct the ancient Hebrews to employ musical instruments in their praises. Verse 6 brings the book of wisdom and song to a fitting close.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Praise Him (1-2)

1. the final psalm asks the believing among mankind to assemble in the sanctuary for worship, but it also invites praise in God's mighty firmament

2. we are reminded that God is not confined to an earthen temple and that worship likewise is broader than a question of place and even time

3. while there are periods of assembling for worship, the disciples of Christ are encouraged to live their lives in a way that expresses praise all the time and anywhere

4. long before there was a temple or a church building, Moses explained as much to his successor, Joshua, as he pleaded with God for a glimpse of the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 3:21-28)

B. The Sound of Instruments (3-5)

1. the psalmist then calls for Old Testament worshipers to play their various musical instruments in praise to God—brass, strings and even crashing cymbals, accompanied by dance and lyric

2. instruments of music were obviously very popular in Hebrew praise, although the Law itself limited them mainly to trumpets and other horns

3. the image of this musical symphony and dance recital is somewhat hard for us to imagine, but to the Hebrews, it likely came quite naturally

4. the symphony and ballet described here, however, are both but shadows of the worship of the church, which would authorize neither of them in favor of the clarity and purity of the simple human voice (Ephesians 5:15-21)

C. Everything That Has Breath (6)

1. the psalm closes with a final invitation—really a commandment—that everything with breath in it should praise God

2. we have seen in previous psalms how even the lower living members of creation are called to praise God by exercising their beauty and ability; here those who are able to read or understand the will of God should acknowledge that he deserves our praise even when there are other pressing matters and all sorts of distractions and diversions about us

II. Some Applications

A. His Excellent Greatness

1. just as Moses prayed when the Exodus drew to its close, so we should be motivated to sing to the excellent greatness of our God, who parts the Red Sea of doubt and obstacles and feeds us with the bread of heaven and the water of life (Ephesians 1:15-23)

2. his excellent greatness is not necessarily a measure of how much he enriches various members of the body or prospers certain congregations with growth and increase, but simply an assessment of the fact that he created us, redeemed us and has patience upon us while we stumble through life on the way to eternity (Romans 11:33-36)

3. sanctuary is a term used to refer to a temple or other holy place where worship is considered to be more formal, but Christ taught the woman at the well and us that the only location issue in worship concerns whether or not the heart is in it (John 4:19-24)

4. it is not just excellence or greatness, but excellent greatness, a praiseworthy degree attained only by a God who suffers long with his people because he is love and mercy

a. "Ascribe strength to God; His excellence is over Israel, And His strength is in the

clouds” (Psalm 68:34).

b. the excellence of the power of the gospel is in God and not in man and that is why we sing (see Second Corinthians 4:7)

B. Instruments

1. should we accompany our songs with instruments of music and dance, or even replace our lyrics with instrumental interludes?

2. while that was an option under Moses, nothing in the New Testament suggests that the church or its members may do so today

a. the authority that permitted them to play and dance in worship has been thoroughly fulfilled and abolished (Colossians 2:13-17)

b. all were merely shadows of the substance to come in the person of Christ and the covenant he would establish (cf. Hebrews 8:1-6)

3. instruments of music and even dance can never express worship in the way that a heartfelt verse can when sung in spirit and according to truth

a. God grew to hate Israel’s worship because it was hypocritical and inconsistent (Amos 5:21-25, 6:4-6)

b. this happens all too easily when one is merely strumming thoughtlessly upon a harp, but it can also happen when one is singing a familiar hymn

4. whether it is prayer or song, worship is only in spirit when the mind is focused and understanding (First Corinthians 13:1-3, 14:15-20)

C. Everything That Has Breath

1. everything that has breath should praise the Lord; there just is no excuse or justification for unbelief (Romans 1:18-21)

2. but among Christians, there is likewise no justification for excusing oneself from worshiping God on a regular basis (Hebrews 10:19-25)

a. some will be prevented from attending *every* service because of work, illness, travel or infirmity, but that yearning to worship will soon bring them back to praise God in the assembly

b. moreover, although prevented from assembling on occasion, they will know how to praise God when alone as well

c. one does not need a prayer leader or song leader or teacher to praise God by singing hymns, praying prayers and studying Scripture while alone

3. it is not that one can forsake the church and do all his worship alone, but at the same time, one should not think that he can only worship when assembled with others

a. perhaps the message in Matthew 18:20 about God being where two or three are gathered has been misunderstood and misapplied; Jesus was not saying that God abandons lonely Christians!

b. as Paul and Silas sang hymns in prison, so you can learn to sing psalms when cheerful just as you pray when suffering (see Acts 16:25, James 5:13)

4. let everything that has breath praise God and let nothing prevent you from doing so

Conclusion

Psalm 150 brings this series of songs to a fitting close, for they have been about bearing the emotions of their writers and singers before God and mankind in a way that expresses trust and faith and hope. God is excellently great and we ought to continue praising him until the last breath in our bodies is exhausted. Praise the Lord!

APPENDIX A: REVIEW QUESTIONS

Psalm 1

1. How does the first psalm provide the theme for the whole collection?
2. What do the scornful do?
3. Why is the godly man happy?
4. What is chaff and what is it worth? To what is it compared here?
5. What does true piety have to do with material prosperity?
6. How do you define success in this life?
7. What would the rich man have done to escape torment?

Psalm 2

1. Why did so many resist Jesus in his days upon Earth?
2. What are we to pray for concerning our government?
3. How do people today resist Jesus?
4. What happens to the power of the gospel when believers stop preaching it?
5. Why do so many today want to be rid of God?
6. When was Christ properly begotten, according to the New Testament?
7. Is Jesus a created being or something else? If something else, what?

Psalm 3

1. Why weren't David and Absalom getting along?
2. Describe Absalom's campaign.
3. How is God our "shield"?
4. What did David do with his worries?
5. Why did Elijah feel forlorn?
6. What behaviors are often subject to peer pressure?
7. What should we do when we are surrounded by trouble like David was?

Psalm 4

1. Why do some people hate the light?
2. What is the shared quest of mankind?
3. Why are friends of the world necessarily enemies of God?
4. What place has gratitude in the heart's quest for gladness?
5. When will God finally sort things out? How?
6. What does it mean to walk in the light vs. the darkness?
7. How does the Christian avoid persecution?

Psalm 5

1. Explain what it means to "own the Lord."
2. How could God not hate sinful things?
3. How does Peter suggest we overcome the devil?
4. What does the shield of faith protect?
5. What are the benefits of morning prayer?
6. What happens if we pray impatiently?
7. What does a God of love hate?

Psalm 6

1. What was real about David's pain?
2. What did he pray for?
3. How can the mind make the body sick?
4. How did David know that God heard him?
5. Why do the righteous suffer?
6. How is the way of the transgressor made hard?
7. What happens to workers of iniquity?

Psalm 7

1. In the Proverbs, lazy people didn't cry wolf—what did they cry?
2. What did David wish for his enemies? What do we wish for ours?
3. What does the devil hope will happen when we are wrongly accused?
4. When do two wrongs make a right?
5. What is the golden rule? How does it apply when someone is abusing you?
6. Why is it a fearful thing to fall into God's hands?
7. How are we tempted to pursue our own vengeance?

Psalm 8

1. What is man's place?
2. Where did life come from?
3. What does Emmanuel mean?
4. What did the children say about Jesus?
5. How are kingdom citizens like children?
6. How can schools hinder children's spiritual growth?
7. How can media hinder children's spiritual growth?

Psalm 9

1. What is David celebrating in the ninth Psalm?
2. Into what do God's enemies sink?
3. To what extent does God ordain human governments?
4. Name a few nations that God punished in the Bible.
5. What are the two sections of Hades?
6. Where are Heaven and Hell?
7. How is judgment according to *grace and* works?

Psalm 10

1. How is the prosperity of the righteous to be measured?
2. How can you see the wicked man's character defect on his face?
3. What specific threats are unknown to treasure laid up in heaven?
4. What did Paul preach to Felix?
5. What are examples of instant gratification?
6. Why is the wicked man so untrustworthy, even to his own friends?
7. How do the wicked get caught in their own traps?

Psalm 11

1. What did the writer's friends recommend he do?
2. Who took a shot in the dark? What does this mean?
3. If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?
4. What did Habakkuk mean about silence before God (2:20)?
5. What is involved in being in the world, but not of it?
6. What are the foundations of a godly society?
7. How will the church survive?

Psalm 12

1. What are some examples of idle words?
2. What is wrong with flattery?
3. What happens to silver that is refined in the furnace?
4. When is it right to compromise? What makes compromise wrong?
5. How did God prove to Elijah that he was not alone?
6. What happens when ministers stop moralizing from the pulpit?
7. How do we put the devil on the defensive?

Psalm 13

1. What are David's four complaints?
2. What made David feel better?
3. Why do some people shun the light Jesus provides?
4. What can people do when they feel they are at their spiritual breaking point?
5. What is wrong with self-pity?
6. What are the limits of self-reliance?
7. In what respects are Christians heirs?

Psalm 14

1. What does the fool say in his heart? Why is this folly?
2. What message does the discontented Christian send the unbeliever?
3. With what is the believer to be filled?
4. What is a practical atheist?
5. What do all mature people share?
6. What evidence of design exists in the universe?
7. How often are we to try to exhort one another?

Psalm 15

1. What was God's holy hill?
2. How is it possible to walk blamelessly?
3. Why is it best to despise the vile?
4. When might we swear to our hurt?
5. What are some practical ways we love our neighbors?
6. How can we convert the evil if we despise them?
7. How can God keep us until the end?

Psalm 16

1. What is a Michtam?
2. Who are the saints today? What are the qualifications?
3. What are the other gods today?
4. What use of this psalm did Peter and Paul make?
5. What kind of friend did Nathan turn out to be for David?
6. How necessary is resurrection to Christianity? Explain.
7. What is the duty of the believer (First Corinthians 15:58)?

Psalm 17

1. What is the purpose of an examination?
2. What did David expect from God as the apple of his eye?
3. What kind of vengeance did David crave?
4. How can anyone count it joyful when he is tempted?
5. What stands between tribulation and hope?
6. What is the main problem with finding temptations' way of escape?
7. What is the end intended by the Lord, according to Job's case?

Psalm 18

1. Where did David find solace in his most difficult moments?
2. According to what did God reward David?
3. What kind of people does God save?
4. How is God like a rock?
5. With what should we love God?
6. What comprises the Christian's armor?
7. What is the devil like? Explain.

Psalm 19

1. How do the heavens declare God's glory?
2. What makes God's will more desirable than honey?
3. What are presumptuous sins?
4. Why are not many wise or noble chosen?
5. What is prize that Christians are pursuing?
6. How have men tried to wipe out the word of God?
7. Why is there no excuse for disbelief?

Psalm 20

1. What is wrong with trusting in horses and chariots?
2. What is the purpose of civil governments?
3. What could be wrong with a Christian holding elective office?
4. For what does the Christian hope from his government?
5. What would be the problem if our government taught the Bible?
6. What is the new world order from the New Testament?
7. How far should we go to obey civil government?

Psalm 21

1. Do you think David wanted to live forever?
2. Why don't more "kings" trust in the Lord like David did?
3. How does faith bring victory to the faithful?
4. How is the crown used as a New Testament symbol?
5. How did Paul handle criticisms of his apostleship?
6. How does God help us in times of temptation?
7. What happens when we forsake assembling?

Psalm 22

1. Why did David feel so forsaken by God?
2. What part of this psalm are prophetic of Christ's trial?
3. How did David learn that he really was not forsaken?
4. What did people think when Jesus quoted part of this psalm on the cross?
5. What makes people today feel forsaken by God?
6. Why won't God just force his friendship upon us?
7. Will God ever forsake the faithful and penitent?

Psalm 23

1. Why do so many people find such solace in the twenty-third psalm?
2. What two images of God are presented (1-4 and 5-6)?
3. What are real sheep like and how does that compare to people?
4. What did Jesus do for his sheep?
5. What does Jesus do for sheep?
6. What is involved in passing through the valley of the shadow of death?
7. What is comforting about a rod and staff?

Psalm 24

1. What is implied in the Lord's ownership of the Earth?
2. What is the equivalent of ascending the hill of the Lord?
3. Who is able to achieve that feat?
4. What is the basis of human fellowship with God?
5. For what are Earth's stewards responsible?
6. List a few modern idols.
7. What does victory look like in Revelation 21-22?

Psalm 25

1. What is an acrostic poem?
2. What did David want God to remember? What did he hope he would forget?
3. How does God teach us?
4. What makes it hard to wait on the Lord?
5. What is true of us if we fail the waiting test?
6. What happens after death?
7. What happens to doubters?

Psalm 26

1. What is vindication?
2. How does James describe wavering trust in the New Testament?
3. Who famously washed his hands of guilt in the gospels?
4. Define integrity.
5. What were the obvious imperfections of David's life?
6. How can we know that our loyalty is as absolute as it can get?
7. What causes us to become desensitized to sin?

Psalm 27

1. Of whom was David afraid?
2. What one thing did David ask of God?
3. What must we do to seek the face of the Lord?
4. When does the kingdom cease to be our first priority?
5. How do we maintain our fellowship with God?
6. How do we figure out what God wants from us?
7. What keeps us from losing heart when it seems like we're failing?

Psalm 28

1. How is God like a rock?
2. What un-rocklike response does the psalmist hope to elicit from God?
3. Can we likewise pray that our neighbors get what they deserve?
4. What specifically is the believer's shield? What does it protect?
5. What is one thing God cannot do?
6. Why do people stumble over Jesus?
7. What is the solid foundation of God?

Psalm 29

1. What is ascribed to God?
2. How powerful is the voice of the Lord?
3. What exactly are the oracles of God?
4. What distinguishes jealousy from envy?
5. What are the rivals for God's worship?
6. Define friendship with the world and why it is so dangerous.
7. How does one cure himself of spiritual adultery?

Psalm 30

1. What is Sheol?
2. When does joy come?
3. What was the psalmist's unwise boast?
4. How does conversion cleanse the conscience?
5. What is the Christian's one hope?
6. What is the Christian's responsibility to it?
7. Where is the potential for disinheritance?

Psalm 31

1. What did Moses beg of God?
2. Whom did the writer hate?
3. What was his physical condition?
4. Whom does God preserve? Whom does he repay?
5. What is involved in waiting for the Lord?
6. What kinds of things had Paul suffered as a Christian?
7. How did he describe his affliction?

Psalm 32

1. Where is Psalm 32:1-2 quoted in the New Testament? How?
2. Why would any believer want to avoid God?
3. What is the value of a healthy sense of shame?
4. How are sinners sometimes obstinate?
5. What is necessary to spiritual regeneration?
6. Why is it unnecessary for the Christian to be baptized over and over?
7. Where can we find joy when all around us is crumbling?

Psalm 33

1. When do we make joyful sounds?
2. What makes for a pleasant scent to the Lord in Heaven?
3. What is the difference between godly fear and terror?
4. Why does our worship sometimes lack obvious joy?
5. Describe the place of instrumental music in worship in both testaments.
6. What does Jesus do for us as our high priest?
7. How does he sympathize with our weaknesses?

Psalm 34

1. Why did David change his behavior before Abimelech?
2. How does one learn the fear of the Lord?
3. Whom does God hear?
4. How does God deliver the righteous out of every affliction?
5. What is the purpose of angels in this era?
6. What is involved in seeking first the kingdom of God?
7. What distinguishes the wise man's foundation from the foolish?

Psalm 35

1. What did David ask of God?
2. Why is it that harmless people can be perceived as threats?
3. What do malicious witnesses do?
4. Why shouldn't we rejoice at another's stumbling?
5. What are the weapons of spiritual war?
6. Is guilt by association always fair? Explain.
7. How is it practical to love an enemy?

Psalm 36

1. Why does the wicked allow himself to transgress?
2. What is the problem with self-flattery?
3. Whom does God accept in every nation?
4. What will someone do if he truly hates evil?
5. What is character?
6. What is the light that Jesus shines into our lives?
7. How do we resist the pressure of evil people to follow them?

Psalm 37

1. Why would anyone envy an evildoer?
2. Explain what it means to delight oneself in the Lord.
3. What is fretting oneself and how can it be avoided?
4. How can I know I am walking in steps ordered by God?
5. What things are worth worrying about?
6. How does the story of the rich man and Lazarus illustrate justice?
7. How is God's law written on the believer's heart?

Psalm 38

1. How does David describe his current relationship with the Lord?
2. What was ever before him?
3. Why did his enemies accuse him?
4. What must the Christian do to complete the race victoriously?
5. What can lonely people do to find solace and company?
6. What does godly sorrow produce?
7. What does worldly sorrow produce?

Psalm 39

1. Why did the psalmist want to be mute?
2. What did he realize about life itself?
3. How did he perceive the chastening of the Lord?
4. What are some of the sins of the tongue?
5. Explain the hypocrisy of cursing a brother.
6. When is it right to be angry?
7. How might prayer help cure discontentment?

Psalm 40

1. What new song did God put in David's mouth?
2. What is David's beatitude in Psalm 40?
3. How did the Hebrew writer apply verses 6-10 in Hebrews 10:5-7?
4. How does God bend forward to us?
5. Of what is Christ the perfect example?
6. What should his self-sacrifice impress upon us?
7. What is David's imprecation?

Psalm 41

1. What beatitude opens the forty-first psalm?
2. If someone we pray for dies anyway, has our prayer failed?
3. Is every sick person cursed by God? Why do some people think that?
4. What are the benefits of friendship?
5. What are the risks of friendship?
6. Why is it easier to seek mercy than to extend it?
7. What is the doxology of Book One of the Psalms?

Psalm 42

1. How does a deer pant for water?
2. What should be our attitude about appearing before God?
3. How does one feel when his tears are his food?
4. How do we pour out our souls before God?
5. What makes us feel like God has forgotten us?
6. How does the devil twist a knife in the suffering saint's back?
7. What is left when hope is lost?

Psalm 43

1. When did David feel oppressed?
2. When do we feel oppressed today?
3. What is a modern expression for feeling "cast down"?
4. How do evil men tend to wax?
5. How is God's strength made perfect in human weakness?
6. How does it feel when God's word reveals our own flaws?
7. How is it possible to maintain joy when things are going wrong?

Psalm 44

1. What are the benefits and drawbacks to listening to old stories?
2. What does it mean to boast in God?
3. What can our defeats teach us?
4. How did Paul apply verse 22 in Romans 8:36?
5. When does it seem like God is sleeping?
6. What is involved in spiritual warfare?
7. When do we need patience most with God?

Psalm 45

1. What is the pleasing theme of the forty-fifth psalm?
2. How does the Hebrew writer make use of verses 6-7?
3. What didn't Pilate understand about the Lord's kingdom?
4. What is the point of Christ's exiting the "Ivory Palaces"?
5. What sets people free?
6. What is Christ's relationship to the church?
7. What makes the church an everlasting kingdom?

Psalm 46

1. How does God prove himself a help in time of trouble?
2. When do we need to be still and know he is God?
3. What becomes of those who love and practice unrighteousness?
4. What are people looking for when they face disaster?
5. What river runs through Heaven?
6. What famine did Amos predict?
7. What did Habakkuk recommend?

Psalm 47

1. What did the psalmist want the people to celebrate?
2. Who is the ruler of the Earth now?
3. What did the ark of the covenant represent?
4. How do we become proficient with our weaponry?
5. What should characterize our worship?
6. What causes people to skip or forsake assembling?
7. How do we know that God still reigns over men?

Psalm 48

1. What did Jerusalem represent to the Jews?
2. What does Jerusalem represent today?
3. What is the work of the church?
4. What is Israel's successor on the Earth today?
5. How do people refuse him who calls?
6. What is the warning about becoming a teacher?
7. How is the church like a city on a hill?

Psalm 49

1. Why should I fear in times of trouble?
2. What was the purchase price to redeem one lost soul?
3. Who will shepherd those who have foolish confidence?
4. Why do you never see a hearse with a luggage rack?
5. What is the difference between a dead man and a dead animal?
6. What good are land, money and other possessions when judgment comes?
7. What is the cost of spiritual wealth?

Psalm 50

1. How do we make a covenant with our God?
2. What did God testify against Israel?
3. How do we offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God?
4. What does God say to the wicked?
5. What is the difference between gossip and slander?
6. Who sees the salvation of God?
7. What is necessary to worship God with the right spirit?

Psalm 51

1. What does the psalm's heading suggest as its context?
2. What caused David to confess his sin?
3. What is meant by sin ever before me?
4. How was David "brought forth in iniquity"?
5. What did David promise to do when he felt cleansed?
6. What will God not despise?
7. How do we draw near to God?

Psalm 52

1. What does the psalm's heading suggest as its context?
2. How does the psalmist describe the mighty man?
3. In what did he trust?
4. What was the psalmist like?
5. List some "devouring words."
6. What was the fault of the rich young ruler?
7. Why is it so hard to wait on the vengeance of God?

Psalm 53

1. What does the fool say in his heart?
2. How does atheism tend to immoral behaviors?
3. Is "there is none who does good" an absolute or relative statement?
4. When would Israel rejoice?
5. How is hope like an anchor for the soul?
6. How can we know that there is a God?
7. How can we try to persuade the atheist there is a God?

Psalm 54

1. What is the likely context for writing Psalm 54?
2. Define vindication.
3. If God is your helper, what can man do to you?
4. What is a freewill offering?
5. Why didn't David just kill Saul when he had the chance?
6. Why don't we lose heart considering the difficulties of each day?
7. What's wrong with treating God like your copilot?

Psalm 55

1. Why do some people seem to enjoy bearing grudges?
2. When have you ever wished to be like a bird?
3. Who was troubling the psalmist?
4. What was his speech like? His heart?
5. When is it right to run away? When is it wrong?
6. How does the Bible describe true friends?
7. What is involved in casting your burden on the Lord?

Psalm 56

1. What is the likely context for the writing of this psalm?
2. How do people stir up strife?
3. How did the enemies of Jesus stir up strife for him?
4. What sinful attitude is identified in Hebrews 13:5-6?
5. What is required to show trust in God?
6. What is the spiritual danger in pack mentality?
7. How does God keep us in the faith?

Psalm 57

1. What is the likely context for the writing of this psalm?
2. Where was David's soul as he wrote?
3. What happens to people who dig pits for others?
4. What does it take to feel like worshipping when so down?
5. What are some figurative or metaphorical lions?
6. How can we count it joy when tried?
7. Why should we be steadfast in the midst of trial?

Psalm 58

1. What is the accusation against the mighty lords?
2. When are the wicked estranged?
3. What are their teeth like?
4. When can the righteous rejoice?
5. When do the Revelation martyrs rejoice?
6. What will mankind say?
7. How much influence over God does the funeral preacher exert?

Psalm 59

1. What does the psalm's heading suggest about its context?
2. What were the psalmist's enemies like?
3. How can God still be like a fortress?
4. Why should the world hate Christians?
5. How do believers bite and devour one another?
6. How and why do we heap coals of fire on our enemies?
7. What is the benefit of making worship music a bigger part of our lives?

Psalm 60

1. What does the psalm's heading suggest about its context?
2. What was each nation's fate, according to verses 7-8?
3. What does chastening feel like? Why is it necessary anyway?
4. What is the "wine of confusion"?
5. What is the gauntlet by which we enter the kingdom?
6. Describe a trial that you would not trade.
7. Who is the Chief Shepherd? What does this imply?

Psalm 61

1. To what does David liken God?
2. What should watch over the king?
3. What is the heritage of the Christian?
4. What kind of prayer satisfies Pharisees?
5. What kind of prayer did Cornelius make?
6. What can separate the disciple from God?
7. When must we learn that God's grace is sufficient?

Psalm 62

1. What kind of person blesses with the mouth and curses with the heart?
2. What are people tempted to do when riches increase?
3. What will God render to each man?
4. How do different hearts respond to the gospel seed?
5. Why was Habakkuk an honest doubter?
6. Why is this song called "The Only Psalm"?
7. What can ultimately make life vain?

Psalm 63

1. What would we do if our souls really thirsted for God?
2. Why was Absalom bitter toward his father?
3. What two broad categories of people will God punish in judgment?
4. How did Jesus illustrate persistence in the gospel quest?
5. Why are some afraid to own their Lord?
6. What is the purpose of life?
7. What is key to contentment?

Psalm 64

1. What do the wicked aim like arrows?
2. Why did the Sodomites hate Lot?
3. Why were the Galatians upset with Paul?
4. How should the word of God be spoken?
5. What is to be our attitude toward our enemies?
6. What is the value of producing a sense of guilt in the guilty?
7. How is Queen Esther an example of the right kind of courage?

Psalm 65

1. Which one is blessed?
2. What credit does the psalmist give God?
3. How do we know that God is no respecter of persons?
4. How do we approach God's throne of grace?
5. What would make us guilty of trampling his courts?
6. What is Deism?
7. Where should God be on our priority list?

Psalm 66

1. When do people shout for joy? What do they say?
2. What historical event does the psalmist reference?
3. What would have kept God from listening?
4. What similar journey do Christian pilgrims undertake?
5. How does Paul describe the Christian's fresh start?
6. What are we supposed to learn from what happened after the Exodus?
7. Whom does God choose not to hear?

Psalm 67

1. What is an invocation?
2. What did Aaron invoke?
3. What does Ebenezer mean?
4. Whom did Nehemiah want to learn the law?
5. What is a doxology?
6. How does God know those who are his?
7. Who gives the increase?

Psalm 68

1. What does God do daily for his people?
2. What was the purpose of the ark of the covenant?
3. What does God's name mean?
4. How does Jesus lead captivity captive?
5. What kind of prayer works?
6. Is water baptism an answer or an appeal?
7. Is water baptism the replacement for circumcision?

Psalm 69

1. How did David feel as this psalm opened?
2. How many enemies did he perceive?
3. What had consumed him?
4. How did that also consume Jesus?
5. Why should we pray at mealtime?
6. What good is zeal without knowledge?
7. How will God save Zion now?

Psalm 70

1. How do you know David was desperate for salvation?
2. What did his enemies say to him?
3. Why do unbelievers look for inconsistencies in Christians?
4. Do Christians receive everything they for which they pray?
5. Why didn't God just remove the thorn from Paul's flesh?
6. Why don't we always pray for the day of the Lord to be hastened?
7. How can we magnify God's name?

Psalm 71

1. What is a person's most valuable asset?
2. At what stage of life was the psalmist as he wrote?
3. How can we make certain that God is near to us?
4. How is baptism an expression of trust?
5. Why is unwise to retire too early?
6. What would you think of God if he let you get imprisoned for your faith?
7. What is the prize?

Psalm 72

1. What makes this a royal psalm?
2. What was the hope for the king?
3. How many kings reigned over the united kingdom?
4. How does Jesus make compassion a hallmark of his reign?
5. What is the nature of his kingdom?
6. How is citizenship acquired?
7. Whose glory exceeds the earthly king's?

Psalm 73

1. What had Asaph envied? Why?
2. How did those people feel about God?
3. What did Asaph think he might have done in vain?
4. Where did he go for answers?
5. What did he conclude about the wicked and arrogant?
6. Why do the wicked prosper?
7. Is the hope of heaven enough if we are not richly blessed on Earth?

Psalm 74

1. How did the psalmist feel?
2. What did he want God to remember?
3. What source of information was even lacking in Israel then?
4. What is Leviathan?
5. How badly was the enemy's scoffing bothering the psalmist?
6. What is the trouble with shortsightedness?
7. What would it mean to be cast away from God forever?

Psalm 75

1. How does it help to recount God's wondrous deeds?
2. How does the psalmist illustrate God's judgment?
3. What happens when the horns of the wicked are cut off?
4. Why do some Christians lose their passion for worship?
5. What is the effect of a metaphorically stiff neck?
6. Whom did Stephen accuse of that malady?
7. How are the humble exalted?

Psalm 76

1. Is God known in this country?
2. What is God more majestic than?
3. Who can stand before God when his anger is roused?
4. What happens when rulers do not fear God?
5. What was the lesson from Gideon's Midianite victory?
6. How do some people try to make truces with the devil?
7. How will the wrath of man praise God?

Psalm 77

1. When do our souls refuse to be comforted?
2. What are the mixed emotions of remembering days of old?
3. What did the waters do when they saw God?
4. What kind of boldness takes us to the throne of God?
5. What could cause a believer to lose the power of prayer?
6. Why were things written before time?
7. Compare this life to a pilgrimage.

Psalm 78

1. With what would the psalmist open his mouth?
2. Why do we teach the next generation about God?
3. What were their fathers like?
4. What had the Ephraimites seen? How they did they respond?
5. How do we test God?
6. When did they finally repent?
7. Why did God choose Judah?

Psalm 79

1. What had happened to Jerusalem?
2. What the Israelites lately become?
3. What did the psalmist want God to do?
4. What did he want God to forget?
5. What did he wish for Jerusalem's neighbors?
6. What exalts a nation? What reproaches it?
7. What is positive and negative about extending second chances?

Psalm 80

1. How was Israel like a flock to God?
2. How was Israel like a vine?
3. Why is sometimes necessary that punishment be extended?
4. When do we feel like we are being punished by God?
5. How is the church like God's flock?
6. How is the church like a vine?
7. How does restoration differ from reformation?

Psalm 81

1. How did God test Israel at Meribah?
2. How does the psalm renew Jehovah's jealousy?
3. When did God give them up?
4. What is to be the spirit of our musical worship?
5. Why isn't Psalm 81 a blessing for novel Christian holidays?
6. How can we know if the Lord is among us or not?
7. What are the foreign gods threatening spiritual Israel?

Psalm 82

1. Who are the gods in whose midst God is?
2. What was their fault?
3. What is the plan of authority in the home?
4. What is the lesson of the Good Samaritan?
5. Which is worse—neglect of abuse?
6. How do we know that God is no respecter of persons?
7. What kinds of things make people biased?

Psalm 83

1. Why did the psalmist want God to stop holding his peace?
2. What did Israel's enemies plan to do?
3. What examples of punishment does the psalmist list?
4. How is the church like a shelter?
5. How do we exit a cycle of apostasy?
6. How do we know God will be there for us today?
7. What is our goal regarding our enemies?

Psalm 84

1. Who were the sons of Korah?
2. What is our equivalent for longing for the Lord's courts?
3. Why did the psalmist envy the sparrow?
4. What is the shield in the Christian's armor?
5. What happens in the tents of wickedness?
6. What forms the church's foundation?
7. How does Moses provide an example for the tempted saint?

Psalm 85

1. What is indignation?
2. To whom is God's salvation near?
3. Who destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C.?
4. What effect was this designed to have on Judah?
5. What is friendship with the world?
6. Define backsliding.
7. How do we listen to God?

Psalm 86

1. Why did the psalmist think his life deserved preservation?
2. How can God teach us his way?
3. Where are the depths of Sheol?
4. What signs of God's favor can we expect to be shown?
5. What does God owe his children?
6. How are God's blessings forfeited?
7. What does it take to fix one's heart wholly on the Lord?

Psalm 87

1. What was Jerusalem before it was Jerusalem?
2. Why is it called the city of David?
3. What did Solomon do with Jerusalem?
4. What did the Babylonians do to Jerusalem?
5. How did the law go forth from Jerusalem?
6. What did the Romans do with Jerusalem?
7. What is the prophetic illustration of Jerusalem now?

Psalm 88

1. Who did the psalmist think had put him in the pit?
2. Does God work wonders for the dead?
3. What is Abaddon?
4. What is the peculiar benefit of morning prayer?
5. What did man do the last time he had Paradise on Earth?
6. Why doesn't God just grant our every wish?
7. Is it permissible to be angry with God?

Psalm 89

1. Of what would the psalmist sing forever?
2. How does it feel when God's timeline clashes with ours?
3. Why did David think it was right for him to build God a house?
4. Where do we have all things that pertain to life and godliness?
5. What is godly character?
6. How did Christ ascend onto David's throne?
7. What is the reproach of Christ?

Psalm 90

1. Where and how did God begin to exist?
2. What happens to man when he dies—physically and spiritually?
3. How does the psalmist describe the years of our life?
4. What would we learn if we numbered our days?
5. Why is it unfashionable to believe in a Creator?
6. What does it mean to abide in God?
7. What is the purpose of human life?

Psalm 91

1. From what does God deliver those who trust in him?
2. Who cites verses 11-12 in the gospel accounts?
3. How did Simeon and Anna show they trusted and abided in the Lord?
4. Does this psalm indicate the believer is impervious to trial? Explain.
5. How did Paul describe his vacillation between life and death?
6. Why do we love God?
7. What do angels do for Christians?

Psalm 92

1. Why is it good to give thanks to God?
2. Would you like to have your horn exalted like the wild ox? Why or why not?
3. What do the righteous flourish like? Why?
4. What do they still do in old age?
5. What might happen if we stop making thanksgiving prayers?
6. What was the prayer of Agur?
7. What does it mean to worship in spirit and truth?

Psalm 93

1. What does the Lord wear for a belt?
2. What form God's trustworthy testimonies?
3. What limits, if any, are there to God's sovereignty?
4. What makes for fervent prayer?
5. How has God spoken to man throughout history?
6. What causes the Christian to worry?
7. Contrast conformity and transformation.

Psalm 94

1. How long shall the wicked exult?
2. What were the wicked doing to bother this psalmist?
3. What are the thoughts of man to God?
4. What person is blessed by the Lord?
5. What is our obligation to the most vulnerable in our society?
6. Is it required that all Christians liquidate their possessions to pool their resources?
7. How did the Hebrew writer describe the omniscience of God?

Psalm 95

1. Is your singing easily identified as a joyful noise?
2. How did the Hebrew writer use the Exodus pilgrims as a warning about apostasy?
3. What rest did God have for them? What rest has he for us?
4. Why do some capable believers refuse to answer the call to worship?
5. What is the "Christian Sabbath"?
6. What does Jesus promise to the people of his pasture?
7. How is apostasy tantamount to disbelief?

Psalm 96

1. What happens if we are unwilling to praise God before the nations?
2. What is ascribed to God in these songs?
3. With what does God judge the world?
4. When did David originally speak the words that open this psalm?
5. Do unfulfilled prayers indicate no answer?
6. What architectural appointments are required to create the beauty of holiness?
7. How is salvation a conditional proposition?

Psalm 97

1. How does the true God put idolaters to shame?
2. What are lovers of the Lord to hate?
3. What effect did thunder and lightning have at Mount Sinai?
4. What is God's evidence of concern even for unbelievers?
5. How close is God to us?
6. What does God send upon those who do not love truth?
7. What are the limits on hating evil?

Psalm 98

1. What had God remembered?
2. What is wrong with using mechanical instruments in musical worship now?
3. What is the ultimate form of deliverance from suffering?
4. What happens in Heaven when one sinner repents?
5. What will be the basis of God's judgment in the end?
6. For what does all creation eagerly wait?
7. What keeps us from being more anxious for the second coming?

Psalm 99

1. Where does the Lord sit enthroned?
2. What three great characters are mentioned as calling on the Lord?
3. How had God fairly treated them?
4. How is God's word unlike a flower or grass?
5. How is God's word like milk?
6. What is the difference between being humbled and humiliated?
7. What will God do with our unrighteousness when we confess it?

Psalm 100

1. Is singing optional for the tone-deaf or bashful worshiper?
2. What is it like to belong to God?
3. When is it right to withhold some form of our worship?
4. What animal is the devil like?
5. What is involved in knowing the Lord?
6. What does Jesus use his shepherd's rod and staff for?
7. Why did God reject musical worship in Amos's time?

Psalm 101

1. About what did David plan to sing?
2. What is another expression for the “way that is blameless”?
3. Why is it sometimes harder to walk with integrity inside the house?
4. What worthless things are often before our eyes?
5. What should we do with the arrogant, haughty slanderer?
6. What happens when rulers select worthless ministers?
7. What is true of all liars and those who believe them?

Psalm 102

1. When are we ever satisfied with a slow answer from God?
2. How was the psalmist like an owl? Like a sparrow?
3. Why did he feel this way?
4. What time did he think it was?
5. What was to be recorded for a future generation? Why?
6. If Heaven is our goal, should we ever be reluctant to die?
7. How does the Hebrew writer apply verses 25-27?

Psalm 103

1. What did the psalmist want worshipers to remember?
2. Why don't people think of God as slow to anger and merciful?
3. Why do other people think of him as only being slow to anger?
4. What would become of us if God dealt with us according to our sins?
5. How do we harmonize fear of God and love?
6. How did Jesus illustrate this love (Matthew 7:7-11)?
7. What are a man's days like?

Psalm 104

1. With what is God clothed?
2. How does the psalmist explain creation, seas and mountains?
3. What are the purposes of the sun and moon?
4. What happens to the body after it is used up?
5. What did the psalmist hope regarding his meditation?
6. What did hope regarding sinners?
7. What are the benefits of getting reconnected with creation?

Psalm 105

1. How can we make known his deeds among the peoples?
2. When do Christians neglect to seek his presence continually?
3. How did God protect Israel when they were nomadic?
4. How did he protect them during the famine?
5. Whom did he choose while Israel was in the land of Ham?
6. How did he sustain them along the way to Canaan?
7. Why did God give them the Promised Land?

Psalm 106

1. Who are blessed?
2. Upon what did the psalmist hope to look?
3. What did the writer confess?
4. How did Israel react on the far side of the Red Sea?
5. What interrupted their confidence?
6. What kept God from destroying Israel in Horeb?
7. Why did they begin to despise the pleasant promised land?

Psalm 107

1. What caused some of these people to cry out to God?
2. What does God do for the longing and hungry soul?
3. Where was darkness and the shadow of death?
4. What made others of this number into fools?
5. How did God get their attention even upon the sea?
6. Why would God ruin a river or a fruitful land?
7. What must the wise consider?

Psalm 108

1. What does it mean to wake the dawn?
2. What had God promised in his holiness?
3. Why did the writer suspect God had abandoned them?
4. What defines the steadfast heart?
5. How do we know that our labor is not in vain in the Lord?
6. What are the wages of sin? The reward of faith?
7. Why did Israel keep allying with heathen nations?

Psalm 109

1. What was David hearing?
2. How does it feel when your good is repaid with evil?
3. How are verses 6-12 applied in the life of Christ?
4. How was one apostle guilty of pursuing the poor and needy?
5. What are the purposes of fasting?
6. When is it harder or easier to praise God amidst a throng?
7. Where is there evidence of such corruption in the church?

Psalm 110

1. How is verse one possible or practical?
2. What is the priestly order of Melchizedek?
3. How might passages like this one have caused Israel to crave a warrior king?
4. With this in mind, why would Peter have rebuked Jesus's prophecies about death?
5. What New Testament writer references Melchizedek?
6. What is the implication of Adonai?
7. How does Christ's kingdom compare to the one of prophecy here?

Psalm 111

1. Why is it unwise to separate oneself from the company of the upright?
2. Do we really delight in God's works if we neglect to study them?
3. How is God's name described?
4. How is this used as a title for mere men then?
5. What is the beginning of wisdom?
6. How integral is practice to understanding?
7. With what four things should we love the lord our God?

Psalm 112

1. What does Hallelujah mean?
2. Why don't we always delight in God's commandments?
3. Why don't people lend and deal more generously?
4. How did Paul apply verse 9 in Second Corinthians 9:9?
5. What happens to the desire of the wicked?
6. Why do we sometimes find it hard to worship with zeal?
7. Why are God's commands far from burdensome?

Psalm 113

1. Where does God sit and what does he do there?
2. How does one praise the "name" of God?
3. Is God aloof from the righteous or approachable?
4. How does Christ compare to the scapegoat of the Old Testament?
5. What are the rules for observing the Lord's Supper?
6. What is wrong with using euphemisms for God's name?
7. How does Judgment Day promise a reversal of fortunes?

Psalm 114

1. What happened when Israel left Egypt?
2. What happened to the Sea and the Jordan and the mountains?
3. What two events resemble verses 7-8 (Exodus 17:6, Numbers 20:8-13)?
4. How can we tell if natural disasters are evidence of divine disapproval?
5. When do believers feel like they are surrounded by a strange language?
6. How are we tempted to be both in and of the world?
7. What is thirst for God's word and how is it satiated?

Psalm 115

1. When are we tempted to take the glory for ourselves?
2. How did the psalmist describe idols?
3. What happened to idolaters?
4. What two houses are specially mentioned here?
5. How does God give the increase, according to the apostle Paul?
6. Why don't the dead praise the Lord?
7. How does God keep us from falling into condemnation?

Psalm 116

1. Why did the psalmist love the Lord now?
2. What had made him feel low before?
3. Why do many people save prayer for times like these?
4. How did Paul allude to verses 10-11 in Second Corinthians 4:13?
5. What would the writer render to God in return?
6. Why is the death of a saint a precious thing?
7. What kinds of vows might we make to God today?

Psalm 117

1. Why should the nations extol God?
2. Most psalms address Israel; whom does this one address?
3. How does Paul use this psalm in Romans 15:8-13?
4. What is the greatest feature of God's patience?
5. What caused the old covenant to be broken?
6. What did Peter accomplish in the house of Cornelius?
7. How does mercy triumph over judgment?

Psalm 118

1. What is the obvious theme of Psalm 118?
2. How is verse 6 applied in Hebrews chapter thirteen?
3. When are we tempted to trust in men and princes more than God?
4. What songs are found in the tents of the righteous?
5. When might God discipline us severely?
6. How did the builders reject the chief cornerstone?
7. What days are harder to rejoice in than others?

Psalm 119

1. Who does the psalmist call blessed as the psalm begins?
2. How can a young man cleanse his way?
3. What did the psalmist remember about his own ways?
4. What kept him from perishing in affliction?
5. How is God's word similar to a lamp?
6. What happened to his eyes because men did not obey the law of God?
7. Why doesn't zeal consume us more often?

Psalm 120

1. From what did this psalmist seek deliverance?
2. What did the liar deserve?
3. Among whom did he dwell?
4. How we survive when we are for peace, but others want only war?
5. What are some other sins of the tongue?
6. What do we do with coals of fire and our enemies?
7. What is required to answer anger with a soft reply?

Psalm 121

1. What did the psalmist see in the hills?
2. What would make people think that God was sleeping on the job?
3. This psalm is about a journey; what is our journey?
4. How can God keep us on the right path if we are intent on detouring?
5. Does every sin indicate apostasy? Is every apostasy permanent? Explain.
6. When are we tempted to look back at sinful life with longing?
7. What happens to whomever that seeks to save his life?

Psalm 122

1. When was David glad?
2. Why did they go up to Jerusalem?
3. Does earthly Jerusalem still maintain this significance?
4. What is today's house of the Lord? Of what is it made?
5. Why are so few glad about going to worship?
6. When is the best time to do something about waning zeal?
7. How can all Israel be saved?

Psalm 123

1. To what did the writer lift up his eyes?
2. What comparisons does he offer for that look?
3. Of what had they had their fill?
4. How do the proud mock believers today?
5. How is Christianity comparable to slavery?
6. For what is God trying to preserve us?
7. What forms of persecution are prevalent today?

Psalm 124

1. What would have happened if the Lord was not on their side?
2. How had they escaped?
3. What was their help?
4. What happened in Second Samuel 5:17-25?
5. How do we know that our God is the real one?
6. What does it take to get God on your side?
7. What is present with every temptation?

Psalm 125

1. How are those who trust in God like Mount Zion?
2. When do people not want to be surrounded by the Lord?
3. How does God distinguish the good from the wicked?
4. Of whom is God the savior?
5. Is worship enough to establish that one trusts God? Explain?
6. What does evil company do to good habits?
7. What does false teaching do to righteous souls?

Psalm 126

1. How did they feel when God restored Zion's fortunes?
2. What did the nations proclaim?
3. What is necessary before you bring in sheaves of joy?
4. When might this psalm have been written?
5. How were we under captivity?
6. What do outsiders see when they look at us?
7. How do we sow tears in the hopes of bringing in sheaves?

Psalm 127

1. What houses are built in vain?
2. Which watchman watch in vain?
3. What keeps us from getting sufficient rest?
4. What is the fruit of the womb?
5. How are they a blessing?
6. Are people allowed to refuse to have children?
7. Who is responsible for watching out for the congregation?

Psalm 128

1. What does it mean to fear the Lord? What kind of fear is excluded?
2. What are his wife and children like?
3. What blessing did the psalmist pronounce upon him?
4. Jonah fled from God; did he fear him?
5. How does obedience differ from legalism?
6. What do people do when there is no revelation?
7. What can be done to prevent familial breakdown?

Psalm 129

1. Who are greatly afflicted from youth?
2. What makes furrows on one's back?
3. What was to happen to those who hated Zion?
4. What furrows were on Christ's back?
5. What is Zionism?
6. Should Christians be Zionists?
7. What must happen before Jesus can return?

Psalm 130

1. For what did the psalmist plead?
2. What would be true if God marked iniquities?
3. What did his soul do more than watchmen?
4. What is with the Lord?
5. What did Ezra, Nehemiah and Josiah do when they acknowledged sin?
6. What is a lamentation?
7. How did Jesus describe his Father's abundant redemption?

Psalm 131

1. What would have been true if the psalmist had lifted up his heart and eyes?
2. When are we preoccupied with things that are beyond us?
3. To what did the writer compare his calm and quieted soul?
4. What did David teach Solomon as he lay dying?
5. What does it take to be a man after God's own heart?
6. What distinguishes the wisdom of this world from that above?
7. Why does hope deferred make the heart sick?

Psalm 132

1. What hardships did David endure?
2. What did the writer vow to do before sleeping?
3. What did the call to worship sound like?
4. Why do some Christians find joy elusive?
5. What did God swear to David?
6. What were the conditions?
7. What did Zion have to do with the establishment of the new kingdom?

Psalm 133

1. What is both good and pleasant?
2. Why is this condition often elusive among believers?
3. What is unity like?
4. What blessing had God commanded?
5. What was Christ's prayer regarding Christian unity?
6. What differences are permitted among the saints?
7. How can we help ensure others' eternal life?

Psalm 134

1. What were the songs of ascents?
2. What is involved in being a servant of the Lord?
3. What did uplifted hands signify?
4. How do we glorify or shame God with our bodies?
5. What is our reasonable service?
6. What kinds of hands ought we to uplift today?
7. What attitude is required for us to bless our enemies and curse them not?

Psalm 135

1. Why should we praise God?
2. What does God do with rain and wind and lightning?
3. What should the Passover teach?
4. What should the Canaan conquest teach?
5. How did the old covenant become a burden to many in Israel?
6. How is Christ our Passover?
7. When is it wrong to swear?

Psalm 136

1. Why is this psalm called “The Great Hallel”?
2. What are the lessons of the parable of the prodigal son?
3. Compare Jonah to the prodigal son’s older brother.
4. What are the benefits of blessing our food before we consume it?
5. What is the key to happiness and contentment in life?
6. What is the lesson from the Exodus debacle?
7. Is real faith possible without repentance?

Psalm 137

1. Where does the writer appear to be as he pens Psalm 137?
2. The psalm is written against the sons of _____ and the _____ of _____.
3. How is profitable to examine the past?
4. Why is it unwise to dwell on the past too much?
5. Why did Jesus weep?
6. Of what were the Edomites convicted by God?
7. What was the name of the coppersmith whom Paul hoped to see “rewarded?”

Psalm 138

1. To what three things could the “gods” of verse one refer?
2. What does “imprecatory” mean?
3. What is wrong with worshiping angels?
4. By what standard will people be judged?
5. How do we magnify the word of God?
6. What is David’s focus in Psalm 138?
7. What element of Christianity runs counter to the pride of most men?

Psalm 139

1. What is reassuring about God knowing us so well?
2. What is terrifying about God knowing us so well?
3. How did Jonah learn that God was inescapable?
4. When did God begin to know the psalmist?
5. What does the Bible teach about abortion?
6. How should we feel about and treat God’s enemies?
7. What is the benefit of self-examination?

Psalm 140

1. What did Doeg do to harm David?
2. What is an “imprecation”?
3. How are ridicule and mockery examples of violence?
4. What was David’s helmet?
5. How does one heap burning coals upon his enemy’s head?
6. Can we hope for the plans of the wicked to fail?
7. Why wasn’t Paul ashamed?

Psalm 141

1. Who rebuked David when he thought about killing Nabal?
2. Who rebuked David when he had Uriah killed?
3. What did David wish for his enemies?
4. How is prayer like incense?
5. "If sinners entice you, _____."
6. How did David hope the righteous would strike him?
7. How is prayer a refuge?

Psalm 142

1. At least how many times did David hide from Saul in a cave?
2. Why did David pour out his complaint before the Lord?
3. Why is medication usually insufficient to cure all depression?
4. Define self-pity.
5. What did Elijah do when he felt abandoned by God and men?
6. What does bad company do?

Psalm 143

1. Why doesn't David want to be judged purely according to his works?
2. What was the sliver of hope onto which David clung?
3. Why must prayer be persistent?
4. How is God faithful when we are tempted and tried?
5. How is judgment according to works and grace?
6. How can faith help prevent suicide attempts?
7. Is Christianity subjective or objective?

Psalm 144

1. How did David describe his God?
2. What did Job want God to do?
3. What must we do to defeat our adversary in battle?
4. Why does God bother with man, if he is so temporary?
5. If a man dies, shall he live again?
6. Who might prove to be "lying foreigners" in our lives?
7. What is the secret of contentment?

Psalm 145

1. What is it that overwhelms the writer?
2. What kind of kingdom did God plan to establish?
3. What condition is attached to God's promise to lift those who fall?
4. "The _____ of God leads you to _____."
5. What does it mean to "pray without ceasing"?
6. What is the best way to teach a child about the faith of Christ?
7. Why do we sometimes stumble and spiritually fall?

Psalm 146

1. When can going to worship be a “game-day decision”?
2. What is Zion?
3. What is the “fruit of our lips”?
4. Why is it unwise to trust in princes?
5. Who has God?
6. What is the vaccine against sin?

Psalm 147

1. How many hymns seem to make up Psalm 147?
2. From whence were the exiles returning and for what purpose?
3. When do we most often take every day blessings for granted?
4. How does God protect his people?
5. How is the church of Christ a gathering of outcasts?
6. Why is it unwise to reinterpret Scripture to harmonize with science?
7. Why does God resist the proud?
8. In what does God take pleasure?

Psalm 148

1. How do the sun, moon and stars praise God?
2. How does the subhuman part of creation worship God?
3. What evidence does the universe supply regarding a Creator?
4. How is Jesus the beginning of creation?
5. What will become of the earth on Judgment Day?
6. What might disinterest in church indicate?
7. What does it mean that God’s name is “reverend” in the KJV?

Psalm 149

1. What is a “Hallelujah Psalm”?
2. How could dance and musical instruments be useful in worship?
3. What might “the written judgment” be?
4. What benefits might be derived from trying a few new songs?
5. What was it about David’s dancing that enraged Michal?
6. Explain whether this psalm is authority for Christian worship.
7. Define meekness.
8. What can we do if our lives are not bearing joyful fruit?

Psalm 150

1. Distinguish between the sanctuary and the firmament.
2. How was Old Testament worship but a shadow of the New Testament?
3. What kinds of things distract people from worshipping?
4. What makes for God’s excellent greatness?
5. How might one worship outside of the assembly?
6. Can one use musical instruments to worship outside of the assembly?
7. When is it all right to take a Sunday off?

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