



Daily Devotions in the Psalms

Psalm 50-54

Monday 8th June - Psalm 50

The Mighty One, God, the Lord,
speaks and summons the earth
from the rising of the sun to where it sets.
2 From Zion, perfect in beauty,
God shines forth.
3 Our God comes
and will not be silent;
a fire devours before him,
and around him a tempest rages.
4 He summons the heavens above,
and the earth, that he may judge his people:
5 "Gather to me this consecrated people,
who made a covenant with me by sacrifice."
6 And the heavens proclaim his righteousness,
for he is a God of justice.
7 "Listen, my people, and I will speak;
I will testify against you, Israel:
I am God, your God.
8 I bring no charges against you concerning your
sacrifices
or concerning your burnt offerings, which are ever
before me.
9 I have no need of a bull from your stall
or of goats from your pens,
10 for every animal of the forest is mine,
and the cattle on a thousand hills.
11 I know every bird in the mountains,
and the insects in the fields are mine.

12 If I were hungry I would not tell you,
for the world is mine, and all that is in it.
13 Do I eat the flesh of bulls
or drink the blood of goats?
14 "Sacrifice thank offerings to God,
fulfill your vows to the Most High,
15 and call on me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you will honor me."
16 But to the wicked person, God says:
"What right have you to recite my laws
or take my covenant on your lips?
17 You hate my instruction
and cast my words behind you.
18 When you see a thief, you join with him;
you throw in your lot with adulterers.
19 You use your mouth for evil
and harness your tongue to deceit.
20 You sit and testify against your brother
and slander your own mother's son.
21 When you did these things and I kept silent,
you thought I was exactly like you.
But I now arraign you
and set my accusations before you.
22 "Consider this, you who forget God,
or I will tear you to pieces, with no one to rescue you:
23 Those who sacrifice thank offerings honour me,
and to the blameless I will show my salvation."

There's an episode of the 'The Simpsons' where Homer decides to never go to church again. He has a dream where he meets God and they connect over how long and boring Reverend Lovejoy's sermons are. Maybe you know how he felt! In his dream, God is a kindly old man with nice teeth who agrees with everything Homer says.

It's hard to square that picture of God with the one we read here, isn't it? The God of the Bible is mighty; surrounded by fire and storm. He comes to testify against his people, not conform to their image of Him. He is both judge and witness in the stand.

I wonder whether we are prone to treat God lightly? Or to think that God is appeased by the things we do for Him, or in His Name. God reminds Israel how he has no need of them. Any God you have to feed is clearly no God! Verse 21 is particularly confronting: "you thought I was exactly like you." Anytime we start to imagine God in our image we have put ourselves in the dock to be accused by the God who defines Himself.

God is also reminding his people that sacrifices are meant to flow from the heart. Why do you do the good things you do? Why do you sacrifice time or money for others or ministry? God is not interested in a people who make sacrifices and then ignore holiness. Rather, he wants a people who make sacrifices from the heart, because of who God is.

May this Psalm remind us that God is big and holy. He has no need of us or anything we "have"; everything is His. May this humble us. May we repent of imagining God in our image. May we obey Him from the heart.

James

Tuesday 9th June - Psalm 51

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.

5 Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

9 Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

11 Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. 13 Then I
will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.

14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Saviour,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

15 Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

17 My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.

18 May it please you to prosper Zion,
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.

19 Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the
righteous,
in burnt offerings offered whole;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

This Psalm begins with a humble crying out to God for mercy (v. 1). David is now going to God as his source of life rather than his own self-protective means. This is a picture of what true repentance looks like, and it begins with honesty. When we see our sin like David does here, we are on the way. He says, "I was sinful at birth" (v. 5). At last David sees that from the very beginning of his life he was like this. It was like he stopped living in denial about the reality of his life.

There's a kind of remorse where you're not really repenting but just complaining, however, David makes a full clean confession of sin, "I have done what is evil in your sight" (v. 4). Life change involves taking full responsibility without blame shifting. He is not blaming his upbringing, his job or situation. He simply says I have done evil in your sight. At last he's not going on community standards, but God's. Real repentance begins when blame shifting ends.

Life change also includes a deep renunciation of sin, as he says, "against you only have I sinned" (v. 4). Underneath all your sins there is always a sin against God. Repentance flows from the energy of being stunned, silent, and without excuse for the harm we've done to ourselves and others and for breaking the heart of God. When he says, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation" (v. 12) he realises he needs to find his greatest joy in God rather substitutes.

David asks that his sin be blotted out (v. 1,9) because it creates an objective record that calls for punishment. Criminal records can only be wiped clean if the penalty is paid. In Jesus we learn what it cost God to cancel the charge of our legal indebtedness, which was against us (Col 2:14).

Father God thank you for your forgiveness. Lord, when I sin against others, I'm ultimately sinning against you. Help me see that and rejoice in you, because I want to forsake my sins and not just admit them. Amen.

Martin

Wednesday 10th June - Psalm 52

**For the director of music. A maskil of David.
When Doeg the Edomite had gone to Saul and
told him: "David has gone to the house of
Ahimelek."**

Why do you boast of evil, you mighty hero?
Why do you boast all day long,
you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God?
2 You who practice deceit,
your tongue plots destruction;
it is like a sharpened razor.
3 You love evil rather than good,
falsehood rather than speaking the truth.
4 You love every harmful word,
you deceitful tongue!
5 Surely God will bring you down to everlasting
ruin:

He will snatch you up and pluck you from your
tent;
he will uproot you from the land of the living.
6 The righteous will see and fear;
they will laugh at you, saying,
7 "Here now is the man
who did not make God his stronghold
but trusted in his great wealth
and grew strong by destroying others!"
8 But I am like an olive tree
flourishing in the house of God;
I trust in God's unfailing love
for ever and ever.
9 For what you have done I will always praise you
in the presence of your faithful people.
And I will hope in your name,
for your name is good.

How often do we see the proverb, "pride comes before a fall" enacted out in real life? Whether it is the annual dose of hubris from the NSW State of Origin team, only to lose to their nemesis QLD yet again. Or a boxing match where a fighter disrespects an opponent only to find the taste of the canvas instead of victory. (some great examples of this https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_z-9Xr8SZM)

In this psalm, we have a personal account, likely from David, who speaks against an enemy who knew his measure (v. 1). This enemy is powerful, a mighty man and has riches and a strong army. But see how the fight is constructed by David. While it is personal, what David sees is that his enemy has made himself an enemy of God (v. 7). Just like Goliath before him, this man is in danger of defeat at the hands of God.

Who is David speaking of here? While the context given might be helpful, it was added much later and based upon Jewish tradition, so it could be Doeg or Saul or any other enemy that David found himself against. But what we see in these verses is the problem for all who set themselves against God. For Lucifer in glory, to Judas on that dark night. From the greatest despot in the mightiest kingdom to the nice old lady around the corner who is so lovely and gentle. All who defy God, who showboat God with their good works have set themselves in an impossible situation where they face the certain judgement of God.

Take time to pray for yourself in times where you become anxious over the frail threads of life, see the last verse and praise God for His goodness and the rest that this can bring. And pray for those around you whose good works are a frail defence against the good judgement of God.

Phil

Thursday 11th June - Psalm 53

For the director of music. According to mahalath. A maskil of David.

The fool says in his heart,
"There is no God."
They are corrupt, and their ways are vile;
there is no one who does good.
2 God looks down from heaven
on all mankind
to see if there are any who understand,
any who seek God.
3 Everyone has turned away, all have become
corrupt;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.

4 Do all these evildoers know nothing?
They devour my people as though eating bread;
they never call on God.
5 But there they are, overwhelmed with dread,
where there was nothing to dread.
God scattered the bones of those who attacked
you;
you put them to shame, for God despised
them.
6 Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of
Zion!
When God restores his people,
let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!

Who played the fool when you were in primary school? This psalm teaches that even brilliant minded people are fools when they persistently close their hearts and minds, and refuse to acknowledge the truth about God.

At first glance this looks like a wisdom psalm. In wisdom literature the wise and the fool are contrasted and compared. The fool in Psalm 53 says, "There is no God." But where is the wise person? God searches the earth and this is what he sees: No one is wise. No one seeks after God. No one is righteous. Not even one.

Why is it foolish to say there is no God? David notes what happens when people refuse to acknowledge the truth about God and live their lives independently of him. By doing this they are effectively rejecting the only true, righteous and objective standard of what is right and wrong. The result is a corrupt and godless society of people who choose to live for themselves, without any consideration for God, for their own spiritual welfare or for the spiritual well-being of others.

Do you see David's sweeping indictment of humanity as a gross exaggeration? No one is wise. No one seeks after God. No one is righteous. Not even one? In Romans 3 the apostle Paul seizes on the profound truth of this psalm and makes it foundational to his teaching about the Gospel of Jesus. He summarises this psalm in one sentence: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23.

Who is David speaking of in v.6? He is looking forward to the Messiah who will deliver God's people from their captivity. Paul's cry in Romans 7:24: Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? is answered in v.25: Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Father God, the words of this psalm are humbling because they confront our true condition. Thank you for leading us into repentance, forgiving our sins, and clothing us in the righteousness of Christ.

John

Friday 12th June - Psalm 54

**For the director of music. With stringed instruments.
A maskil of David. When the Ziphites had gone to
Saul and said, "Is not David hiding among us?"**

Save me, O God, by your name;
vindicate me by your might.
2 Hear my prayer, O God;
listen to the words of my mouth.
3 Arrogant foes are attacking me;
ruthless people are trying to kill me—
people without regard for God.
4 Surely God is my help;
the Lord is the one who sustains me.
5 Let evil recoil on those who slander me;
in your faithfulness destroy them.
6 I will sacrifice a freewill offering to you;
I will praise your name, Lord, for it is good.
7 You have delivered me from all my troubles,
and my eyes have looked in triumph on my foes.

The idea of hiding in a desert as my King pursues my life is an experience that I struggle to imagine. David must have been more stressed, anxious and overwhelmed that I've ever been.

But this Psalm speaks to the common experiences that we humans have. We're often fearful. We experience the attacks of others (perhaps in different ways to David, perhaps similar). We experience slander. We experience injustice and unfair treatment. David is in hiding because God has anointed him as King and given him success. Saul, in his jealousy, seeks David's life.

One of the ways that God uses these kinds of moments in our lives is to remind us again that we are not in control and that we are dependent on Him. David knows he needs God to save him. He turns to God for the help he desperately needs. We too, in our moments of fear and desperation, are called to turn to God for the salvation that only He can give. And this Psalm gives us words to pray as we experience those things.

You might wonder whether we can pray the words of verse 5: "in your faithfulness destroy them." It doesn't seem particularly loving to pray such things. But praying for justice is something we are encouraged to do. And that justice can either be served by Christ's death on the cross or by God paying people the penalty for our sin. We can pray these words, but only as people who remember that God showed us mercy. That we are guilty of injustice and slander and mistreating others.

Lastly, notice how David remembers God's past faithfulness in verse 7. We have more to remember! As you are fearful, remind yourself of how Christ has delivered you from the greatest troubles of all. We can be even more certain of his presence and faithfulness in our troubles today, because we know the stone has been rolled away and the grave is empty.

Father, help us to call out to you in prayer when we are mistreated and experience injustice. Please use those moments to teach us of your control and our dependance on you. Help us to remember that you ordain the days of our lives and that you have always been, and will always be, faithful to us and present with us.

James