



Daily Devotions in the Psalms

Psalm 84-88

Monday 27th July - Psalm 84

How lovely is your dwelling place,
Lord Almighty!

2 My soul yearns, even faints,
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh cry out
for the living God.

3 Even the sparrow has found a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may have her young—
a place near your altar,
Lord Almighty, my King and my God.

4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house;
they are ever praising you.

5 Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.

6 As they pass through the Valley of Baka,
they make it a place of springs;
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.

7 They go from strength to strength,
till each appears before God in Zion.

8 Hear my prayer, Lord God Almighty;
listen to me, God of Jacob.

9 Look on our shield, O God;
look with favour on your anointed one.

10 Better is one day in your courts
than a thousand elsewhere;

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my
God
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

11 For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
the Lord bestows favour and honour;
no good thing does he withhold
from those whose walk is blameless.

12 Lord Almighty,
blessed is the one who trusts in you.

One of my boys loves to have his back scratched and preferably scratched hard. As I was scratching his back one night, he said: "This is the life!" At that moment, his idea of the good life was pretty simple. I wonder what makes you say "this is the life!"? When you imagine 'the good life', what does it look like?

This Psalm is inviting us to make God our deepest desire. Although the Psalmist is speaking of the temple as the dwelling place of God, it's not about the building itself. It's not about the architecture or the activity. It is because the temple was the place where God's people met with God.

It's very easy to desire comfort or ease. It makes sense that we look forward to whatever is 'next' because we imagine that when we get there, then everything will be right or good. But in this life, it never really comes. So often, 'the good life' is perpetually just over the horizon. And yet for the Psalmist, the good life, in fact the best life is all about being in the presence of the Good One, the Best One.

If we are to have the deepest desires of our heart met, then we must set out hearts of desiring God himself above all. Only the One who is eternal and ultimate can satisfy our hearts forever.

It's also worth noting that Christians have often turned to this Psalm as a glimpse of heaven. As we thanked God for Rebecca at her funeral this week, Shelley read this Psalm. It reminds us that the temple was a shadow of heaven, where God's people will enjoy his presence forever. We take comfort from knowing our sister is enjoying the fullness of God's presence right now.

In the meantime, the temple has been replaced by the church. We are now the dwelling place of God. The good life is a life lived with God's Spirit dwelling in us, both individually and together. The good life is found in knowing God and being known by God.

Father, forgive us for thinking the good life is found anywhere else but in relationship to you. Help us to desire you more and most. Help us to see that only you give deep and eternal and abiding joy.

James

Tuesday 28th July - Psalm 85

You, Lord, showed favour to your land;
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
2 You forgave the iniquity of your people
and covered all their sins.
3 You set aside all your wrath
and turned from your fierce anger.
4 Restore us again, God our Saviour,
and put away your displeasure toward us.
5 Will you be angry with us forever?
Will you prolong your anger through all
generations?
6 Will you not revive us again,
that your people may rejoice in you?
7 Show us your unfailing love, Lord,
and grant us your salvation.

8 I will listen to what God the Lord says;
he promises peace to his people, his faithful
servants—
but let them not turn to folly.
9 Surely his salvation is near those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.
10 Love and faithfulness meet together;
righteousness and peace kiss each other.
11 Faithfulness springs forth from the earth,
and righteousness looks down from heaven.
12 The Lord will indeed give what is good,
and our land will yield its harvest.
13 Righteousness goes before him
and prepares the way for his steps.

Psalm 85 models the act of prayer in a time of crisis and the celebration of salvation in the promises of verses 8-13. Psalm 85:10: "Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed."

Think about how difficult it is to get both mercy and truth together at the same time. Truth is reality, without error or hypocrisy; but mercy overlooks error and hypocrisy. We human beings seem to lean toward one extreme or the other: mercy or truth.

The psalmist puts another two seemingly contradictory concepts together in the second half of the verse. The Hebrew word here for righteousness is also often translated justice. Righteousness suggests inflexible justice; God holds everyone to the same standard.

The Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, means a perfect unity and harmony within the whole creation. *Shalom* is much more than the absence of war and conflict, it's a sense of well-being; physical, mental, and spiritual peace. Peace is not possible without justice, and justice is not possible without peace. It only happens in Jesus Christ.

God graciously restores peace between Himself and us in Christ Jesus. This peace is permanent, because it's not based on ignoring our sins but on God's willingness to accept the perfect payment of Jesus on our behalf. Since the Lord has accepted this payment, this peace must be eternal, otherwise His Son would have died in vain.

Heavenly Father, we call on you for help in the midst of our struggles. We ask you to bring change in our hearts through your love, and that you would reflect your glory in our lives. May our egos decrease as your attributes increase in our lives today. Amen

Martin

Wednesday 29th July - Psalm 86

Hear me, Lord, and answer me,
for I am poor and needy.

2 Guard my life, for I am faithful to you;
save your servant who trusts in you.

You are my God; 3 have mercy on me, Lord,
for I call to you all day long.

4 Bring joy to your servant, Lord,
for I put my trust in you.

5 You, Lord, are forgiving and good,
abounding in love to all who call to you.

6 Hear my prayer, Lord;
listen to my cry for mercy.

7 When I am in distress, I call to you,
because you answer me.

8 Among the gods there is none like you, Lord;
no deeds can compare with yours.

9 All the nations you have made
will come and worship before you, Lord;
they will bring glory to your name.

10 For you are great and do marvelous deeds;
you alone are God.

11 Teach me your way, Lord,
that I may rely on your faithfulness;

give me an undivided heart,
that I may fear your name.

12 I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my
heart;

I will glorify your name forever.

13 For great is your love toward me;
you have delivered me from the depths,
from the realm of the dead.

14 Arrogant foes are attacking me, O God;
ruthless people are trying to kill me—
they have no regard for you.

15 But you, Lord, are a compassionate and
gracious God,
slow to anger, abounding in love and
faithfulness.

16 Turn to me and have mercy on me;
show your strength in behalf of your servant;
save me, because I serve you
just as my mother did.

17 Give me a sign of your goodness,
that my enemies may see it and be put to
shame,
for you, Lord, have helped me and comforted
me.

On Fiona and I's wedding day we sung the hymn 'O for a thousand tongues to sing'. Every time we sing this song I am transported back 25 years. That day seems so clear. It is what songs do. They attach our heart to events and memory and emotions. They can transport both body and soul to significant points in our past.

This psalm acts in the same way for the psalmist. Consider the problem of his life and where he turns. When he sings and prays he turns back to his relationship with God. As you reflect on the Psalm, consider these questions:

What does he thank God for in His life?

What characteristics of God bring security and comfort?

How does this give the psalmist comfort and boldness to ask God for a sign of His goodness?

As we think about today what sign of goodness do you need? What sign do you already have?

Phil

Thursday 30th July - Psalm 87

He has founded his city on the holy mountain.

2 The Lord loves the gates of Zion
more than all the other dwellings of Jacob.

3 Glorious things are said of you,
city of God:

4 "I will record Rahab and Babylon
among those who acknowledge me—
Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush—
and will say, 'This one was born in Zion.'"

5 Indeed, of Zion it will be said,
"This one and that one were born in her,
and the Most High himself will establish her."

6 The Lord will write in the register of the peoples:
"This one was born in Zion."

7 As they make music they will sing,
"All my fountains are in you."

Psalm 87 is another of the Songs of Zion

The Songs of Zion are lyrical hymns which magnify the greatness of God in the city of Jerusalem, and acclaim his authority throughout the world. They also celebrate the resilience of the city: the ability of Mount Zion, by God's grace, to weather the storm.

In verses 1-3 the psalmist celebrates the city of Jerusalem, the place where God dwells among his people.

The writer had seen foreign pilgrims come and worship God in the holy city, and in his mind's eye, he envisages a great in-gathering of worshippers from every tribe, people, language, nation.

He foresees something truly amazing - God reaching out to those formerly his enemies and placing them within the precincts of his holy city v.4. Not only including them but giving them the birthrights of those who were actually born within the city v.6.

Hear the invitation of the psalm. What a privilege to come to Zion to worship! The Songs of Zion awaken our hopes and desires to the glorious inheritance of the people of God. "All my fountains are in you."

"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." Rev 7:9-10.

Father God, thank you for Jesus. Thank you for the achievement of the cross. Thank you for all He accomplished by his living, dying, rising. Prepare us for that day when we shall gather in your presence and celebrate your greatness with those of every tribe, people, language, nation.

John

Friday 31st July - Psalm 88

Lord, you are the God who saves me;
day and night I cry out to you.

2 May my prayer come before you;
turn your ear to my cry.

3 I am overwhelmed with troubles
and my life draws near to death.

4 I am counted among those who go down to the
pit;

I am like one without strength.

5 I am set apart with the dead,
like the slain who lie in the grave,
whom you remember no more,
who are cut off from your care.

6 You have put me in the lowest pit,
in the darkest depths.

7 Your wrath lies heavily on me;
you have overwhelmed me with all your waves.

8 You have taken from me my closest friends
and have made me repulsive to them.

I am confined and cannot escape;

9 my eyes are dim with grief.

I call to you, Lord, every day;

I spread out my hands to you.

10 Do you show your wonders to the dead?
Do their spirits rise up and praise you?

11 Is your love declared in the grave,
your faithfulness in Destruction?

12 Are your wonders known in the place of
darkness,
or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?

13 But I cry to you for help, Lord;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.

14 Why, Lord, do you reject me
and hide your face from me?

15 From my youth I have suffered and been close
to death;

I have borne your terrors and am in despair.

16 Your wrath has swept over me;
your terrors have destroyed me.

17 All day long they surround me like a flood;
they have completely engulfed me.

18 You have taken from me friend and neighbour

—

darkness is my closest friend.

Psalm 88 is the darkest Psalm in the whole book. It begins with an acknowledgement that salvation is from God, and then it laments that the God who saves hasn't saved. The Psalmist laments that God hears his prayers, but doesn't answer (v. 2, 13-14).

The Psalmist feels close to death (v. 3-7). He acknowledges God's sovereignty (he continually speaks to God as the one who has brought his situation about); but this reality also leaves the Psalmist wondering why God would order things in the way that He has.

I can't help but think that Psalm 88 is in God's word because God knew that we would need it. Notice that unlike the other Psalms of lament, there is no praise or expression of trust at the end; the final word in Hebrew is "darkness".

God knows that there will be days for many (all?) of us where we will despair of life itself. There will be times and seasons where everything will feel dark, or like we're alone (v. 8, 18) or like God is against us and we're drowning (v. 7, 17). God may ordain great suffering and hardship for our lives, but he graciously gives us words to pray (or groan) as we find ourselves in those moments.

Beware thinking that the only holy response to sorrow is to smile and pretend like it's ok or that it doesn't hurt. Psalm 88 invites us to lament all that is wrong - in fact doing so is a holy response to the sin in the world.

But Psalm 88 should also help us to lift our eyes to the cross. Jesus was cut off, he bore God's wrath for us. He went under the waves and was rejected. Jesus tasted God's terrors in full. For us. What grace. He is an understanding King. He knows our sorrows and weeps with us. And this means that even as everything falls apart or tragedy strikes and breaks us, we have One with us and in us and beside us who knows more deeply our sorrow than we realise. Rest in Him.

James