



Daily Devotions in the Psalms

Psalm 119-123

Monday 28th September - Psalm 119:161-176

Sin and Shin

161 Princes persecute me without cause,
but my heart stands in awe of your words.
162 I rejoice at your word
like one who finds great spoil.
163 I hate and abhor falsehood,
but I love your law.
164 Seven times a day I praise you
for your righteous rules.
165 Great peace have those who love your law;
nothing can make them stumble.
166 I hope for your salvation, O Lord,
and I do your commandments.
167 My soul keeps your testimonies;
I love them exceedingly.
168 I keep your precepts and testimonies,
for all my ways are before you.

Taw

169 Let my cry come before you, O Lord;
give me understanding according to your word!
170 Let my plea come before you;
deliver me according to your word.
171 My lips will pour forth praise,
for you teach me your statutes.
172 My tongue will sing of your word,
for all your commandments are right.
173 Let your hand be ready to help me,
for I have chosen your precepts.
174 I long for your salvation, O Lord,
and your law is my delight.
175 Let my soul live and praise you,
and let your rules help me.
176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your
servant,
for I do not forget your commandments.

Here we finally come to the end of the longest Psalm. The Psalm spans the Hebrew alphabet and in doing so, I think, gives us a glimmer of the span of life. As the Psalm finishes I want to encourage you to notice and meditate on a challenge that we regularly see in our own lives.

Firstly, notice that this section continues the theme of treasuring God's word. The Psalm stands in awe of (v. 161), rejoices in (v. 162), loves (v. 163), praises (v. 164), does/keeps (v. 166-168), sings of (v. 172), delights in (v. 174) and remembers (v. 176) God's word. There is a dedication to and delighting in God's word that is necessary to trust in God throughout our days.

Notice also that the Psalmist, despite his commitment to the word and laws of God, still needs salvation. He's persecuted (v. 161), hopes for salvation (v. 166) and cries out to God for salvation (v. 169-170, 173-175). No matter how much we know God's word, we can never save ourselves. The Psalmist doesn't just know God's laws, but also knows His need of God's saving work. In fact, apart from remembering the promises of God in His word, life feels hopeless.

Lastly, notice the last line. It seems the Psalmist has unintentionally strayed from God's word. He's noticing a bent in his heart towards sin; even as he remembers God's commands he acknowledges that he has gone astray. We all experience this. We know the right thing and choose the wrong. We try to do the right thing and find ourselves doing the wrong.

So here's the challenge: treasuring God's word doesn't mean that we won't experience pain, nor that we won't sin. In fact, the Psalm reminds of that we need to treasure God's word precisely because life is so hard and we are prone to sin even when we're delighting in God's word. Let me encourage you to persist in reading, learning, memorising and meditating on God's word. It leads to joy and delight, encouragement and comfort, repentance and hope.

Father, help me to treasure your word throughout all my days, that I might never forget my need of salvation and that I might cling to your promises. Amen.

James

Tuesday 29th September - Psalm 120

In my distress I called to the Lord,
and he answered me.
2 Deliver me, O Lord,
from lying lips,
from a deceitful tongue.
3 What shall be given to you,
and what more shall be done to you,
you deceitful tongue?
4 A warrior's sharp arrows,
with glowing coals of the broom tree!
5 Woe to me, that I sojourn in Meshech,
that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!
6 Too long have I had my dwelling
among those who hate peace.
7 I am for peace,
but when I speak, they are for war!

Do you long for peace? The Bible urges you as a Christian to pursue peace in every aspect of your life. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." (Matthew 5:9) Romans 12:18 says, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." The word for "peace" in Psalm 120 is the Hebrew word shalom. Shalom is a beautiful word signifying not just the absence of conflict but the presence of health and wholeness. The Psalmist is a person of peace, longing for peace, living among those who hate peace.

Do you long for true peace in your life? It is only found in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) Yes, in this world you will have trouble, but remember Psalm 120 teaches you to call on the Lord in times of trouble.

What do you do when you are in trouble? Do you worry? Do you complain? Do you take it out on others? Or do you pray? Psalm 120 shows us the best way. When in trouble, pray. Psalm 120 is the psalm that starts us on our journey in the Psalms of Ascent with three applications: call on the Lord in times of trouble, know that God will punish the wicked, know that you do not belong to the world.

What does Psalm 120 mean? It means that as followers of Christ we are in the world but not of the world. The world is creating a future without God, however, we are a part of a future God is leading us into! This means that we are pilgrims on a journey. God has changed our hearts in Christ, and so we no longer desire the things of the world like we used to. We desire first and foremost to be with God and live for him. It is also a journey that begins and ends with prayer.

Father, thank you for your abiding presence even in times of trouble. Please help me to continue loving and offering respect to those who are against me, that I would bring glory to you in how I pursue peace in this life. Amen.

Martin

Wednesday 30th September - Psalm 121

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From where does my help come?
- 2 My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
- 3 He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
- 4 Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
- 5 The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade on your right hand.
- 6 The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
- 7 The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
- 8 The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore.

When I was 16 I went with 2 other friends to cycle around Tasmania. Tasmania is a land full of mountains and rain. Every kilometre straining uphill was met with an exhilarating race down to the bottom. Our lungs were often straining, but we did that straining together.

The psalms of ascent were psalms written for a people who were straining to travel to Jerusalem. It wasn't easy. During the times of the kings, mountain tops were filled with shrines to gods who promised an easier path. Leaving the houses, farms and worldly possessions behind was a significant step of faith. But God had commanded that they do this journey 3 times each year (Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles). The journey of faith is one that comes with the uncertainty of what will happen but leads to a hope and a greater love for God's people and God Himself.

It is interesting to consider Jesus' first message to His people, repent because the kingdom of God is near. A message that started God's people on a journey of faith by leaving all that they had behind. How is your journey going today?

Phil

Thursday 1st October - Psalm 122

I was glad when they said to me,
"Let us go to the house of the Lord!"
2 Our feet have been standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem!
3 Jerusalem—built as a city
that is bound firmly together,
4 to which the tribes go up,
the tribes of the Lord,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the Lord.
5 There thrones for judgment were set,
the thrones of the house of David.
6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
"May they be secure who love you!"
7 Peace be within your walls
and security within your towers!"
8 For my brothers and companions' sake
I will say, "Peace be within you!"
9 For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek your good.

In years gone by Christians have debated the centrality of the place of Israel and (more specifically) Jerusalem in the plans of God. Some argue that God's plans continue to centre on the geographical place of Jerusalem and the ethnic group the Jews. It's fair to say that Jerusalem has not enjoyed great peace in recent decades. So what do we do with this Psalm?

Firstly, read it in its historical context. The Psalm seems to be written from the perspective of someone going with a group to Jerusalem (v. 1), most likely to celebrate one of the Jewish festivals (v. 4). Jerusalem was the central place of worship, politics, the economy and justice. To pray for its peace is to pray for its wellbeing in every area of life. And when there was no peace there, it was bad for the whole nation. Jerusalem literally means "city of peace" and so to pray for it means to pray that what the city is by name it will also be by nature.

Reading the Psalm in its biblical context helps us too. We remember the central place of the temple, but we also see the temple fulfilled in Christ and the church. Remember that Christ said "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (John 2:19). In Ephesians 2, Paul says that the church is now a temple, built on Christ the cornerstone and the foundation of the Apostles. And we look forward to the new (and infinitely better!) Jerusalem where God will dwell with his people forever. Jerusalem does not play the same role anymore. First the curtain of the temple was torn, and late the whole thing was destroyed.

So by all means, pray for the modern city of Jerusalem. Pray that God's peace and justice will reign everywhere. But this side of the cross, I think this Psalm should cause us to pray for peace where God's temple is today - local churches that profess Christ. For where healthy churches are, communities and societies will be better for it, and God's name will be glorified.

Father, we pray for peace throughout the world. We pray for peace in our church and in all the churches of Christ. Help us to maintain the peace we have in Christ and seek the good of those around us.

James

Friday 2nd October - Psalm 123

To you I lift up my eyes,
O you who are enthroned in the heavens!
2 Behold, as the eyes of servants
look to the hand of their master,
as the eyes of a maidservant
to the hand of her mistress,
so our eyes look to the Lord our God,
till he has mercy upon us.
3 Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us,
for we have had more than enough of contempt.
4 Our soul has had more than enough
of the scorn of those who are at ease,
of the contempt of the proud.

When our boys were little, like all babies, they required regular nappy changes. Maybe they'd cry or maybe we'd smell what they'd dropped, but the time had come to clean them up and take away the mess.

Not once did any of our baby boys stop us mid-change and say, "Mum, Dad, I've got this. You take a break. I'll clean myself up." They didn't have the speech or will or coordination to make that happen. Were we to give them a chance they'd likely get poo everywhere or just fall off the change table and hurt themselves.

This picture of dependency is similar to what we see in this Psalm. As the servant or maidservant look to their master/mistress, so we look to God for mercy. As the servant depends on their master using their power and wealth and authority to provide for their needs, so too do we lift our eyes toward the One enthroned in the heavens.

Kids are good at being dependant. And a huge part of parenting is about training children to become independent adults. But us adults sometimes delude ourselves that we are independent of all, even God. None of us should ever forget that we are always completely and utterly dependent on God. We need his mercy. We might not be experiencing the contempt that the Psalmist is, but we need God like we need air and water and food.

Remember, we were dead in our sins and transgressions. "But God, being **rich in mercy**, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:4-5).

Our sin is a nappy we could never change, a mess we could never clean up. Our attempts to do so only leave us in more mess and greater danger. So today, remember your dependence on God. Every breath, every bite, every smile and every joy is an act of mercy on the part of God. Let this truth humble you. Let this reality cause you to increasingly call upon Him for more and more and more mercy.

Father, we praise you for your mercy to us. Thank you that Jesus bore the scorn and contempt that we deserve. Thank you that you lavish your mercy upon us. Help us to remember our dependence on you for all things. Grow us in humility and thankfulness. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen

James