



Daily Devotions in the Psalms

Psalm 129-133

Monday 12th October - Psalm 129

"Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth"—

let Israel now say—

2 "Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth,

yet they have not prevailed against me.

3 The plowers ploughed upon my back;

they made long their furrows."

4 The Lord is righteous;

he has cut the cords of the wicked.

5 May all who hate Zion

be put to shame and turned backward!

6 Let them be like the grass on the housetops,

which withers before it grows up,

7 with which the reaper does not fill his hand

nor the binder of sheaves his arms,

8 nor do those who pass by say,

"The blessing of the Lord be upon you!

We bless you in the name of the Lord!"

It is interesting that Psalm 128 and 129 sit side by side. They seem to sit at odds with one another. Psalm 128 speaks of Yahweh blessing his faithful people. They enjoy prosperity and the fruit of their labour. It is a picture of peace and blessing. And then comes this Psalm, clunking like a car accidentally put into reverse.

Here we see a people long afflicted (v. 1-2). As a nation, they have had their backs ploughed. And the rest of the Psalm prays for the destruction of the wicked nations and individuals who would seek to harm and destroy Israel.

It's possible that this Psalm makes you feel uncomfortable, or even wonder if this Psalm is appropriate for the lips of God's people.

But imagine for a second that you are subject to a foreign nation whose ruled is marked by corruption, oppression and abuse. Imagine that you work long and hard to fill the coffers of evil men. Imagine your family and community brutalised and feeling powerless to stop it.

What good is a God if He cannot help in that situation? What God is good if he is deaf to the cries of His people? Psalm 129 reminds Israel that evil people will not prevail because the LORD will call them to account.

All that said, we must remember that we are deserving of God's judgement and yet, we have been given grace and mercy and love. And this reality empowers us to not seek vengeance, but to leave it to the Lord. But it does not stop us from calling out to God to bring justice to evil in the world. In fact, we must! Love for the oppressed should compel us to pray and serve and love sacrificially.

Taken together, Psalm 128 and 129 remind us of the breadth of experiences in life and call on us to trust in God through all of it.

Lord God, please bring justice for those who are abused and oppressed. Please help us to trust you in all seasons of life. Amen

James

Tuesday 13th October - Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!
2 O Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleas for mercy!
3 If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?
4 But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.
5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
6 my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.
7 O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.
8 And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.

This Psalm is one of fifteen psalms (120-134) that were sung by Jewish people on the way up to Jerusalem for the various Jewish festivals. It is also a very well-known psalm, being the favourite of Calvin and Augustine and it was uniquely used in changing the life of John Wesley.

This is one of the most straight forward pictures in the Old Testament of what it means to be put right with God. It's obvious the psalmist is aware he can't save himself, so it's an emergency call to God, starting "Out of the depths". What would you ask God for if you were in the depths? The psalmist asks God for mercy. This person is saying they feel like they are in quick-sand and can't get out. They are sinking into guilt and shame and can't stand because of the sense of the weight of the record of their sins.

How can I, as someone who has broken God's law and turned my back on him, how can I ever be put right with God?

Verse 8 is amazing saying God himself will come someday to redeem us with unfailing love (v7). God says he will do everything necessary for your freedom and forgiveness, and if you receive it, he will love you without condition. Stop and think about how liberating this is. God sees everything about you, every flaw and fault. He sees the darkness in you and where you struggle and still loves you, to the point of laying down his life for you through Jesus Christ.

"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross." Colossians 2:13-14.

Father God, I thank you for the joy of your forgiveness. Amen.

Martin

Wednesday 14th October - Psalm 131

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up;
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.
2 But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child is my soul within me.
3 O Israel, hope in the Lord
from this time forth and forevermore.

David Powlison has written a great article on this psalm which can be found at: <https://www.ccef.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Peace-be-still-Learning-Psalm-131-by-Heart.pdf>

It is a terrific help when peace is illusive.

There was a time when this was my experience when I started at Westside. Things weren't going well and the stress of ministry meant that I found it very difficult to stop and pray without my mind being flooded with all sorts of emotions and things to do. But in this psalm a quiet help came.

It directed me to the cause of much of my distress (v. 1) and my great need (v. 2) and where my hope is (v. 3). But even more than that it showed me what to do in learning to pray again.

My friends as you read the article and contemplate this psalm, my hope is that you might find a deep quiet and rest for your soul.

Phil

Thursday 15th October - Psalm 132

Remember, O Lord, in David's favour,
all the hardships he endured,
2 how he swore to the Lord
and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,
3 "I will not enter my house
or get into my bed,
4 I will not give sleep to my eyes
or slumber to my eyelids,
5 until I find a place for the Lord,
a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob."
6 Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah;
we found it in the fields of Jaar.
7 "Let us go to his dwelling place;
let us worship at his footstool!"
8 Arise, O Lord, and go to your resting place,
you and the ark of your might.
9 Let your priests be clothed with righteousness,
and let your saints shout for joy.
10 For the sake of your servant David,
do not turn away the face of your anointed one.

11 The Lord swore to David a sure oath
from which he will not turn back:
"One of the sons of your body
I will set on your throne.
12 If your sons keep my covenant
and my testimonies that I shall teach them,
their sons also forever
shall sit on your throne."
13 For the Lord has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his dwelling place:
14 "This is my resting place forever;
here I will dwell, for I have desired it.
15 I will abundantly bless her provisions;
I will satisfy her poor with bread.
16 Her priests I will clothe with salvation,
and her saints will shout for joy.
17 There I will make a horn to sprout for David;
I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.
18 His enemies I will clothe with shame,
but on him his crown will shine."

For those who travelled in Bronze Age Israel, it can't have been easy. Surrounded by enemies and the dangers that travelling would naturally bring, let alone travelling with children! What could motivate a person to do this? Especially for those whose enemies lived just up the road.

Imagine as you travel, surrounded by others of the faithful from your town. The joy of being together as Jerusalem comes close, what do you see? This city of David represents your walk with God by faith and as you remember David you share something of his faith.

This psalm speaks to the motivation of faith in the covenant of YHWH. It speaks of the faith of David as the example of faith for the people of Israel. We get to see the power of promise (v. 13 – 18) and how it gives direction for the faithful to go.

Yet what those who travelled, sung, hoped and dreamed was only a shadow of what was to come. Consider, for a moment, what it would be like walking along the road with Jesus during His last journey to Jerusalem? How might Jesus sing this song? Where do you think Jesus might sing it louder? Where in the psalm might He have been quieter?

If you view your life as a pilgrimage with Jesus, how might the promises in this psalm help you journey well, all the way to the end?

Phil

Friday 16th October - Psalm 133

Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!
2 It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down on the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down on the collar of his robes!
3 It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!
For there the Lord has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore.

Relational conflict is really awful to live in. It leaves us feeling unsettled, anxious, angry and hurt. The Psalmist could just have easily written:

Behold, how bad and unpleasant it is
when brothers dwell in conflict!

Unity amongst brothers, however, is beautiful. Verses 2 and 3, in their own strange ways, seek to illustrate the goodness of unity. The oil on the head and running down Aaron's beard refers to the anointing of the High Priest. It's a picture of special blessing. Unity among brothers is like the special blessing of God given to the High Priest. One commentator says that the dew on Mt Hermon is most likely referring to snow, which melts and feeds the rivers of Israel and bring life to the people. Unity amongst brothers is like the snow melt that sustains and gives life to a nation.

The point is clear: unity amongst families and communities are a special blessing from God. How much more unity in the church?

In Ephesians 4, Paul tells the church to maintain their unity, despite the fact that there was likely disunity between Jewish and Gentile believers. In Ephesians 2, Paul says that Christ created a new humanity through his death, destroying the disunity between Jew and Gentile. Ours is a unity created by Christ, not by us. We maintain it as we live out the gospel. We maintain it as we apologise and forgive. We maintain it as we follow the humble example of Christ and consider others as more important than ourselves. We maintain it as we seek to be gentle with one another and bear with one another in love.

It's easy to point the finger at others when it comes to disunity. But a good question to consider is whether we're contributing to maintaining the unity we have in Christ or breaking it? Are you bearing with others and loving others? Are you slandering others and gossiping about others? Are you seeking the good of others?

Maintaining unity doesn't mean never disagreeing with anyone! But it does mean that we must maintain our unity as we disagree. It means that the way we disagree will be marked by love and humility.

May we enjoy unity in our church, our families, our communities and nation. And as we do, may we remember that it is a blessing from the Lord to be enjoyed and protected.

James