



Daily Devotions in the Psalms

Psalm 134-138

Monday 19th October - Psalm 134

Praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord
who minister by night in the house of the Lord.

2 Lift up your hands in the sanctuary
and praise the Lord.

3 May the Lord bless you from Zion,
he who is the Maker of heaven and earth.

This Psalm appears to be a song for those who serve in the temple, offering the daily sacrifices. In particular, this seems to call on those making the evening sacrifice to praise the Lord.

Verse 3 seems to draw in the individual. As the Levites serve in the temple and as the sun goes down for another day, the people of Israel are to remember and praise the Lord. It also reminds the people that their blessings come from their Creator God, from whom all blessings flow.

How do you end your day? Mindless tv? A novel? Scrolling on your phone? Browsing the web? These are the things that come to mind for me because they're what I'm prone to!

Let this Psalm encourage you to remember and praise and thank the Lord day by day. Before you go to sleep, spend some time praising Him for his blessings. You see, the Lord has blessed us from Zion. For the original readers and singers of this Psalm, with the temple in the backdrop, God's presence and his forgiveness were visible.

For us, just outside Zion, Jesus bled and hung and died, bearing on himself the weight of the sins of the world. The presence of God became visible in Christ and He became the great sacrifice for sin. If you're struggling to remember your blessings, start there.

Friends, may the Lord bless you. And may we remember his blessings and praise His name daily.

Lord God, help me to praise and bless your name. Thank you for all of your blessings in Christ. Amen.

James

Tuesday 20th October - Psalm 135

Praise the Lord.

Praise the name of the Lord;

praise him, you servants of the Lord,

2 you who minister in the house of the Lord,
in the courts of the house of our God.

3 Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good;
sing praise to his name, for that is pleasant.

4 For the Lord has chosen Jacob to be his own,
Israel to be his treasured possession.

5 I know that the Lord is great,
that our Lord is greater than all gods.

6 The Lord does whatever pleases him,
in the heavens and on the earth,
in the seas and all their depths.

7 He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth;
he sends lightning with the rain
and brings out the wind from his storehouses.

8 He struck down the firstborn of Egypt,
the firstborn of people and animals.

9 He sent his signs and wonders into your midst,
Egypt,
against Pharaoh and all his servants.

10 He struck down many nations
and killed mighty kings—

11 Sihon king of the Amorites,
Og king of Bashan,
and all the kings of Canaan—

12 and he gave their land as an inheritance,
an inheritance to his people Israel.

13 Your name, Lord, endures forever,
your renown, Lord, through all generations.

14 For the Lord will vindicate his people
and have compassion on his servants.

15 The idols of the nations are silver and gold,
made by human hands.

16 They have mouths, but cannot speak,
eyes, but cannot see.

17 They have ears, but cannot hear,
nor is there breath in their mouths.

18 Those who make them will be like them,
and so will all who trust in them.

19 All you Israelites, praise the Lord;
house of Aaron, praise the Lord;

20 house of Levi, praise the Lord;
you who fear him, praise the Lord.

21 Praise be to the Lord from Zion,
to him who dwells in Jerusalem.

Praise the Lord.

If you get a chance watch Bob Dylan's 'You have got to serve somebody' (he has a hint of the Josh Pullin).

The song strips away the pretences of life and reveals that life is based on one clear fact we end up serving somebody.

This psalm begins in a fairly orthodox way. It begins as a call to praise. But it does something similar to Bob Dylan's song. Will you come to worship, will you come to praise. The psalmist addresses the reasons why you mightn't come (1 – 7). Consider what reasons that might stop you from coming... perhaps you feel angry and bitter about how God has treated you or feeling frustrated that God hasn't provided what you want in your timing. How does the idea of God doing whatever He wishes helps or hinders you coming to praise?

What is the alternative to praising God? (15 – 18) think about how dangerous the idolatry of anger, resentment and bitterness and self righteousness be?

What sins do you need to repent of today?

How is God worthy of your praise?

Phil

Wednesday 21st October - Psalm 136

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.
His love endures forever.
2 Give thanks to the God of gods.
His love endures forever.
3 Give thanks to the Lord of lords:
His love endures forever.
4 to him who alone does great wonders,
His love endures forever.
5 who by his understanding made the heavens,
His love endures forever.
6 who spread out the earth upon the waters,
His love endures forever.
7 who made the great lights—
His love endures forever.
8 the sun to govern the day,
His love endures forever.
9 the moon and stars to govern the night;
His love endures forever.
10 to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt
His love endures forever.
11 and brought Israel out from among them
His love endures forever.
12 with a mighty hand and outstretched arm;
His love endures forever.
13 to him who divided the Red Sea asunder
His love endures forever.
14 and brought Israel through the midst of it,
His love endures forever.

15 but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red
Sea;
His love endures forever.
16 to him who led his people through the
wilderness;
His love endures forever.
17 to him who struck down great kings,
His love endures forever.
18 and killed mighty kings—
His love endures forever.
19 Sihon king of the Amorites
His love endures forever.
20 and Og king of Bashan—
His love endures forever.
21 and gave their land as an inheritance,
His love endures forever.
22 an inheritance to his servant Israel.
His love endures forever.
23 He remembered us in our low estate
His love endures forever.
24 and freed us from our enemies.
His love endures forever.
25 He gives food to every creature.
His love endures forever.
26 Give thanks to the God of heaven.
His love endures forever.

As you read this psalm write down the signs of God's love in your life. Signs that show how His love endures forever. After you have written down a list of both the big and little things in your life, consider who you might share this list with

Chris Tomlin has written a song that echoes this psalm. Take some time to reflect on the words you have written and give thanks for His love does endure forever, well after we left this world.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUH_NzfRmbs

Phil

Thursday 22nd October - Psalm 137

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion.

2 There on the poplars
we hung our harps,

3 for there our captors asked us for songs,
our tormentors demanded songs of joy;
they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

4 How can we sing the songs of the Lord
while in a foreign land?

5 If I forget you, Jerusalem,
may my right hand forget its skill.

6 May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth
if I do not remember you,
if I do not consider Jerusalem
my highest joy.

7 Remember, Lord, what the Edomites did
on the day Jerusalem fell.

"Tear it down," they cried,
"tear it down to its foundations!"

8 Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction,
happy is the one who repays you
according to what you have done to us.

9 Happy is the one who seizes your infants
and dashes them against the rocks.

I think many people are familiar with this Psalm because of the pop song named after it. But when they read it in full, they discover something unexpected.

The exiles are in Babylon, weeping. They can't sing the songs of Zion, because those are songs of Yahweh's victory over their enemies and his protection of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem lies in ruins and Yahweh has handed them over to the Babylonians. They are a defeated, mocked and broken people.

Yet, in their sorrow, they are reminding themselves (and their children) through the Psalm to remember the place of God's presence and blessing. I can't help but think they're remembering the words of prophets like Jeremiah who promised exile *and* restoration. They're remembering the promises of Yahweh in Jeremiah and Obadiah and Isaiah to bring justice to Edom and to Babylon.

Verse 9, for many readers, is one of the most shocking verses in the Bible. Some argue it shouldn't be in the scriptures. But I think this is a holy and righteous response to extreme violence and injustice. Verse 8 makes clear that the Babylonians have done to God's people exactly what verse 9 suggests.

This is such a challenging Psalm. I think it reminds us to call out to God for justice. I think it should remind us that as citizens of a wealthy, western nation, most of us have never experienced the kind of loss, sorrow and trauma that the people of Jerusalem did. Most of us have not watched our children being brutally murdered.

The cry for God to bring justice is right. God hates the wickedness of Babylon. He promised to repay them in full and in history he did. Babylon was the greatest empire of its time and it quickly and suddenly was destroyed. It is holy to hate evil. It is also holy to cry out to God and ask Him to act. It is holy to not avenge ourselves. And it is holy to speak against the evil and injustices of our world. Belonging to the

But it's also true that we don't have to respond with words like verse 9. They speak of one type of response. We are also able to pray for evil people to repent. We remember that God's Son was dashed for us. In our moments of deepest grief, this Psalm helps us to lament and cry out, but never without hope. God heard his people then and because of Christ, he hears you today.

James

Friday 23rd October - Psalm 138

1 I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart;
before the "gods" I will sing your praise.

2 I will bow down toward your holy temple
and will praise your name
for your unfailing love and your faithfulness,
for you have so exalted your solemn decree
that it surpasses your fame.

3 When I called, you answered me;
you greatly emboldened me.

4 May all the kings of the earth praise you, Lord,
when they hear what you have decreed.

5 May they sing of the ways of the Lord,
for the glory of the Lord is great.

6 Though the Lord is exalted, he looks kindly on the
lowly;

though lofty, he sees them from afar.

7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you preserve my life.

You stretch out your hand against the anger of my
foes;

with your right hand you save me.

8 The Lord will vindicate me;

your love, Lord, endures forever—

do not abandon the works of your hands.

Many of David's Psalms relate to his need to flee from, hide from, be protected from the many enemies that surround him and pursue him.

The reality is, we are not surrounded by enemies pursuing us to our death.

It is, however, our lived experience, especially in this last seven or eight months that we have walked in the midst of troubles. It is also true that God has preserved our lives in this global pandemic.

But for me, something even greater than the preservation of life in these troubling times (although that has been amazing) has been God's sustaining presence in our Church and in the Church globally.

Have you wondered why?

In an article in the Sydney Morning Herald[1] from August this year, "researchers have found Australians say they have been praying more during the COVID-19 crisis, suggesting the pandemic has led many to reassess their priorities in life". The article goes on to say that nearly half of the people surveyed by researchers had thought more about mortality and the meaning of life.

Why has God sustained the Church? Because the church (us) lives next to, works with, buys food from, pays bills to, sends their kids to school with..... these praying people who need an answer to their eternal questions. They need a witness to the truth of the love that God has for them in Jesus which is secured in an eternally fixed promise of life beyond all the mayhem of lockdowns and social dislocation. Our neighbours have a God who loves them so much that he sent His only son to die for their sins and ours so they might enjoy confidence today in a secured eternal place in his kingdom.

We may very well be the answer to our searching neighbours' prayers.

Oh, and if you doubt if you are brave enough to speak to them it seems that the God of David is in the business of emboldening those who call on him. Give it a go because God will not abandon the work of his hands and the object of his Son's affections – his bride the Church!

Matt

[1] <https://www.smh.com.au/national/the-meaning-of-life-australians-praying-more-during-covid-19-20200820-p55nla.html>