

Worship

Lesson 7: "Worship in the Psalms"

I am delighted to take you on a journey of worship where reading the Psalms blends the message of the gospel with worship in the Sanctuary. Last week we sang our hearts out to the songs written by David, the man after God's own heart. Man was made to sing, to lift up his voice in worship, to speak to God and to others "in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with his heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19).

Let's zoom in to the Psalms. The Greek word psalmoi means praise, where the idea of songs of praise comes from. If we look into the Hebrew word for Psalms, Tehilim, which also means praise, it is translated from a root word that means "to sing with instrumental accompaniment." Praise directed to Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the primary emphasis in the psalms. The Book of Psalms is considered as Israel's hymnbook and prayers used in the context of their worship.

Many of the Psalms were composed by David, the shepherd-king, "the singer of Israel's psalms" (2 Sam. 23:1). Other composers include Solomon (Psalms 72, 172), Asaph (50; 70-83), the sons of Korah (42; 44-49), Ethan (89), Herman, the son of Korah (88), and Moses (90). The Psalms can be divided in sections: hymns (145-150) and songs of thanksgiving (30-32); lament (38-39), which are prayers or cries to God in distressful situations; royal psalms (2, 110) pertaining to the earthly king of Israel; enthronement psalms (96, 98), which celebrate the Kingship of Yahweh; penitential psalms (32, 38, 51), which express contrition and repentance; and wisdom or didactic psalms (19, 119).

There is a clear structure to the Book of Psalms. It is divided into five parts, according to Jewish tradition and based on the arrangement of the Torah. For example, there is a doxology or statement identifying the end of one book and the beginning of another. The psalms containing these statements are known as "seam" psalms because they show the "piecing together" of the psalms to form the collection as it now stands. Isn't that incredible? Those who travel through the Holy Land tracing the footsteps of Jesus will indeed hear those sounds of worship among the people.

Next, we will look at the aspect of praising God our Creator and how He is reflected in the sanctuary service. Faith and thankfulness are twins. Faith expresses itself in praise to God. Read as E. J. Waggoner reflected on Psalm 63:

"To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the Sanctuary.' That is what David longed for. He had been at times wonderfully impressed, during the services in the Sanctuary, with the power of the love of God. He had been greatly blessed. Now he wants to see the Lord just as he had seen Him in the Sanctuary. He believed that a person might enjoy just as much of the blessing of God while about his daily business as when in the church. ... Continual remembrance of God must result in praise and thanksgiving; and praise to God is a powerful help in overcoming. Says David: 'So will I say praise unto Thy name forever, that I may daily perform my vows' (Psalm 61:8). Meditation upon God reveals His goodness, and this calls for praise; praise is but an expression of confidence in God, 'and this is the victory that overcometh the world, and even our faith' ("Practical Thoughts on Psalm 63," *The Signs of the Times*, July 1, 1886).

Thursday's lesson, "Lest We Forget!," cites Psalm 78: "For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: ... that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: and might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright and whose spirit was not steadfast with God" (vss. 5, 7, 8).

It says that our present day context and experience are very different from Israel during the time this Psalm describes. But is it? Our customs, dress, travel, etc. are different, but in spiritual matters are we really that different from the Jews?

Our church was given a "most precious message" in 1888, which was a special testimony for the church at the end of time. Yet, the leadership of the church in loyalty to "the old landmarks" rejected that truth. Ellen G. White wrote: "There is sadness in heaven over the spiritual blindness of many of our brethren" (*Review and Herald*, July 26, 1892). And speaking of "those who resisted the Spirit of God at Minneapolis," she said: "All the universe of heaven witnessed the disgraceful treatment of Jesus Christ, represented by the Holy Spirit. Had Christ been before them, they would have treated Him in a manner similar to that in which the Jews treated Christ" (*Special Testimonies*, Series A, No. 6, p. 20).

Going to school is something most people want to get out of as soon as possible. But does God have a "class" where school discipline continues? In Psalm 25 David seven times prays that he may be a student in the Lord's "class"; "teach me Your paths," he asks over and over. The inspired picture we get in the Bible is Good News--there is never a graduation out of the Lord's school. You are always a student, a learner, and He never expels you from His "university," but of course you are always free to "quit school" if you wish.

There is always a temptation to "quit" because as our Teacher the Lord exercises discipline, which our carnal hearts don't like. "Do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens" (Heb. 12:5, 6). It's not that He is a severe Schoolmaster, but His tuition appears that way to us, for "no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (vs. 11).

In fact, if the discipline or chastening has ceased and you think you have clear sailing, one of two things has happened: either you are indeed ready for translation (way ahead of almost everybody else), or you are in real trouble, for "if you are without chastening, ... then you are illegitimate and not sons" (vs. 8). The writer of Psalm 73 felt at times that the Lord's discipline was too severe. "I have been ... chastened every morning" (vs. 14), waking up each new day to renewed "grief" and "vexation" (vs. 21).

It seemed that the Holy Spirit would never get through "convicting" him of sin (which is His "first grade" tuition, John 16:8). Would he as a student in the "school of Christ" never get out of that "first grade"? Other "students" seemed to be spared that "discipline." Life for them was all fun and games. "It was too painful for me--until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end" (Psalm 73:16, 17). Something special is happening right now in the "sanctuary"--the Day of Atonement. Stay in school! (From Robert J. Wieland, "Dial Daily Bread").

May Christ direct your destination each day. We who are in Christ are on our way to a wedding of such glorious and expensive proportions that we'll have to change our clothes to survive the thrill of His presence. The psalmist said, "joy cometh in the morning" (30:5). Let God wash your feet in the water of His Word and plant them in His path of everlasting love songs.

--Mary Chun