

"PSALMS, WALK THRU THE BIBLE."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

February 9, 2025, 6:00 pm

Text for Sermon: Psalm 1:1-2; 16:11; 19:1-2; 27:1; 29:1; 95:1-3

Introduction to Psalms.

We turn this evening to the second of the five Wisdom books, the writings, right in the center of the OT. The wisdom books are the heart of the OT. They don't contain history or law or prophecy, they are not just about Israel but about the individual before His God.

Job gives us wisdom for suffering, how to fear the Lord despite what happens to us.

Psalms gives us wisdom for worshipping, how to pray and praise God.

Proverbs gives us wisdom for living, how to act and behave wisely, how to fear the Lord.

Ecclesiastes gives us wisdom for thinking, how to enjoy life even in its meaninglessness.

Song of Solomon gives us wisdom for loving in the context of covenant marriage.

The Book of Psalms has several distinctions. It is the longest book in the Bible with 150 chapters. If you read five a day, you can finish it in a month. Someone has said a Psalm a day helps you work, rest, and pray.

It has the shortest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 117 (2 verses) and the longest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 119 (176 verses). Luther called the Psalms the Bible in miniature.

The New Testament writers quoted the Book of Psalms over 400 times, far more frequently than any other Old Testament book. Isaiah is a distant second with 47 NT quotes.

It is often regarded as the most popular book, the favorite, and yet is still often overlooked or neglected. It is in most respects the easiest book to understand, it appeals to our emotions and senses.

Historically the psalms cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). Of course, Psalm 90 by Moses is the oldest psalm. The latest psalm is probably (137), a song of lament clearly written during the days when the Hebrews were being held captive by the Babylonians, from about 586 to 538 B.C.

Psalms is one of only two books in the Bible that self-identifies as written by *multiple authors*, Proverbs is the other one.

David is credited with the most, 73, almost half of the psalms. No wonder he is called in Scripture, “the sweet psalmist of Israel.” Then Asaph and Korah had a dozen each. Solomon has 2 and Moses has 1.

The psalms are organized into *five smaller books or psalters*, each book ending with a doxology and then the entire psalter is capped with great doxology from 146 to 150, concluding with a grand doxology, Psalm 150, symphony of praise.

Open your pew Bibles to Psalm 41, 72, 89, 106, 150.

Most of the psalms in Books I and II are written by David. Many of the psalms in Books IV and V are more like a miscellaneous collection including psalms from Moses to Ezra.

As is true of modern hymnals, there are smaller collections of Psalms within the larger collections. These smaller collections include songs of ascent (Ps. 120—134), the writings of Asaph (Ps. 73—83), the psalms of Korah's descendants (Ps. 42—49), and the hallelujah psalms (Ps. 113—118, 146—150) (Thomas Constable).

Psalms is one of the most *diverse* books as the psalms deal with such subjects as God and His creation, war, worship, wisdom, sin and evil, judgment, justice, and the coming of the Messiah.

The psalms are all prayers written in Hebrew poetry. So you will find them all using parallelism, couplets of lines, or stanzas. Whereas English poetry rhymes words, Hebrew poetry rhymes thoughts, or though rhymes in parallel phrases.

The most frequent types of parallelism are the following: In synonymous (or affirming) parallelism, the writer repeats the thought of the first line in the following line (e.g., 1:2; 24:1-3; 25:4). Antithetic (or opposing) parallelism is the reverse: the second line expresses a contrasting thought compared to the first line (e.g., 1:6; 20:8; 37:9). In synthetic (or advancing) parallelism, the second line explains or expands the thought expressed in the first line (e.g., 1:1; 19:7-9; Prov. 1:7) (Thomas Constable).

Acrostics (the arrangement of material in alphabetical order). The acrostic psalms are these: 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, and 145. This aided memory.

Psalms

For everything we do we need tools, objects to help us accomplish a task. Whether farming, cooking, learning, building, communicating, or getting from one place to another, we need tools. Animals and angels don't need tools, but we do.

Our most important work is spiritual, and the most important tool for our spiritual work is prayer. And God's gift to help us in this is the Book of Psalms.

The Psalms enable us to improve in our prayer life, to grow in our life of faith, to mature spiritually, to glorify God and love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Prayer is basic to our existence, to our growth, to our being human in the image of our God. And basic to our praying is the Psalms, for they are human and divine, man's words and God's Word.

This is God helping us have a conversation with Him that is free from the corruptions of our own minds and souls. The Psalms get out of our ruts, out of our laziness in prayer, out of our repetition and triviality and mediocrity. They help us find our words as we try to express our hearts and souls to God.

All we have to do is open our Bibles to the Psalms and begin to pray them. Psalm by Psalm. That's it, nothing fancy, just straightforward praying. Start moving your lips and let your heart begin to join in.

No matter what you are going through, there is a Psalm for that occasion.

“It is very difficult to find any circumstance in life that does not find expression in some psalm or another. Some psalms arose out of conditions of prosperity, others out of adversity. Some psalms deal with holiness, and others with sinfulness. Some are laments that bewail the worst of situations, whereas others are triumphant hymns of joy and thanksgiving. Some look back to the past while others look forward to the future” (Thomas L. Constable).

The psalms are a window into the hearts and souls of our brothers and sisters in the faith over twenty-five hundred years ago. We see our ancient brothers and sisters living with a profound God consciousness, living *Coram Deo*, before God in every aspect of daily life. The Psalter bridges the gap between the ancient world and the present world, probably better than any other book of the Bible.

“If God's people before the Incarnation could have such a faith in the Lord, witnessing to his greatness and readiness to help, how much more should this be true among twenty first-century Christians? The Book of Psalms can revolutionize our devotional life, and family patterns” (Thomas L. Constable).

Genres of the Psalms.

The 150 psalms can be sub-divided into categories by theme or genre. I am going to focus on seven of the main ones next week, but this evening I want to address two other genres so next week isn't too long. We will look at the Jesus genre, called Messianic Psalms, and one of the hardest genres, the imprecatory psalms.

Imprecatory Psalms.

How do we interpret these “imprecatory psalms,” these psalms of curse (more generally, Psalms 55, 59, 69, 79, 109, and 137)? Of these, 35, 69, and 109 are the longest and most intense.

- Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer. (Psalm 10:15)
- Let their way be dark and slippery, with the angel of the Lord pursuing them! (Psalm 35:6)
- Let death steal over them; let them go down to Sheol alive. (Psalm 55:15)
- Let them be like the snail that dissolves into slime, like the stillborn child who never sees the sun. (Psalm 58:8)
- Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see, and make their loins tremble continually. (Psalm 69:23)
- May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow! May his children wander about and beg, seeking food far from the ruins they inhabit! (Psalm 109:9–10)
- Let burning coals fall upon them! Let them be cast into fire, into miry pits, no more to rise! (Psalm 140:10)
- Oh, that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me! They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain. Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? (Psalm 139:19-21)

First, one must be clear that the people being cursed are not enemies over trivial matters; they are people who hate the faithful precisely for their faith; they mock God and use ruthless and deceitful means to suppress the godly (cf. Ps. 5:4–6, 9–10; 10:15; 42:3; 94:2–7).

When the psalmists witnessed injustice and oppression, they called on Him to vindicate Himself immediately.

Second, it is worth remembering that these curses are in poetic form and can employ extravagant and vigorous expressions. (The exact fulfillment is left to God.)

Third, these curses are expressions of moral indignation, not of personal vengeance or vindictiveness. The curses are not directed at individuals, but prayers to God.

David, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the right to call down judgment on the enemies of God. This is not personal vindictiveness.

But the NT adds some additional perspective for us as Christians.

Jesus said: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. . . . Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. . . . Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” (Romans 12:14, 17, 19)

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Matthew 5:44).

But what about horrible evil against families, women and children or the wicked persecution of Christians and the church around the world? What I have prayed is that God would convert them or remove them, stop them by whatever means He would use.

As James Hamilton exhorts Christians today, pray that God would either save those who destroy families and hurt little children or thwart all their efforts and keep them from doing further harm. . . . Pray that God would either *redeem people* who are right now identifying with the seed of the serpent, or if he is not going to redeem them, that he would crush them and all their evil designs. (*Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*, 201)

While we may not follow their wording, we should follow their zeal for the glory of the Lord.

Messianic Psalms.

As we have seen Jesus is in every book of the Bible, this is especially true of the Psalms. There is a whole category of Messianic Psalms, many of which in some way predict the coming of a messiah. It might be the largest genre.

Jesus taught us to read our Bibles with him in mind—“everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). “The Psalms” or “the Writings,” which includes the book of Psalms and other books, bear witness to Jesus (John 5:39) and can “make [us] wise for salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15).

Luke 24:44 Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

Psalms more than any other book in the Old Testament, clearly anticipates the coming of the Messiah. Many of the psalms are Messianic and speak of the person and work of Christ.

God’s provision of a Savior for His people is a recurring theme in the Psalms. Prophetic pictures of the Messiah are seen in numerous psalms. Psalm 2:1-12 portrays the Messiah’s triumph and kingdom. Psalm 16:8-11 foreshadows His death and resurrection. Psalm 22 shows us the suffering Savior on the cross and presents detailed prophecies of the crucifixion, all of which were fulfilled perfectly. The glories of the Messiah and His bride are on exhibit in Psalm 45:6-7, while Psalms 72:6-17, 89:3-37, 110:1-7 and 132:12-18 present the glory and universality of His reign. (Got Questions link)

Psalm 110 is a clearly prophetic psalm.

Psalm 110:1-2, 4 The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”

The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies!

4 The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind,

“You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

But we can also speak more broadly about all the psalms in the light of Jesus. All 150 of the psalms are the heart-cries of God’s covenant people and Jesus is God’s definitive answer to the cries of his people.

Jesus provides the forgiveness cried out for. Jesus underwent the ultimate lament, crying out as he was forsaken by the Father on the cross, so that we need not lament separation from God. Jesus’ substitutionary work gives us supreme reason to praise God and to thank him. Jesus perfectly lived out God’s law so that we law-breakers can be exonerated freely and then changed from the inside out so that we can delight in God’s law truly (George W. Robertson).

Implications and application.

"... the dominant message in the Book of Psalms is twofold: (1) God is good, and (2) life is difficult. The life of faith is lived between these two realities."

“The message of the Psalter then is: Worship God! Turn every situation into an occasion for worship. If we are sad, we should worship. If we are glad, we should worship. If we are in the dark, we should worship. If we are in the light, we should worship. The Apostle Paul expressed it this way in Philippians 4:4 and 7: "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I will say, rejoice... And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." The Book of Psalms closes with this word of exhortation: "Everything that has breath shall praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!" (Ps. 150:6) (Thomas Constable).

The Psalms served as a vehicle for the prayers and praises of God’s people in Israel, and Christians today, who have been grafted into the olive tree of God’s ancient people (Rom. 11:17, 24), can join their voices together with these ancient people in their worship.

Make this ancient prayer book your own prayer book, make these prayers your prayers. When you pray them you are praying the Holy Spirit’s Words back to Him. And God will be pleased and delighted to answer and do even more than you can ask or imagine.

Psalm 150:6 Everything that has breath shall praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!