

Bible Study on Psalms

Community Lament and Praise Psalms – Sharing Our Pain and Joy

Psalm 44

1. We praise God for his greatness.
2. We cry out in defeat and anguish.
3. We wonder why we suffer.
4. We bow before God and plead for his help.
5. Quite often such struggle drives a person into the Word of God and thus produces a faith that is more well-rooted and secure than ever before.

Psalm 80

1. Verses 3, 7, and 19 repeat the words “Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us” are from the priestly blessing God gave to Aaron (Num. 6:24-26). These words are often spoken by the pastor as the benediction at the end of worship services.

Verses 3, 7, and 19 are different in that each successive verse addresses God in a more urgent way. Verse 3 says simply “Restore us, O God.” verse 7 says “Restore us, O Almighty.” Verse 19 says “Restore us, O Lord God Almighty.” These differences point out the growing intensity throughout the psalm as Israel calls upon God for help.

2. Isaiah 5:1-6 tells how God planted his vineyard with “the choicest vines” (v. 2). God looked to gather a harvest from his vine, “but it yielded only bad fruit” (v. 2) Verse 5 tells how God took away its hedge and broke down its wall.
3. From Jesus, the true Vine, we receive life, the ability to bear fruit (i.e. to do good works in his name), and strength to grow and prosper even in times of sorrow.

Psalm 90

1. Psalm 90 is the only psalm authored by Moses.
 - a. Verses 1 and 2 describe God as eternal. He has always existed. He is also “our dwelling place.”
 - b. Verses 3, 5-6, and 10 describe people as mortal but with a limited number of years to live on this earth. People will eventually return to dust (v. 3). The time people do spend on this earth is filled with trouble and sorrow (v. 10).

- c. Moses and the Israelites had good reason to lament. In general, our own mortality fills our hearts with regret, as does the suffering we endure while here because of the sin our world and in our own lives. But the Israelites in particular had much to regret. They would wander for 40 years in the wilderness because of their own stubborn unbelief. They would watch their friends die and they would not get to enjoy the land God had promised to give them. Their children would go in, but they were denied the joy of seeing God keep this particular promise.
2. Verse 4 tells us that God's concept of time is vastly different from ours. As the verse says, a thousand years to God are like one day. God is not trapped in time; he created it and stands outside it. This is difficult or even impossible for us to understand because all our human experience is grounded in time.
 3. The wisdom for which Moses asks in verse 12 involves knowing God, particularly in the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ. The people of the OT looked forward to the Savior from sin God in his mercy would send; we know that in Jesus God has kept his promise to do just that. The wisdom of the cross looks like foolishness to the world, but it is indeed our "righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30).
 4. Even Christians may dread the process of dying and the physical suffering that often accompanies it. Because of our sinful nature, we fear the unknown and to our sinful nature death is the greatest unknown. We fear God's wrath and his punishment in death.
 5. God has revealed to us a beautiful truth about himself. He is "our dwelling place." In life we find a home in him; in death we enjoy that same security. He is our eternal God in life and in death. Of course, in the resurrection of Jesus, we receive even greater assurances of his power to rescue us from death and the grave.

Psalm 124

1. Psalms 120-134 are all "songs of ascents"; several including Psalm 124, are written in such a way that successive verses pick up and develop the thoughts of earlier verses. This causes the thoughts themselves to "ascend" through the psalm. What ideas are picked up and developed further in each pair of verses below?
 - a. The thought in verse 1, "If the Lord had not been on our side," is repeated in verse 2 and developed further with the added words, when "men attack us."
 - b. The thought in verse 3, "they would have swallowed us alive," is further developed in verse 4a, "the flood would have engulfed us."
 - c. The thought in verse 4b, "the torrent would have swept over us," (also a continuation of verse 4a) is further expanded upon in verse 5, "the raging waters would have swept us away."

- d. The thought in verse 7a, “we have escaped like a bird out of the fowler’s snare,” is further developed in verse 7b, “the snare has been broken, and we have escaped.”
2. In Psalm 44, the nation lamented defeat. But the Lord had not abandoned them; if he had (Psalm 124), they would have been swept away completely. Psalm 124 is really a prayer of praise that could be used after the disasters of Psalm 44 have reached a resolution. Neither psalm answers all our questions about “the problem of evil.” But together they both point to the One who hears our questions and who comforts us with his continual love for us in Christ Jesus.

After reading and rereading a psalm, ask yourself these questions. What words or phrases stick out to you? How do these words or phrases reveal the poet’s purpose for the psalm? What effect does this psalm have on you as you meditate on it?