



LOCKINGCASTLECHURCH

Summer Psalms – Psalm 1
Sunday 13th August 2017

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Over these next three weeks as life dials down a bit during August we're going to spend a bit of time looking at the Psalms.

For centuries, Christians, Jews and millions of others have all drawn comfort inspiration and spiritual nourishment from this collection of hymns of praise, thanksgiving, wisdom, supplication and lament. The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 songs and poems written to God. David penned half of them, and the rest were written by temple worship leaders (like the sons of Asaph), wise men (like Solomon), and some unknown poets. Millions of people recite, sing, memorise and meditate on the words of the psalms on a daily basis. The bible commentator Matthew Henry called them 'one of the choicest parts of the Old Testament, wherein there is so much of Christ and his gospel, as well as of God and his law, that it has been called the summary of both Testaments. "Words from the Psalms feature at the very heart of our nation where they are engraved at the houses of Parliament. In the floor of the lobby of the Palace of Westminster it says in Latin Psalm 127v1 'Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain.'



Out of all the books of the Old Testament, Psalms is the one Jesus quotes most often. Among the Psalms there are some of the clearest prophecies relating to his life death and resurrection. For example When Jesus said on the cross 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' he is quoting from Psalm 22. Many have found that loving the Psalms is key for developing a deeper spiritual connection with God.

Deitrich Bonhoeffer said "The more deeply we grow into the psalms and the more often we pray them as our own, the more simple and rich will our prayer become."

Since I was about 18 I have used a bible reading plan that includes a psalm or some verses from Proverbs every day of the year. What I have found is that however I am feeling, the Psalms help me connect with the heart of God and even shape and direct our emotions back towards the Lord. Billy Graham said 'I used to read five psalms every day - that teaches me how to get along with God. Then I read a chapter of Proverbs every day and that teaches me how to get along with my fellow man.' Psalms are an essential part of the Christian walk. In 2009 I went with a preaching team from Trinity College to Horfield prison. I shared my testimony and Jimmy Rocks preached. Initially prisons can be quite intimidating places to visit, but in the end it proved to be one of the richest days of ministry that I have ever experienced.

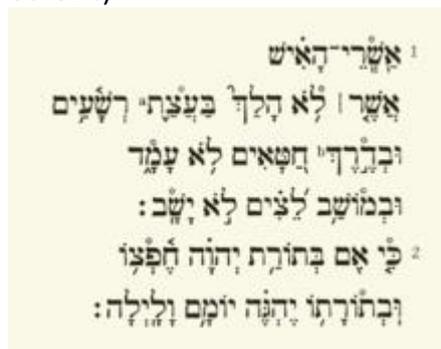
The service was dead simple. The Chaplain David Powe has an amazing gift for no-nonsense Christianity. There was such a hunger for forgiveness as 21 guys came forward to receive Christ. It was so good. No coercion, no hype. Simply the power of the Gospel transforming lives. Sometimes in regular settings the

gospel seems to have so little effect, but in the prison it really was 'the power of God for those who are being saved'. David simply said 'those who would like to receive Christ get in line, and we will pray for you then put your name in the book and I will visit you in the week.' So all these guys came forward and David laid hands on their heads praying for them to be filled with the Holy Spirit.



After the service I asked David what he would do when he went to visit them. He told me 'Horfield is a transfer prison. Some of these guys will only have a couple of weeks here before they go on to different places around the country, so we only have two weeks to get them going in the way of Christ.' 'How do you do that in 2 weeks?' I asked. 'Give them the Gospel and then give them the Psalms.' He said. 'It's the prayer book of the bible.'

So knowing that Psalms can help us get closer to God – please turn in your bibles or on your devices to Psalm 1 (or check out the original Hebrew!)



Psalm 1

¹ Blessed is the one
 who does not walk in step with the wicked
 or stand in the way that sinners take
 or sit in the company of mockers,
² but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
 and who meditates on his law day and night.
³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of
 water,
 which yields its fruit in season
 and whose leaf does not wither –
 whatever they do prospers.

⁴ Not so the wicked!
 They are like chaff
 that the wind blows away.
⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the
 judgment,
 nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
⁶ For the Lord watches over the way of the
 righteous,
 but the way of the wicked leads to
 destruction.

There are 2 ways to live. The narrow way that leads towards life or the broad road to destruction.

In Matthew 7v13 Jesus said 'Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.'

Long before the church was called The Church or Christianity was called Christianity, disciples of Jesus followed what was called 'The Way'. Our strapline as a church reflects that when it says that we are 'following the way of Jesus, serving the community.' And Psalm 1 tells us clearly there are two ways to walk – the way of the righteous, or the way of the Godless. Rather like how Jesus begins his sermon on the mount with the beatitudes, the first verse of the Psalms begins with 'Blessed is the one...' or 'happy is the one...' Blessed is the one who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in *the way* of sinners, or sit in the seat of sinners, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night. It is the posture of our hearts that determines the direction of our lives. As John Mark Comer put it 'You become what you love.' Verse 1 says we can walk, stand or sit in a way that fosters opposition to God or we can adopt a heart posture that is centred around loving God's word and his commandments. So the key to walking in the way of Christ is to learn the habit of loving him and loving his word.

So how do we begin to love God's word, his law and his commandments? The trouble is its not simply about reading it. For centuries after this Psalm was written, the Jewish people had been seeking this *way of the righteous*. Children would be taught to recite the Torah from an early age. Well meaning Rabbis had studied the law and drawn up codes of conduct for every detail of life, but these actually ended up suffocating the people and constricting them to a hapless and legalistic existence. But then Jesus came along like a breath of fresh air: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14v6). In John 5 He said to the Pharisees 'You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰yet you refuse to come to me to have life.'

It is only when we see the person behind the words that they start to carry power for transformation. As you see God's hand and Jesus' face reflected in the words of the Psalms, the Holy Spirit will use them to transform the love-focus of your heart. You can start tapping into the life-transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

I often write in my journal 'Lord please speak to me today from your word' and usually I will read one of the Psalms like my cup of tea gets me going in the morning.

Verse 3 says that the one who delights in God's law, (the Hebrew is Torah – the scriptures) you will become like a tree planted by streams of water. Now as you know I'm not much of a Gardener but I do take much pleasure from growing raspberries and plums. This year has been a bumper harvest!



You can plant a tree into a solid concrete foundation, but of course it won't grow. It needs water. Fruit trees take water, sunshine, soil and time to produce a crop. But it's worth the wait!

Cultivating fruit takes time. To see beyond the words typed up on the pages of the bible takes time too. I usually tell those who are preaching to let the words soak over them, reading the text over 50 times before starting.

The blessed person delights in the words, meditating on them day and night. The word for meditate here is Hagah which literally means to murmur, mutter or purr or growl just as a Lion would over delicious food. Apparently 'mmm' is a word in the scrabble dictionary. To meditate on God's word is to let your senses and imagination loose and say mmm...

Eugene Peterson, the Author of *the Message* version of the Bible started his journey of biblical understanding with the Psalms. He wrote in Christianity magazine 'I usually ask people who are interested to print out a prayer or poem and carry it through the day and memorise portions of it whenever there's a chance of privacy. Patience is required. If you're in a hurry you'll never make it.

Eugene Peterson has formed an unlikely friendship with the lead singer of U2 Bono and they met up last year to discuss the Psalms in Peterson's lakeside home in Montana. The full video is available on Youtube but it is a beautiful conversation and I recommend you listen to the whole thing, but let me play you just some of the highlights...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-l40S5e90KY>

Psalm 1 The Message (MSG)

1 How well God must like you—
you don't hang out at Sin Saloon,
you don't slink along Dead-End Road,
you don't go to Smart-Mouth College.
2-3 Instead you thrill to GOD's Word,
you chew on Scripture day and night.
You're a tree replanted in Eden,
bearing fresh fruit every month,
Never dropping a leaf,
always in blossom.
4-5 You're not at all like the wicked,
who are mere windblown dust—
Without defense in court,
unfit company for innocent people.
6 God charts the road you take.
The road *they* take is Skid Row.