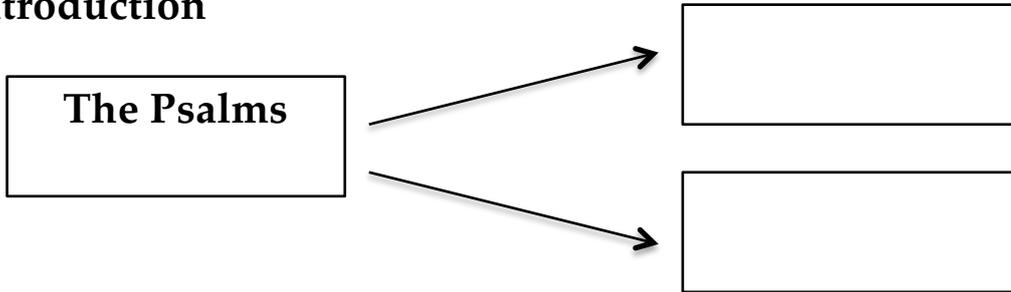


Delighting in the Psalms

Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville – Sunday Class

Introduction



How do the psalms speak of Christ?

- As the king (e.g. Psalm 2)
- As a faithful believer (e.g. Psalm 13)
- As the Lord of whom the psalm speaks (e.g. Psalm 23)
OR The one who achieved the salvation to which the psalm points (e.g. Ps 40)

The Psalms and the life of faith

- **The spirituality of the psalms is *responsive***

The life of faith is one of *responding* to the finished work of Christ, NOT of trying to earn spiritual blessings from God.

i.e.:



e.g. Psalm 113 What does this psalm teach us about:

- **who God is**
- **what he does**

¹ Praise the LORD.

Praise the LORD, you his servants;
praise the name of the LORD.

² Let the name of the LORD be praised,
both now and forevermore.

³ From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets,
the name of the LORD is to be praised.

⁴The LORD is exalted over all the nations,
his glory above the heavens.
⁵Who is like the LORD our God,
the One who sits enthroned on high,
⁶who stoops down to look
on the heavens and the earth?
⁷He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
⁸he seats them with princes,
with the princes of his people.
⁹He settles the childless woman in her home
as a happy mother of children.
Praise the LORD.

- **The spirituality of the psalms is *normative***

The Psalms teach us that sorrow, doubt, grief and lament are just as appropriate emotions and experiences for a believer as joy, thankfulness and praise.

- **“How to lament in a church of praise”**
- **What are appropriate emotions / feelings / behaviour for a Christian?**

e.g. Psalm 13 (ESV)

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
²How long must I take counsel in my soul
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?
³Consider and answer me, O Lord my God;
light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,
⁴lest my enemy say, “I have prevailed over him,”
lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.
⁵But I have trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
⁶I will sing to the Lord,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Notice two crucial dynamics in the Psalms

- The move from lament to praise
- Sorrow and joy may coexist in the life of a believer (cf 2 Cor 6:10)

- No need for _____
- No need to know _____
- No need for things to _____
- No need for _____

“What is it in the hymnody of your church that can be sung honestly by the woman who has just lost her baby, the husband who has just lost his wife, the child who has just lost a parent, when they come to church on Sunday?”

Weakness and then death ultimately come to us all; and it is the pastor’s task to prepare both himself and his people for the inevitable. Thus, I now believe it is more important than ever that the church embrace weakness and tragedy in its worship. True, we look forward to the resurrection; but we often forget that the pathway to resurrection is necessarily and unavoidably through death. We need to remind our people in both what we preach, what we pray, and what we sing as a congregation that God’s strength is made perfect in our weakness—and, where resurrection is concerned, in and through our total weakness at the hands of death.”
Carl Trueman¹

- **The spirituality of the psalms is *expressive***

They give us ‘vocabulary’ to engage with God

- Honesty of experience – truth v. authenticity
- What vocabulary do I have to express these emotions?
- What happens if I have no vocabulary?

Pain and suffering take language from us – the Psalms help give it back

‘Why do we not have the words to express our pain? Part of the reason seems to be that there is an absence of talking about and expressing our pain in our society and the church, as mentioned earlier, but also – and more deeply – because pain is inherently language shattering. It takes our words away. Pain and suffering suppress us at the deepest level, including our voice. (...) It follows that in the midst of pain and suffering there is a need for the reality of our pain to be expressed. It is greatly comforting to have the words of the psalm to help one understand what one is feeling and thinking.’²

When we have no words to pray to God – God graciously gives us words to use

¹ <http://9marks.org/article/journalreflections-what-can-miserable-christians-sing/>

² Tara J. Stenhouse. “The Psalms of Lament in the Experience of Suffering Christians,” in *Stirred by a Noble Theme: The Book of Psalms in the Life of the Church* (ed. Andrew G. Shead; Nottingham: Apollos, 2013), 188-189.

- **The spirituality of the psalms is *formative***

'Let me write the songs of a nation and I care not who writes its laws.' Andrew Fletcher

"I have also become more aware of the power of liturgy to shape the mind of a Christian congregation. I am not talking here only of formal liturgies such as those in *The Book of Common Prayer*. I mean the form and content of any worship service claiming to be Christian. That which we say and sing as a congregation will over time subtly and imperceptibly inform our thinking about the Christian faith and thus about life in general in a powerful way." Carl Trueman³

e.g. Psalm 16:5-6

*LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup;
you have made my lot secure.
The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance*

The ESV study Bible notes on the psalms capture this wonderfully in the introduction to each psalm. e.g. Ps 16:
"When the faithful sing Psalm 16, they entrust themselves to the Lord and foster their confidence and contentment in his care."

- **The spirituality of the psalms is *collective***

'Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.' (Rom 12:15)

Gordon Wenham on why even those who are not sad should pray the lament psalms:

'By praying these psalms those who have no problems and difficulties in their lives can learn to sympathize with those in trouble and pray for those who are suffering or persecuted.'⁴ (47)

Conclusions, questions

Matt Searles 2016

³ <http://9marks.org/article/journalreflections-what-can-miserable-christians-sing/>
⁴ Wenham, Gordon. *The Psalter Reclaimed* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 47.