
Day 12 – May 7

Israel as a Monarchy (1100 – 930 BCE)

Psalms Expressing a Variety of Sentiments

Readings: Psalm 42, 53, 58, 81, 101

Reflections:

- Psalm 42: One of the most beautiful of all psalms in expressing a deep longing for God. Again we see the depth of the personal relationship. The vision of going to the tabernacle was not one focused on a legalistic requirement to fulfill sacrifices but one rooted in actually seeking to know God intimately and to live in a joyful relationship. Key verses: “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God....” “By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me - a prayer to the God of my life.”
- Psalm 53: Here we see that David is clearly linking relationship with God with a person doing good. The vision of Scripture is that for true justice, mercy and compassion to be expressed in a person's life, it must first be rooted in a surrendered and intimate relationship with God. Although people who don't follow God can do good, most often self-centeredness takes over and we as humans are unwilling to truly sacrifice for others. This is why religion doesn't work in the end. Only an intimate relationship with God can change our hearts and lead to truly knowing God and knowing how to bless him through a life of justice, mercy and compassion.
- Psalm 58: A psalm that gives us a good image of hating your enemies. How radical does Jesus teaching of enemy love stand in contrast to this psalm? Again, praise God for Jesus!
- Psalm 81: A psalm reminding the people of their story of being slaves who God rescued. This is their core identity that God wishes to keep ever before them. They are not to become proud but be the people of compassion because they were once slaves. God wants them not to trust in their own ability to take care of their needs but to trust in him as their protector and provider. Key verses: “Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.” “If my people would listen to me...would follow my ways, how quickly would I subdue your enemies...would you be fed with the finest of wheat; with honey from the rock would I satisfy you.” Intimate relationship that leads to truly living out God's ways, this is what opens the door for God to show his power through our weakness in overcoming

our struggles and in meeting our needs according to his riches. Again, notice the absence of any mention of sacrifices, rituals or rules. It is all about relationship and dependence on God.

- Psalm 101: This psalm of David describes how to lead a blameless life. Notice as you read through this it all sounds good but it is all rooted in his external world. This is the way of the Old Testament before Jesus comes. Clean up your environment. Get rid of bad friends. Only hang out with holy people. Don't let anyone say anything bad around you. Here it would be tempting to say to someone, "Follow this psalm and you will lead a blameless life!" But this is not the way of Jesus. He changes us from the inside out so that we can hang out in impure environments, with messed up people and in a broken, sin filled world...and still be righteous and blameless. In Christ, we don't need to be perfect nor try to create a perfect environment to live. That is the very heart of religion. In Christ, we are free to live in open relationship with God and with others because Christ has made us blameless in God's sight and now we can just live lives of love and grace.