

Monday, April 20

TEXT: PSALM 1

¹ Blessed is the man
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
 nor stands in the way of sinners,
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and on his law he meditates day and night.
³ He is like a tree
 planted by streams of water
 that yields its fruit in its season,
 and its leaf does not wither.
 In all that he does, he prospers.
⁴ The wicked are not so,
 but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
 nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
⁶ for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked will perish.

All commentary from John Stott's Favorite Psalms

COMMENTARY: PSALM 1

The Way of the Righteous and the Wicked

Jerome quoted the opinion of some that this first psalm is "the preface of the Holy Spirit" to the Psalter. It is certainly a very apt introduction. Two particular themes are found in it, which recur in many other psalms.

The first is the clear-cut distinction between *the righteous* and *the wicked*. The Bible as a whole, and specially the Wisdom Literature, divides humankind into these two absolute categories [...]

The second theme concerns the present fortunes and the ultimate destinies of human beings. The first and last words of Psalm 1 indicate the alternatives. Blessed is the righteous person who delights in God's law; the ungodly, on the other hand, will *perish*. [...]

In handling these two themes the author of Psalm 1 is only anticipating what Jesus Himself was to teach, that men and women are either on the broad road that leads to destruction or the narrow way that leads to life (Matthew 7:13, 14).

The righteous will prosper (verses 1-4)

The righteous person is described first negatively, then positively. He or she does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand *in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers*. These expressions have been carefully composed in a triple set of parallels: "walk, stand, sit," "counsel, way, seat," and "wicked, sinners, mockers." Moreover, a downward progression is implied. The godly do not model their conduct on the advice of bad people. Further, the godly do not linger in the company of persistent evildoers; still less remain permanently among the cynical who openly scoff at God.

Instead of taking the lead from such people, the godly make *the law of the LORD* their rule (verse 2). [...] *law of the LORD* [is] a phrase virtually equivalent to "the word of God".

The law of the Lord is the righteous person's *delight*. This is an indication of new birth, for "... The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Romans 8:7). As a result of the inward, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, however, the godly find that they love the law of God simply because it conveys to them the will of their God. [...] Delighting in it, the godly will *meditate* in it, or pore over it, constantly, day and night.

[...]

This, then, is the characteristic of the righteous. For guidance regarding daily conduct they look not to public opinion, the unreliable fashions of the godless world, but to the revealed Word of God, in which they delight and meditate. As a result they are like a tree planted by streams of water (verse 3).

The metaphor is a common one in the Bible. [...] for as the tree draws constant nourishment from the water through its roots, so through daily meditation in the law of the Lord the righteous refresh and replenish their soul in God. Such a tree is firmly planted; such people, like Joshua, prosper in whatever they do.

The ungodly will perish (verses 5, 6)

Not so the wicked! Their present condition and future destiny are entirely different. Instead of being like a fruitful tree, they are like dry and useless chaff. Instead of being planted by the waterside, they are driven by the wind.

Again, the metaphor was a familiar one in Bible days and Bible lands (compare Psalm 35:5; Isaiah 17:13; Matthew 3:12). The threshing floor was usually a hard, flat surface situated on a hill, well exposed to the wind. The wheat was lifted by large winnowing fans or shovels and thrown into the air, so that the precious grain would drop down and be garnered, while the light husks of the chaff would be scattered to the four winds.

The wicked are *like chaff* in two senses. They are desiccated and unprofitable in themselves; and they are easily blown away by the judgment of God. The basic idea behind the Hebrew word for the wicked appears to be one of "restlessness" (compare Isaiah 57:20, 21). The tree is planted firmly; but the chaff is unstable. When God begins to sift them in His present activity of judgment, and specially when the final day of judgment comes, they will not stand. Not even now can they stand *in the assembly of the righteous*, for they do not belong to the godly remnant of His people.

Verse 6 is a general conclusion to the whole psalm, distinguishing between *the way of the righteous* and *the way of the wicked*. We are told that the Lord watches over *the way of the righteous*, whereas *the way of the wicked will perish*.

¹ Blessed is the man who walks
not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
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and on his law
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³ He is like a tree
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that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.
⁴ The wicked are not so,
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drives away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked
will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation
of the righteous;
⁶ for the Lord knows
the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

REFLECTION

Please reflect on the Psalm and write personal lessons and applications.

Tuesday, April 21

TEXT: PSALM 8

¹ O LORD, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

² Out of the mouth of babies and infants,

you have established strength because of your foes,

to still the enemy and the avenger.

³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,

the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,

and the son of man that you care for him?

⁵ Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings

and crowned him with glory and honor.

⁶ You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;

you have put all things under his feet,

⁷ all sheep and oxen,

and also the beasts of the field,

⁸ the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,

whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

⁹ O LORD, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

COMMENTARY: PSALM 8

What is a Human Being?

"This short, exquisite lyric," as it was called by C. S. Lewis, begins and ends with the refrain: *O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.* Here is a recognition of the majesty of God's name, or nature, which His works reveal in both earth and heaven. The enemies of God, blinded by their proud rebellion, do not see His glory; but they are confounded by *children* and *infants*. Jesus quoted these words when the children acclaimed Him in the Temple with their hosannas, while the chief priests and scribes indignantly objected (Matthew 21:15, 16). God is still glorified in the simple faith of children and in the childlike humility of Christian believers (see Matthew 11:25, 26; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

What particularly evokes the wondering worship of the psalmist is God's condescension toward human beings (verses 3, 4) and the position of dominion which He has granted to them on earth (verses 5-8). Seen in relation to each other, these two truths enable us to have a balanced judgment of humankind and to give a proper answer to the psalmist's rhetorical question, *What is man?* (verse 4), that is, What does it mean to be a human being?

The littleness of human beings (verses 3, 4)

The question was prompted by a consideration of the night sky. If David was the author of this psalm, there can be little doubt that he was referring to the experience of his youth. In his shepherd days, tending his father's flock in the hills near Bethlehem, he often slept under the stars. [...] He recognized that the heavens, with the moon and the stars, were the work of God's fingers (verse 3), and as he contemplated their greatness and mystery, he cried out: *What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?* (verse 4).

If this was David's reaction, nearly three thousand years ago, how much more should it be ours who live in days of astro-physics and the conquest of space? As we consider the orbiting planets of our solar system, so infinitesimally small in comparison with countless galaxies millions of light years distant, it may seem to us incredible that the great God of the universe should take any note of us at all, let alone care for us. Yet He does; and Jesus assured us that even the hairs of our head are all numbered.

The greatness of human beings (verses 5-8)

The psalmist moves from the littleness of a human being, in comparison with the vastness of the universe, to the greatness which God has given him on earth: *You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands* (verses 5, 6).

Our position of only slight inferiority to the heavenly beings, or even to God Himself, is supremely seen in our *rule*. God has invested human beings with royal sovereignty, crowning us with glory and honor (verse 5) and delegating to us the control of His works. It is even stated that God has put *everything...under his* (man's) *feet*.

The psalmist is referring primarily to the animal creation: beasts both domesticated and wild, *the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea*, and all other creatures inhabiting the depths of the ocean (verse 7, 8). This is not poetic fiction. As the universe yields more and more of its secrets to scientific research, so our dominion increases. Yet even now humankind is not, in fact, lord of creation, with *everything* under our feet, as is recognized in the three New Testament quotations of these verses.

According to Hebrews 2:5 and the following verses: "... at present we do not see everything subject to him." It is immediately added, however, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour." Humankind has sinned and fallen, and consequently has lost some of the dominion which God had given us; but in Jesus, the second Adam, this dominion has been restored. It is in Him rather than in us that humankind's dominion is exhibited. By His death He even destroyed the devil and delivered his slaves (verses 14, 15). He has now been "crowned", and exalted to God's right hand.

Although the Psalm's description of humankind's dominion is true rather of the man Christ Jesus than of us, it applies to us also if we have come by faith to share in His exaltation. The apostle Paul wrote that the exceeding greatness of God's power, which exalted Jesus and "put everything under his feet," is available to us who believe (Ephesians 1:19-22). Indeed, we have experienced it, for it has raised us from the death of sin, exalted us with Christ and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places, where we are partakers of his victory and dominion (Ephesians 2:5, 6).

Even this is not the end. Although Christ is exalted far above all rule and authority, and all things are potentially under His feet, not all His enemies have yet conceded their defeat or surrendered to Him. Only when He appears in glory and the dead rise, will He destroy "all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For He has put everything under his feet"(1 Corinthians 15:24-26).

³ When I look at your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,

⁴ what is man that you
are mindful of him,
and the son of man
that you care for him?

⁵ Yet you have made him a little lower
than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.

⁶ You have given him dominion
over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,

⁷ all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,

⁸ the birds of the heavens,
and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along
the paths of the seas.

REFLECTION

Please reflect on the Psalm and write personal lessons and applications.

Wednesday, April 22**TEXT: PSALM 16**

- ¹ O LORD, our Lord,
Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.
- ² I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;
I have no good apart from you."
- ³ As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones,
in whom is all my delight.
- ⁴ The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply;
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out
or take their names on my lips.
- ⁵ The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.
- ⁶ The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.
- ⁷ I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.
- ⁸ I have set the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.
- ⁹ Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.
- ¹⁰ For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.
- ¹¹ You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

COMMENTARY: PSALM 16

Present Faith and Future Hope

Although this psalm opens with a prayer (*Keep me safe, O God*), it is in reality a believer's testimony regarding both his present faith and his future hope. Having taken refuge in God (verse 1), he has found in Him his greatest good (verses 2, 6, 7) and is convinced that even death cannot rob him of that true life which consists of fellowship with God (verses 11, 12). These final verses were applied to the resurrection of Jesus Christ by Peter on the day of Pentecost and by Paul in the synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 2:24-31; 13:34-37).

Present faith (verses 1-6)

What it means to put one's trust in God, or to take refuge (verse 1) in Him, is explained in verse 2 (compare Psalm 73:24). The believer has turned from the pleasures of sin and the vanities of the world to seek and find his good in God. Delighting in God, he delights also in the godly, the *saints* (verse 3).

In the ungodly, however, who have exchanged the true and living God for *other gods* (verse 4), the believer takes no delight. He knows that they will have great trouble—their *sorrows... will increase*. He affirms with resolve that he will neither offer their idolatrous libations of blood nor even mention the names of their false deities (verse 5). To do so would be incompatible with his wholehearted devotion to the Lord, of whom he now writes in the most exalted terms (verses 5, 6).

[...]

Future hope (verses 7-11)

David, who according to the apostles Peter and Paul was the author of this psalm, now breaks out into thanksgiving (verse 7) that the Lord has given him *counsel* and that at *night his heart instructs him*. [...]

God draws near to David and speaks to him; his own heart teaches him while in the stillness of the night he meditates on his intimate fellowship with God. He learns to draw from his experience this mighty deduction: that because God is ever before him and beside him (verse 8), I shall not be shaken. [...] His present faith brings a future hope.

David now rejoices in heart and soul because he is convinced that his body also may *rest secure* (verse 9). He goes on to elaborate his new assurance in direct speech to God (verses 11, 12).

Three levels of interpretation are possible in these verses, all of which are true. Literally they express the writer's confidence that he will not die, that his soul will not *be delivered to the grave*—the translation of the Hebrew *sheol*, the abode of the dead. Nor will his body see *decay*. We do not know the historical circumstances in which the psalm was written, but it may possibly express the confidence which sustained David during his months as an outlaw, that he would not be delivered into the hand of Saul.

The implication of these verses goes further than this, however. The corollary to deliverance from death is treading the *path of life* and this life is seen to be no mere physical survival, but the enjoyment of God's presence bringing *joy* and eternal *pleasures*. It is in fact what the New Testament calls "eternal life," communion with God, which physical death cannot interrupt. [...]

When Peter applied these verses to the resurrection of Jesus, he went so far as to say that David cannot have been referring primarily to himself, since he died and was buried. He went on: "But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay" (Acts 2:30, 31).

¹ O LORD, our Lord,
Preserve me, O God,
for in you I take refuge.
² I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;
I have no good apart from you."
³ As for the saints in the land,
they are the excellent ones,
in whom is all my delight.
⁴ The sorrows of those who run
after another god shall multiply;
their drink offerings of blood
I will not pour out
or take their names on my lips.
⁵ The LORD is my chosen portion
and my cup; you hold my lot.

⁷ I bless the LORD
who gives me counsel;
in the night also
my heart instructs me.
⁸ I have set the LORD
always before me;
because he is at my right hand,
I shall not be shaken.
⁹ Therefore my heart is glad,
and my whole being rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.
¹⁰ For you will not abandon
my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.
¹¹ You make known to me
the path of life;
in your presence
there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand
are pleasures forevermore.

We must be careful not to make Peter say more than he actually did say. He himself in his first letter (1 Peter 1:10-12) explained that the prophets did not fully understand to what the Spirit of Christ within them was referring when predicting Christ' sufferings and subsequent glory. We need not therefore assert that David was making a deliberate and conscious prophecy of the resurrection of Jesus which was fully intelligible to himself. It is enough to say that, caught up by the Spirit of prophecy, he was led to write words about the conquest of death and the fullness of life and joy in the presence of God, which would be finally fulfilled not in his own experience but in that of his illustrious descendant.

REFLECTION

Please reflect on the Psalm and write personal lessons and applications.

Thursday, April 23

TEXT: PSALM 23

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

³ He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness

for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

COMMENTARY: PSALM 23

The Lord is My Shepherd

There are, in this best known and best loved of all psalms, two graphic pictures of God's intimate relationship with one of His people. The first is the shepherd and his sheep, the second the host and his guest.

The Lord my shepherd (verses 1-4)

It was natural for a pastoral community to think of the Lord as their shepherd, *who brought his people out like a flock; he led them like sheep through the desert* (Psalm 78:52; see also Psalm 80:1; Isaiah 40:11). But here the metaphor is made unmistakably personal. *The LORD is my shepherd*, the writer boldly claims, and does not even mention the other sheep of the flock.

The Christian cannot read or sing this psalm without thinking of Jesus Christ, who dared to reapply the metaphor from Jehovah to Himself. It is He who is to us "the good shepherd," "the Chief Shepherd," and "that great Shepherd of the sheep" (John 10:11, 14; 1 Peter 5:4; Hebrews 13:20).

¹ The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down
in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

³ He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the
valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

Once I can say from personal experience *the LORD is my shepherd*, I can add with assurance the consequence: *I shall lack nothing*. The Good Shepherd cares for His sheep and so provides for all my needs. He makes me lie down in green pastures to satisfy my hunger, and leads me beside refreshing waters to quench my thirst (verse 2). *For his name's sake*, that is, out of loyalty to His character and promises, He will guide me *in the paths of righteousness*; that is, He will not allow me to go astray (verse 3).

Indeed, even when I walk *through the darkest valley* (alternative translation, verse 4), whether that be death or some other somber place, I have nothing to fear and I will not fear, because my Shepherd is *with me*, protecting me with His club and guiding me with His staff (verse 4). My security lies not, then, in my environment—whether green pastures and still waters or the darkest valley—but in my Shepherd. In His presence there is neither want (verse 1) nor fear (verse 4).

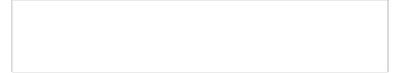
The Lord my host (verses 5, 6)

The scene changes. I am no longer out of doors, but indoors; no longer a sheep in a flock, but a guest at a banquet. My divine host has prepared *a table before me*. It is not a secret feast, but enjoyed in the presence of my enemies, because when He satisfies the soul, it cannot be hidden from the world.

His provision is wonderfully lavish—a table laden with food, perfumed oils to anoint my head, and an overflowing cup (verse 5). Moreover, what God has begun He will surely continue. As He Himself will *lead me* (verses 2, 3), so *His goodness and love will follow me*. Thus He will guard me behind and before, throughout *all the days of my life*. Finally, *I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever*—not indeed in the Tabernacle or the Temple, nor even just in His presence in this life, but in that Father's house with its many mansions, of which Jesus spoke, where He said He was going to prepare a place for His own (John 14:1-4).

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall
follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell
in the house of the LORD forever.



REFLECTION

Please reflect on the Psalm and write personal lessons and applications.

Friday, April 24

TEXT: PSALM 27

¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

² When evildoers assail me
to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,
it is they who stumble and fall.

³ Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident.

⁴ One thing have I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to inquire in his temple.

⁵ For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will lift me high upon a rock.

⁶ And now my head shall be lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

7 Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud;
 be gracious to me and answer me!

8 You have said, "Seek my face."
 My heart says to you,
 "Your face, Lord, do I seek."

9 Hide not your face from me.
 Turn not your servant away in anger,
 O you who have been my help.
 Cast me not off; forsake me not,
 O God of my salvation!

10 For my father and my mother have forsaken me,
 but the Lord will take me in.

11 Teach me your way, O LORD,
 and lead me on a level path
 because of my enemies.

12 Give me not up to the will of my adversaries;
 for false witnesses have risen against me,
 and they breathe out violence.

13 I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD
 in the land of the living!

14 Wait for the LORD;
 be strong, and let your heart take courage;
 wait for the LORD!

COMMENTARY: PSALM 27

The Soul's Changing Moods

The assertions and petitions of this psalm are made against the background of many enemies. If David was its author (which there seems no adequate reason to question), the situation described is likely to be either his pursuit by Saul or his flight from Absalom. In any case, the enemies are *evil men* (verse 2), persecuting him for righteousness' sake, and seeking to harm him by physical violence and by slander (verse 14). He likens them to wild beasts eager to tear him limb from limb (verse 2).

Confidence in God (verses 1-7)

The psalm opens with one of the most sublime Old Testament affirmations of the security of God's people. *The LORD is my light*, to guide me, *my salvation*, to deliver me, and *the stronghold of my life*, in whom I take refuge. *Of whom*, then, *shall I be afraid?* It is a

¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation;
 whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
 of whom shall I be afraid?

defiant, unanswerable question reminiscent of those at the end of Romans 8. Let David's enemies attack him, yet they will stumble and fall (verse 2) Indeed (verse 3), if a whole army should make war against him, *even then* he will be *confident*.

Many Christians, surrounded by foes, have drawn strength from these words. [...]

This steadfast assurance of one man against many foes is now further explained. It lies in the presence and the protection of God. David cherishes one desire above all others (verse 4), namely *to dwell in the house of the LORD* all his life, so that he may both *gaze upon the beauty of the LORD* or "savour the sweetness of the Lord" and seek him in his temple.

[...]

It was through such a life of abiding in God that David knew he would be delivered. *In the day of trouble* God would protect him, as a tent gives the traveler shelter from the sun or a high rock safety from the floods (verses 5, 6). For such deliverance he will praise God in His Tabernacle (literally this time) with sacrifices and *shouts of joy* (verse 6).

Crying to God (verses 8-14)

Suddenly everything is different. The main verbs change from the third person to the second and from a statement to prayer. The mood alters too, as confident affirmation gives place to an anxious supplication to God. [...]

David prays, seeking not only God's ear, but His face (verses 7, 8). He is encouraged to do so because of God's own invitation. When God says: *Seek my face*, his heart responds: *Your face, LORD, I will seek*. True prayer is never a presumptuous approach to God, but rather a response to His gracious initiative. It is this assurance which prompts David to add: *Do not hide your face from me* (verse 9). Although he seems to recognise that his sins deserve only God's displeasure, he is sure that God, who has been his help in the past, will not now cast him off (verse 10). Even were his own parents to forsake him, he says, *the Lord will receive me* (verse 10), or "adopt me as his child," as one commentator puts it. For the likeness of God's love in the Old Testament to the tender care of a father or mother see Psalm 103:13; Isaiah 49:15; 63:16.

[...]

The psalm ends as it began with an expression of serene confidence. The author has come through his tunnel of darkness. His faith has been sorely tried, but now it triumphs; I am still confident of this: *I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living* (verse 15). He who ardently desired to see with the eye of faith the beauty of the Lord (verse 4) is sure that, before he dies, he will see the same Lord's goodness displayed in his own circumstances. So certain is he of this that he urges others to *wait for the LORD* (verse 14), that is, to trust patiently in Him. It is not enough to urge people to *be strong* and *take heart* (verse 14). These would be empty sentiments unless they are both prefaced and followed by the other injunction to *wait for the LORD*. Courage can be no more than a Stoic virtue. It is only Christian when it is the fruit of a quiet confidence in God.

- ² When evildoers assail me
to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,
it is they who stumble and fall.
- ³ Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident.
- ⁴ One thing have I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to inquire in his temple.
- ⁵ For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me
under the cover of his tent;
he will lift me high upon a rock.
- ⁶ And now my head shall be lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.
- ⁷ Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud;
be gracious to me and answer me!

- ⁸ You have said, "Seek my face."
My heart says to you,
"Your face, Lord, do I seek."
- ⁹ Hide not your face from me.
Turn not your servant away in anger,
O you who have been my help.
Cast me not off; forsake me not,
O God of my salvation!
- ¹⁰ For my father and my mother have
forsaken me,
but the Lord will take me in.
- ¹¹ Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.
- ¹² Give me not up
to the will of my adversaries;
for false witnesses
have risen against me,
and they breathe out violence.
- ¹³ I believe that I shall look upon
the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living!
- ¹⁴ Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart
take courage; wait for the LORD!

REFLECTION

Please reflect on the Psalm and write personal lessons and applications.

Saturday, April 25**TEXT: PSALM 32**

- ¹ Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.
- ² Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
- ³ For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
- ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*
- ⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*
- ⁶ Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.
- ⁷ You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. *Selah*
- ⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
- ⁹ Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
which must be curbed with bit and bridle,
or it will not stay near you.
- ¹⁰ Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.
- ¹¹ Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

COMMENTARY: PSALM 32

The Forgiveness and Guidance of God

The last two verses of this psalm form a good introduction to it. They contain the familiar, uncompromising biblical contrast between the *wicked* and the *righteous*, the believer and the unbeliever. The particular difference between them mentioned here is that, whereas the woes of the *wicked* are many, made clear that the ground of the joy of believers is that God's *unfailing love surrounds them*. Human joy arises from God's love, and the rest of the psalm unfolds its outworking in His forgiveness and guidance of the sinner.

God's forgiveness of the past (verses 1-7)

The psalm begins with two Old Testament beatitudes, affirming the blessedness not now of the person whose delight is in God's law (verses 1, 2), but of the person whose sins are forgiven. First, the facts of sin and forgiveness are described, in each case by three expressions. Wrong-doing is *transgression*, indicating a positive offence, a trespass, the stepping over a known boundary; and *sin*, a negative missing of the mark, an omission, the failure to attain an ideal; and *iniquity*, that inward moral perversity or corruption of nature which we call "original sin."

Forgiveness is threefold too. The Hebrew word translated *forgiven* in verse 1 apparently means to remove or to lift. Sin is also *covered*, put out of sight; and therefore the Lord refuses to reckon it against the sinner. Forgiveness is thus regarded as the lifting of a burden, the covering of an ugly sight, and the cancelling of a debt. It is these verses which the apostle Paul quoted in Romans 4:6-8 as an Old Testament example of God's justification of the sinner by His grace through faith, altogether apart from works.

From this general statement of the blessedness of being forgiven, David turns to a description from personal experience of the misery of refusing to confess sin. He has written of the person *in whose spirit is no deceit* (verse 2), but now he depicts the painful consequences of deceit.

The reference is probably to his shameful dealings with Bathsheba, since, after committing adultery with her and murdering her husband, it was almost a year before he was brought to repentance by the ministry of the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 11). During this period, while he tried to deceive himself and God, he had no peace. Indeed, long before the term "psychosomatic medicine" was coined, David tells how remorse and a tortured conscience resulted in alarming physical symptoms (verses 3,4). But at last he gave in, acknowledged his sin to God and found peace through forgiveness (verse 5).

David's vivid experience of forgiveness through repentance and confession leads him to urge others to do what he did and so receive what he received. Humble prayer to God, at a time when He may be found, always brings relief (verse 6). Moreover, David resolves constantly to do to the same himself (verse 7). He has learned his lesson; he will not make the same mistake again.

God's guidance for the future (verses 8, 9)

David's expression of confidence in God to preserve him (verse 8) is immediately answered. God gives him a promise of personal guidance, for in His steadfast love He is concerned not only to forgive the past but also to direct the future. God's guidance, like His forgiveness, is expressed in four verbs: *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you* (verse 8). The picture seems to be of a mother teaching her child to walk. She never takes her eye off the child. Our God is just as tender and loving toward His people.

Nevertheless, it is important to see that verse 9 follows verse 8. God's promise of guidance is not intended to save us the bother of using our own intelligence. So to His promise he adds the command: *Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle*. The sensitive horse and the stubborn mule have to be controlled and guided by pressure, even by force, because they

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whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.
- ² Blessed is the man against whom
the LORD counts no iniquity,
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- ³ For when I kept silent,
my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
- ⁴ For day and night
your hand was heavy upon me;
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my transgressions to the LORD,"
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- ⁶ Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time
when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.
- ⁷ You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
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with shouts of deliverance. *Selah*
- ⁸ I will instruct you and teach you
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I will counsel you
with my eye upon you.
- ⁹ Be not like a horse or a mule,
without understanding,
which must be curbed
with bit and bridle,
or it will not stay near you.

are irrational animals. But we have been given a mind; we must not expect God to use a bit and bridle in His handling of us. He will treat us like human beings, not mules.

Blessed indeed are those who are surrounded by the steadfast love of God, forgiving their sins when they confess them to Him, and guiding their footsteps when they trust His promises and obey His command to use their mind.

REFLECTION

Please reflect on the Psalm and write personal lessons and applications.

Monday, April 27

TEXT: PSALM 40

¹ I waited patiently for the LORD;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.

² He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.

³ He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the LORD.

⁴ Blessed is the man who makes
the LORD his trust,
who does not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after a lie!

⁵ You have multiplied, O LORD my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with you!
I will proclaim and tell of them,
yet they are more than can be told.

⁶ In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted,
but you have given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering
you have not required.

⁷ Then I said, "Behold, I have come;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me:

⁸ I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart."

⁹ I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;

behold, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O LORD.

¹⁰ I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart;
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;
I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness
from the great congregation.

¹¹ As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain
your mercy from me;
your steadfast love and your faithfulness will
ever preserve me!

¹² For evils have encompassed me
beyond number;
my iniquities have overtaken me,
and I cannot see;
they are more than the hairs of my head;
my heart fails me.

¹³ Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me!
O LORD, make haste to help me!

¹⁴ Let those be put to shame and disappointed altogether
who seek to snatch away my life;
let those be turned back and brought to dishonor
who delight in my hurt!

¹⁵ Let those be appalled because of their shame
who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"

¹⁶ But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation
say continually, "Great is the LORD!"

¹⁷ As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the LORD takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God!

COMMENTARY: PSALM 40

Out of the Horrible Pit

Every Christian believer is fortified in present trial by the memory of past blessings. Because we have experienced God's faithfulness in former days we are encouraged to trust Him still. Such is the theme of this psalm, which begins with a graphic description of deliverance and ends with an urgent plea for continued mercy.

An account of past deliverance (verses 1-10)

The psalmist was down a *slimy pit*, full of *mud and mire*. [...] The pit and the bog no doubt symbolize some desolate experience of sin or depression or disease. In his helplessness, unable himself to climb out, he *waited patiently for the LORD*, and the following verses emphasize, stage by stage, the mighty deliverance of God who first heard his cry, then stooped down and drew him out of the mud, then set his feet securely upon rock, and finally put a fresh song of praise in his mouth, leading many to believe (verses 1-3).

Such an experience of salvation has several fruitful consequences, notably worship (verses 4-6), obedience (verses 7-9), and witness (verses 10-12). His worship is expressed both in exclaiming how blessed the believer is (verse 4) and how numberless are the deeds and thoughts of God (verse 5).

But true worship goes beyond verbal exclamations. It is more even than the offering of sacrifices. It involves the offering of ourselves in a life of moral obedience. (For the precedence of obedience over sacrifice see 1 Samuel 15:22; Isaiah 1:10-17; Jeremiah 7:1-26; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-9). This obedience is demanded *in the scroll*, that is, the written law. It begins in our *ears*, which God has *pierced*, or literally (verse 6) "dug," so that He has enabled us to hear and grasp his will.

But God in grace does more even than this. If He has written His law in a book, that we may know it, and whispered it into our ears, that we may understand it, He also inscribes it in our hearts, so that we "delight to do it"(verse 8). This statement of knowing, loving and doing God's will, which is partially true of all His children, found its perfect fulfillment in His incarnate Son, to whom it is applied in Hebrews 10:5-9.

Salvation provokes within us, however, more than a Godward response of spiritual worship and moral obedience; it teaches us also to care for our fellows, that they too may hear of God's grace. So the psalmist asserts repeatedly that he has not concealed God's *love and...truth* (that is, faithfulness) *from the great assembly* but has publically declared it (verse 9-10). When God sets our feet on the rock and puts His law in our ears and in our hearts, we cannot keep our lips from making His goodness known.

A prayer for present help (verses 11-17)

As in Psalm 27, the mood changes abruptly in the middle from affirmation to supplication, from a rehearsal of God's *love and...truth* to a plea that they will always preserve him. For again the psalmist finds himself in peril and distress. *Troubles without number* have encompassed him, and this time he does not leave us in ignorance of their nature: *my sins have overtaken me and I cannot see*. Indeed, they are not only too strong for him to conquer, but too many for him to count. His heart fails him (verse 12), and in self-despair he cries to God to deliver him (verse 13).

The psalm ends with a contrast between two different kinds of "seeker," those *who seek to take my life* and *those who seek you*, in a word, the godly and the ungodly. The ungodly betray their ungodliness in their persecution of the godly, and three times the psalmist prays for their overthrow (verses 14, 15).

[...]

- ¹ I waited patiently for the LORD;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
- ² He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.
- ³ He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the LORD.
- ⁴ Blessed is the man who makes
the LORD his trust,
who does not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after a lie!
- ⁵ You have multiplied, O LORD my God,
your wondrous deeds
and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with you!
I will proclaim and tell of them,
yet they are more than can be told.
- ⁶ In sacrifice and offering
you have not delighted,
but you have given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering
you have not required.
- ⁷ Then I said, "Behold, I have come;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me:
- ⁸ I delight to do your will, O my God;
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- ⁹ I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;
behold, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O LORD.
- ¹⁰ I have not hidden your deliverance
within my heart;
I have spoken of your faithfulness
and your salvation;
I have not concealed your steadfast love
and your faithfulness
from the great congregation.
- ¹¹ As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain
your mercy from me;
your steadfast love and your faithfulness
will ever preserve me!
- ¹² For evils have encompassed me
beyond number;
my iniquities have overtaken me,
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they are more than the hairs of my head;
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- ¹³ Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me!
O LORD, make haste to help me!
- ¹⁴ Let those be put to shame and
disappointed altogether
who seek to snatch away my life;
let those be turned back
and brought to dishonor
who delight in my hurt!
- ¹⁵ Let those be appalled
because of their shame
who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"
- ¹⁶ But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation
say continually, "Great is the LORD!"
- ¹⁷ As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the LORD takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God!

REFLECTION

Please reflect on the Psalm and write personal lessons and applications.

Tuesday, April 28

TEXT: PSALM 51

- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
- ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!
- ³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.
- ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
- ⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.
- ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
- ⁹ Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
- ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.
- ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
- ¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.

- 15 O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- 16 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.
- 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
- 18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
build up the walls of Jerusalem;
- 19 then will you delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

COMMENTARY: PSALM 51

Divine Mercy for the Penitent

[...]

This fourth of the seven so-called "penitential psalms" refers in its title to David's grievous sin. From his palace roof one spring afternoon, he saw a beautiful woman named Bathsheba, desired her for himself, and committed adultery with her. He had her husband, Uriah the Hittite, sent into the hottest part of the battle with the Ammonites, where he would certainly be killed and, in fact, was killed. David then proceeded to take her as his wife. Only when the prophet Nathan was sent by God to rebuke him, did he feel his guilt, confess his sin, and plead for mercy. His simple "I have sinned against the LORD" in 2 Samuel 12:13 is here elaborated into such a prayer for God's mercy in cleansing and renewal as has been the language of penitents ever since.

The need of God's mercy

We can appreciate our need of divine mercy only when we have seen the gravity of our sin. As in Psalm 32, so in verses 1 and 2 of this psalm, three separate Hebrew words are used to describe David's offence, namely transgression (the crossing of a boundary), sin (the missing of a mark), and iniquity (depravity of nature). The thought behind these words is unfolded in an important recognition of the essence and origin of sin.

The essence of sin is revolt against God: *Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge* (verse 4). It is true that David had sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah, against his family and nation, but first and foremost, he had offended against the love and law of God. He had coveted, stolen, committed adultery and murder and, in so doing, had broken four of the five last commandments and brought himself under the just sentence of God. Compare Romans 3:4 where Paul quotes these words to establish the unswerving justice of God in His dealings with human beings. It is because we are under the judgment of God that we need the mercy of God.

If the essence of sin is rebellion, its origin is in our fallen nature: *Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me* (verse 5). This does not, of course,

- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
- ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!
- ³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified
in your words
and blameless in your judgment.
- ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.

mean that the marvellous processes of conception and birth are in themselves sinful, but that our human nature from its first beginnings has been infected with sin. As we inherit it from our parents, it is twisted with self-centredness. This is "original sin," and David came to recognise it when his sinful passions of lust, jealousy, cruelty, and avarice overcame and overthrew him.

It is when we see ourselves as we are, on the one hand rebels against God and under the judgment of God, and on the other prisoners of a corrupt nature, that we come, like David, to despair of ourselves and to cry to God for mercy.

The expression of God's mercy

The mercy of God expresses itself in meeting the sinner's need, giving him both pardon and purity.

In praying for pardon, David uses two vivid metaphors. First, he asks God to blot out his transgressions (verses 1, 9). The verb denotes the removal of writing from a book (see for example Exodus 32:32). He seems to think of his sins as a list of offences of which he is accused or a catalogue of debts which he cannot pay. He pleads that the entry be erased.

Secondly, he acknowledges that his sins have defiled him and prays that God will wash and cleanse him (verse 2), until his black stains are removed and he becomes whiter than snow (verse 7). Since in certain Old Testament rituals a bunch of hyssop was dipped in blood or water, which was then ceremonially sprinkled, the word hyssop is used in verse 7 as a symbol of cleansing.

But David knew His need of purity as well as pardon. God demanded *truth in the inner parts* (verse 6); yet David's very nature was corrupt (verse 5). Only the creative power of God could make him a new person. So he prayed: *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me* (verse 10). He longed, that is, for a new nature with new and pure desires, and for a spirit both *steadfast* (verse 10) and *willing* (verse 12). If God in mercy would grant him both a clean conscience and a clean heart, the sorrow which his sin had caused would be turned into joy and gladness (verse 8, compare verse 12).

The results of God's mercy

The last part of the psalm (verses 13-19) is devoted to the results which follow an experience of the cleansing and recreating mercy of God. David resolves that his attitude both to other people and to God will be different.

First, he accepts his responsibility to his fellow humans. He has sinned against them; now he will serve them in a new way. When his own transgressions have been forgiven, he will *teach transgressors* God's way, so that they return to Him (verse 13). [...]

His second responsibility is toward God. He will use his lips in worship as well as witness: *O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise* (verse 15). It is this that God desires, not *sacrifice* or *burnt offerings*. He does not mean that no sacrifice at all is pleasing to God, but that the kind of sacrifice He chiefly desires, especially from a transgressor like David, is a *broken and contrite heart*. And then, when he is forgiven, he may offer the further sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving (verse 15; compare Psalm 50:14, 23).

[...]

- 1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!
- 3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
- 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified
in your words
and blameless in your judgment.
- 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
- 6 Behold, you delight in
truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom
in the secret heart.
- 7 Purge me with hyssop,
and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall
be whiter than snow.
- 8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that
you have broken rejoice.
- 9 Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
- 11 Cast me not away
from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.
- 13 Then I will teach
transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
- 14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness,
O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing
aloud of your righteousness.
- 15 O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- 16 For you will not delight in sacrifice,
or I would give it;
you will not be pleased
with a burnt offering.
- 17 The sacrifices of God
are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God,
you will not despise.
- 18 Do good to Zion
in your good pleasure;
build up the walls of Jerusalem;
- 19 then will you delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings
and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

REFLECTION

Please reflect on the Psalm and write personal lessons and applications.

Wednesday, April 29**TEXT: PSALM 73**

- ¹ I waited patiently for the LORD;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
Truly God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.
- ² But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,
my steps had nearly slipped.
- ³ For I was envious of the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
- ⁴ For they have no pangs until death;
their bodies are fat and sleek.
- ⁵ They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.
- ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them as a garment.
- ⁷ Their eyes swell out through fatness;
their hearts overflow with follies.
- ⁸ They scoff and speak with malice;
loftily they threaten oppression.
- ⁹ They set their mouths against the heavens,
and their tongue struts through the earth.
- ¹⁰ Therefore his people turn back to them,
and find no fault in them.
- ¹¹ And they say, "How can God know?
Is there knowledge in the Most High?"
- ¹² Behold, these are the wicked;
always at ease, they increase in riches.
- ¹³ All in vain have I kept my heart clean
and washed my hands in innocence.
- ¹⁴ For all the day long I have been stricken
and rebuked every morning.
- ¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
I would have betrayed the generation of your children.

- 16 But when I thought how to understand this,
it seemed to me a wearisome task,
17 until I went into the sanctuary of God;
then I discerned their end.
18 Truly you set them in slippery places;
you make them fall to ruin.
19 How they are destroyed in a moment,
swept away utterly by terrors!
20 Like a dream when one awakes,
O Lord, when you rouse yourself,
you despise them as phantoms.
21 When my soul was embittered,
when I was pricked in heart,
22 I was brutish and ignorant;
I was like a beast toward you.
23 Nevertheless, I am continually with you;
you hold my right hand.
24 You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me to glory.
25 Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.
26 My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
27 For behold, those who are far from you shall perish;
you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.
28 But for me it is good to be near God;
I have made the Lord God my refuge,
that I may tell of all your works.

COMMENTARY: PSALM 73

The Prosperity of the Wicked

The providence of God, His moral ordering of the world, is a problem which has always baffled the human mind. The book of Job and Psalms 37 and 49 as well as 73 are devoted to this theme. The problem can be simply stated. God has revealed Himself as good and just, punishing wickedness and rewarding goodness. If He is all-powerful as well as all-good, why does He allow such a morally perverse state of affairs to continue on earth? Far from justice catching up on the wicked, they flourish "like a green tree"(Psalm 37:35). They not only get away with their wickedness but seem to be exempt from the troubles which befall other people. In a word, honesty is not the best policy. It does not pay to be good. It is the wicked who prosper, while adversity overtakes the righteous. Such is the background to this psalm.

The problem (verses 1-14)

The psalmist begins with the conviction held by all godly people, even in the face of apparently contradictory circumstances Surely *God is good... to those who are pure in heart* (verse 1). This is an axiom of revealed religion and cannot on any account be surrendered. *But as for me*, he immediately continues, *my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked* (verses 2, 3). First, he was troubled by their immunity to disease and disaster (verses 4, 5). Next, by their arrogance (verses 6-9). Their eyes and heart, their talk and looks (verses 7, 8) are full of conceit. Not only do *their tongues take possession of the earth* (verse 9), but they even *lay claim to heaven* (verse 9). Added to their immunity to trouble and their arrogant ways is their popularity with the world (verses 10, 11). The people ask why God, if indeed He knows about them, does not punish them (verse 11).

The psalmist concludes his description of the wicked: *always carefree, they increase in wealth*. Then he cries out bitterly: *Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure* (verse 13), for while the wicked flourish, *all day long I have been plagued* (verse 14). If the wicked prosper, it is vain to be righteous. Righteousness does not pay; the big dividends go to the wicked.

The right approach to the problem (verses 15, 16)

The reason why the psalmist so nearly stumbled and fell (verse 2) is that his approach was wrong. He made at least three mistakes. First, he *envied* the wicked (verse 3). But it is always wrong to envy the sinner's liberty to sin. "Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the LORD" (Proverbs 23:17). Secondly, he became bitter against God, as he later confesses (verses 21-22). To make presumptuous complaints against God is to behave like an ignorant animal, not like a rational human being. Thirdly, he was tempted to give up. When he tried to understand, he says, *it was oppressive to me* (verse 16). He could find no solution and was inclined to give in to despair.

But perplexity and hopelessness lasted only *till I entered the sanctuary of God* (verse 17). Perception is granted to those who humbly seek God's face. [...] When we are perplexed by the problems of God's providential rule in the world, we are neither to look at the wicked with envy nor at ourselves in bitter self-pity. Nor should we give up looking for any solution and lapse into despair, but rather fall on our knees and look at God. Then "from the secret place of the Most High we see things as God sees them"(Campbell Morgan).

The solution (verses 17-27)

Our problems are aggravated because we are narrow-minded and short-sighted. It is a question of perspective. A mountain, which appears menacing when we stand at its foot and it towers above us, shrinks into harmless insignificance when we view it from a distance or from the air. So the problem of God's providence cannot be solved in the limited context of time and earth; its solution awaits the next world and eternity. Many of life's inequalities will remain now. But wrongs will be righted, evil avenged, and good

- ¹ I waited patiently for the LORD;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
Truly God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.
- ² But as for me,
my feet had almost stumbled,
my steps had nearly slipped.
- ³ For I was envious of the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity
of the wicked.
- ⁴ For they have no pangs until death;
their bodies are fat and sleek.
- ⁵ They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not stricken
like the rest of mankind.
- ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them as a garment.
- ⁷ Their eyes swell out through fatness;
their hearts overflow with follies.
- ⁸ They scoff and speak with malice;
loftily they threaten oppression.
- ⁹ They set their mouths
against the heavens,
and their tongue
struts through the earth.
- ¹⁰ Therefore his people
turn back to them,
and find no fault in them.
- ¹¹ And they say, "How can God know?
Is there knowledge in the Most High?"
- ¹² Behold, these are the wicked;
always at ease,
they increase in riches.
- ¹³ All in vain have I kept my heart clean
and washed my hands in innocence.
- ¹⁴ For all the day long
I have been stricken
and rebuked every morning.
- ¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
I would have betrayed
the generation of your children.
- ¹⁶ But when I thought how to understand
this, it seemed to me a wearisome task.

vindicated in the final judgment. This is why we need to keep going into *the sanctuary of God*; it is there that our perspective is adjusted and our vision clarified.

What the psalmist was able in God's sanctuary to grasp was the *final destiny* of these people (verse 17). They flourish now, it is true, but God sets them on *slippery ground*. In the words of Jesus, they are on "the broad road that leads to destruction." Ultimately death will claim them and they will be destroyed. Indeed, as a dream when one awakes, the very memory of them will vanish away (verses 17-19).

If that is the fate of the wicked, very different is the destiny of the righteous: *I am always with you* (verse 23). That is, though the ungodly flourish now, only to perish in the end, the godly enjoy the presence of God perpetually, both now and forever (verse 24). God's people may suffer want and persecution, but their abiding wealth is in God Himself. In one of the sublimest expressions of personal religion in the Old Testament the psalmist continues: *Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you* (verse 25). In heaven and earth, in time and eternity, the living God is his portion for ever (verse 26). Such communion with God is eternal life; death can neither disturb nor destroy it.

In conclusion, verses 27 and 28 summarise the contrasting destinies of the godly and the ungodly which the psalmist perceived in the sanctuary of God: *Those who are far from you will perish...but as for me, it is good to be near God*. No doubt nearness to God does not appear "good" to the materialist, since it may involve sorrow and suffering in the world. But those who prize true riches know that our real and eternal "good" is in God.

- ¹⁷ until I went into the sanctuary of God;
then I discerned their end.
- ¹⁸ Truly you set them in slippery places;
you make them fall to ruin.
- ¹⁹ How they are destroyed in a moment,
swept away utterly by terrors!
- ²⁰ Like a dream when one awakes,
O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you
despise them as phantoms.
- ²¹ When my soul was embittered,
when I was pricked in heart,
²² I was brutish and ignorant;
I was like a beast toward you.
- ²³ Nevertheless, I am
continually with you;
you hold my right hand.
- ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will
receive me to glory.
- ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth
that I desire besides you.
- ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.
- ²⁷ For behold, those who are
far from you shall perish;
you put an end to everyone
who is unfaithful to you.
- ²⁸ But for me it is good to be near God;
I have made the Lord God my refuge,
that I may tell of all your works.

REFLECTION

Please reflect on the Psalm and write personal lessons and applications.

Thursday, April 30**TEXT: PSALM 84**

- ¹ How lovely is your dwelling place,
 O LORD of hosts!
- ² My soul longs, yes, faints
 for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
 to the living God.
- ³ Even the sparrow finds a home,
 and the swallow a nest for herself,
 where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
 my King and my God.
- ⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
 ever singing your praise! *Selah*
- ⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
 in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
- ⁶ As they go through the Valley of Baca
 they make it a place of springs;
 the early rain also covers it with pools.
- ⁷ They go from strength to strength;
 each one appears before God in Zion.
- ⁸ O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;
 give ear, O God of Jacob! *Selah*
- ⁹ Behold our shield, O God;
 look on the face of your anointed!
- ¹⁰ For a day in your courts is better
 than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
 than dwell in the tents of wickedness.
- ¹¹ For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
 the LORD bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does he withhold
 from those who walk uprightly.
- ¹² O LORD of hosts,
 blessed is the one who trusts in you!

COMMENTARY: PSALM 84

The Courts of the Lord

The Temple in Jerusalem was for the Jew the most sacred spot on earth, for there in the Holy of Holies was the Shekinah glory, the visible manifestation of the presence of God. Of course the pious Israelite knew perfectly well, as Solomon had said, that God does not "dwell on earth" and that "the heaven, even the highest heaven cannot contain" Him (1 Kings 8:27). Nevertheless, He had been pleased to "put his name" in Jerusalem and to cause the symbol of His presence to appear upon the mercy-seat behind the veil of the Temple. [...]

The blessedness of others (verses 1-7)

The psalmist begins by expressing how desirable God's dwelling-place is to Him. His whole being longs for it, *soul, heart, and flesh*. He *yearns, even faints* for it, because to enter *the courts of the LORD* is equivalent to approaching the living God Himself. But for some reason he is prevented from fulfilling his heart's desire. [...]

He thinks of the sparrows, the most numerous and common birds in the world, constructing their nests in every available nook and cranny of the Temple buildings. The *swallow* is probably the swift. Large numbers still visit Palestine on migration, and many nest even today in the precincts of the Mosque of Omar in Jerusalem. How fortunate these birds seem to the psalmist. They are permitted to dwell in the immediate proximity of the altars of God. [...]

He concentrates on the pilgrims (verses 5-7), no doubt because he longs to be one himself, and gives a graphic description of their journey up to Jerusalem. They have set their hearts on pilgrimage (verse 5), and their resolute purpose strengthens them on their arduous trek. [...]

A personal prayer (verses 8-12)

As the psalmist describes the blessedness of sparrows and swifts, pilgrims and priests, who visit the Temple or dwell there, his own longing to join them breaks out into a prayer: *O LORD God Almighty, listen to me...* (verse 8). [...]

The writer goes on to indicate the reason for his prayer to visit the Temple, and expresses it forcefully in terms of both time and space (verse 10). One day in the courts of the Lord, he says, is to him better *than a thousand elsewhere*, while to be a *mere doorkeeper in the house of my God*, approaching only the threshold of the Temple, was preferable to dwelling at ease *in the tents of the wicked*. Only a day. Only a doorkeeper. And yet such a fleeting and distant contact with God would be satisfying, since He is a *sun*, bathing us with light, and *shield*, defending us from evil. More than that, He gives *favour and honour*; in fact no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless (verse 11).

[...] Christian worshipers have no difficulty in applying this psalm to themselves, for the New Testament tells us plainly what the temple of God is which we may call *lovely* and make the object of our desire. First, it is the church, not only universal (Ephesians 2:21) but local (1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16), that is, every company of believers. God does not dwell in temples made with hands (Acts 7:48) but among His people. We do not need to travel to Jerusalem to meet Him. When only two or three of us have met in the name of Christ, He is there in our midst (Matthew 18:20). This is why we love to come together for public worship.

But the final fulfilment of the temple idea will be heaven, the new Jerusalem, of which it is written: "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple," and "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God"(Revelation 21:22, 3). In this sense, too, Christian believers know in their own experience the psalmist's ardent longing for the temple of God. We thirst for God, and our Christian hope sustains us on our weary pilgrimage to heaven.

- ¹ How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!
- ² My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.
- ³ Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.
- ⁴ Blessed are those
who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise! *Selah*
- ⁵ Blessed are those
whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are
the highways to Zion.
- ⁶ As they go through the Valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.
- ⁷ They go from strength to strength;
each one appears
before God in Zion.
- ⁸ O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob! *Selah*
- ⁹ Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed!
- ¹⁰ For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper
in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of wickedness.
- ¹¹ For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
the LORD bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does he withhold
from those who walk uprightly.
- ¹² O LORD of hosts,
blessed is the one who trusts in you!

REFLECTION

Please reflect on the Psalm and write personal lessons and applications.

Friday, May 1**TEXT: PSALM 91**

- ¹ He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.
- ² I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."
- ³ For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence.
- ⁴ He will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
- ⁵ You will not fear the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.
- ⁷ A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.
- ⁸ You will only look with your eyes
and see the recompense of the wicked.
- ⁹ Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place—
the Most High, who is my refuge—
¹⁰ no evil shall be allowed to befall you,
no plague come near your tent.
- ¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
- ¹² On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.
- ¹³ You will tread on the lion and the adder;
the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.
- ¹⁴ "Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him;
I will protect him, because he knows my name.
- ¹⁵ When he calls to me, I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble;
I will rescue him and honor him.
- ¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation."

COMMENTARY: PSALM 91

The Defence of the Most High

This psalm has an unusual distinction: it is the only passage of Scripture which (at least in the sacred record) is quoted by the devil (See Matthew 4:6 and Luke 4:10, 11). This is more important than it sounds, because actually the devil misquoted it, or rather misapplied it. He urged the Son of God to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple and trust God's promise (verses 11 and 12) that His angels would protect Him, so that He would not hurt Himself. The devil is not the only person who has attempted to misapply Psalm 91, as if it promised an unconditional security in any and every circumstance.

Our Lord knew, however, that to jump from the roof of the Temple on the basis of this psalm's promise of divine protection would be to tempt God. Only children of God who are living in the will of God can expect the protection of God. Even then, they have no guarantee of being shielded from all harm (see verse 15). What they know is that ultimately, whatever their circumstances may be, they are secure in God's love. Psalm 91 is, in fact, the Old Testament equivalent of Romans 8:31-39.

The best way to grasp the sequence of thought is to see that first the believer speaks to God (verses 1, 2); then the psalmist addresses the believer (verses 3-13); while finally God intervenes, speaking to the reader, and Himself confirms the believer's assurance of security which is the theme of the psalm. The psalmist addresses the believer (verses 3-13), while finally God intervenes, speaking to the reader, and Himself confirms the believer's assurance of security which is the theme of the psalm (verses 14-16).

The believer (verses 1, 2)

The believer's faith is grounded upon who God is. He is *the Most High* and *the Almighty* on one hand (verse 1), infinite in transcendence and power; but on the other he is *the LORD* (verse 2), Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, bound to His people by a solemn undertaking. *To rest in the shadow* of such a God is wisdom; He is the believer's *refuge* and *fortress*.

The psalmist (verses 3-13)

Having quoted this confession of faith, the psalmist now endorses it, encouraging believers in it and assuring them of their safety. Bold imagery is used to illustrate the divine defence which is promised. God will defend them as a mother bird hides her chicks under her wings; His *faithfulness* will be to them as a soldier's *shield* (verse 4). What, then, are the perils from which believers will be delivered? They are variously described: *the fowler's snare...* *the deadly pestilence* (verse 3), *the terror of night...* *the arrow... by day* (verse 5), *the pestilence and the plague* (verse 6).

[...]

The Lord (verses 14-16)

Finally, the Lord himself is heard to speak, neither to the believer nor to the psalmist, but to the reader, approving the believer's faith and the psalmist's theme. [...] They must trust God, and express their faith in prayer. Then God *will* answer them. The divine deliverance does not, however, always mean an escape from trouble; it sometimes means finding God with them *in trouble* (verse 15). The final promise which God makes to His trusting servants is of *long life* and *salvation* (verse 16). It is not impossible that, like the prophets, the psalmist wrote more than he knew, for the ultimate meaning of security is that eternal life and salvation which are found in Jesus Christ alone.

- ¹ He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.
- ² I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."
- ³ For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence.
- ⁴ He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
- ⁵ You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.
- ⁷ A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.
- ⁸ You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked.
- ⁹ Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place—the Most High, who is my refuge—
- ¹⁰ no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.
- ¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.
- ¹² On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.
- ¹³ You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.
- ¹⁴ "Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name.
- ¹⁵ When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.
- ¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."

REFLECTION

Please reflect on the Psalm and write personal lessons and applications.

Saturday, May 2**TEXT: PSALM 103**

- ¹ Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!
- ² Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,
- ³ who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
- ⁴ who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
- ⁵ who satisfies you with good
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- ⁶ The LORD works righteousness
and justice for all who are oppressed.
- ⁷ He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.
- ⁸ The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- ⁹ He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
- ¹⁰ He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
- ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
- ¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.
- ¹³ As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.
- ¹⁴ For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust.
- ¹⁵ As for man, his days are like grass;
he flourishes like a flower of the field;
- ¹⁶ for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.
- ¹⁷ But the steadfast love of the LORD is from
everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him,
and his righteousness to children's children,
- ¹⁸ to those who keep his covenant

and remember to do his commandments.

¹⁹ The LORD has established his throne in the heavens,
and his kingdom rules over all.

²⁰ Bless the LORD, O you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his word,
obeying the voice of his word!

²¹ Bless the LORD, all his hosts,
his ministers, who do his will!

²² Bless the LORD, all his works,
in all places of his dominion.

Bless the LORD, O my soul!

COMMENTARY: PSALM 103

The Benefits of God's Grace

Psalm 103 is, undoubtedly, one of the best-loved psalms [...] We have here the authentic utterance of a redeemed child of God, who piles up words to express his gratitude to the God of grace. His praise expands in three concentric circles. First, he addresses himself and seeks to arouse himself to the proper worship of God: *Praise the LORD, O my soul* (verses 1-5). Next, he recalls the mercy of God to all the people of His covenant (verses 6-18). Finally, he summons the whole of creation to join in the chorus of praise (verses 19-22).

God's benefits to me (verses 1-5)

The first five verses of the psalm are very personal, as the author confronts himself with his duty and exhorts his own sluggish soul to worship. He desires not only to praise God's holy name (verse 1), acknowledging the holiness or unique "otherness" of His being, but to remember *all his benefits*. Indeed, he is determined that his worship of God shall be as total as are God's blessings to him: *all my inmost being* in response to *all his benefits*. These benefits have been given to both body and soul, for God both *forgives all my sins* and *heals all my diseases* (verse 3). Further, He redeems my life *from the pit* (verse 4), that is the grave or Sheol. Not content with saving the psalmist from sin, disease and death, God lavishes positive blessings upon him as well. He crowns him (verse 4), that is, He makes His child a king (compare Psalm 85). God also *satisfies him with good things* (verse 5), so that our *youth is renewed like the eagle's*. [...]

God's mercy to His people (verses 6-18)

The psalmist now changes from the singular to the plural, from the particular benefits which he has himself received to God's general grace to all the people of His covenant. Whenever they have been oppressed he has displayed on their behalf both *righteousness and justice* (verse 6). The most signal revelation of this was to Moses and the children of Israel under Moses' leadership (verse 7). Such just dealing with His people was an expression of His grace.

Indeed, what the psalmist goes on to write is a kind of meditation on that glorious revelation of God's name to Moses: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness"(Exodus 34:6). After quoting these words (verse 8), our author proceeds to enforce them by two negative statements, three illustrations and a striking contrast.

¹ Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!

² Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,

³ who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,

⁴ who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you
with steadfast love and mercy,

⁵ who satisfies you with good
so that your youth
is renewed like the eagle's.

⁶ The LORD works righteousness
and justice for all who are oppressed.

⁷ He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.

⁸ The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in
steadfast love.

⁹ He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.

¹⁰ He does not deal with us
according to our sins,
nor repay us
according to our iniquities.

¹¹ For as high as the heavens
are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love
toward those who fear him;

¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our
transgressions from us.

¹³ As a father shows
compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion
to those who fear him.

¹⁴ For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust.

¹⁵ As for man, his days are like grass;
he flourishes like a flower of the field;

¹⁶ for the wind passes over it,
and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.

¹⁷ But the steadfast love of the LORD is
from everlasting to everlasting
on those who fear him,
and his righteousness
to children's children,

¹⁸ to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his
commandments.

The two negatives indicate that God sets limits to his own righteous wrath against sin. The first is a time limit, that *He will not always accuse*. The second is a restraint upon the expression of His anger that, instead of that just judgment, *he does not treat us as our sins deserve* (verses 9, 10) Then follows three positive illustrations of God's grace. His steadfast love is as high as heaven, His forgiveness removes our sins as far away as infinity, and His pity is as tender as a father's for his children, because He knows our human frailty (verses 11-14).

The mention of human weakness leads to the final underlining of the mercy of God, which, as in Psalm 90, takes the form of a contrast between human transience and the eternity of God's love. Humankind flourishes like grass, and perishes like grass too when the hot desert wind blows upon it; but toward those who reverence God, keep His covenant and remember His commandments, His *love* and *righteousness* endure for ever and enrich their posterity (verses 15-18). This assurance of God's unfailing love to successive generations has brought comfort to many mourners as they have stood round the grave and watched a coffin lowered to its final resting place.

God's dominion over all creation (verses 19-22)

In the last paragraph the psalmist turns from the love of the Lord for His covenant people to His sovereignty over all His creation. He has *established his throne in heaven* and from there *rules over all* (verse 19). Thus convinced of God's universal kingdom, the author summons the whole created order to praise him. First, he addresses the mighty angels, called also God's *hosts* and *servants*, whose characteristic activity is to do *his will* (verses 20, 21). Next he turns to the lower orders of God's creation and calls on *all his works everywhere* to worship Him. Finally, he comes back to himself and concludes the psalm as he began it, with the personal exhortation: *Praise the LORD, O my soul* (verse 22).

¹⁹ The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.

²⁰ Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word!

²¹ Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will!

²² Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!

REFLECTION

Please reflect on the Psalm and write personal lessons and applications.

Monday, May 4**TEXT: PSALM 127**

¹ Unless the LORD builds the house,
 those who build it labor in vain.
 Unless the LORD watches over the city,
 the watchman stays awake in vain.

² It is in vain that you rise up early
 and go late to rest,
 eating the bread of anxious toil;
 for he gives to his beloved sleep.

³ Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,
 the fruit of the womb a reward.

⁴ Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
 are the children of one's youth.

⁵ Blessed is the man
 who fills his quiver with them!
 He shall not be put to shame
 when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

COMMENTARY: PSALM 127*The Vanity of Unblessed Labor*

It is useless to launch a new enterprise or attempt to guard an old one, unless the Lord blesses these labors (verse 1). The house builder's labor is vain unless the Lord does the building, and the city watchman's vigilance is vain unless the Lord does the watching. We may toil and overwork, getting up early and going to bed late, but all the time, if we only knew it, God *grants sleep to those he loves* (verse 2) or "gives to his beloved in sleep" (Revised Standard Version). This, of course, is not a condemnation of industry, any more than our Lord's teaching in Matthew 6:25-34 is a prohibition of prudent forethought. What is condemned is worry on the one hand, and feverish self-confident activity on the other. Both are symptoms of unbelief.

Children must be recognized as a *heritage from the LORD* (verse 3), one of God's most precious gifts. *Sons born in one's youth are like arrows* (verse 4), for by the time their warrior father is aged they themselves will be old enough to defend and protect him. [...]

¹ Unless the LORD builds the house,
 those who build it labor in vain.
 Unless the LORD watches over the city,
 the watchman stays awake in vain.

² It is in vain that you rise up early
 and go late to rest,
 eating the bread of anxious toil;
 for he gives to his beloved sleep.

³ Behold, children are a
 heritage from the LORD,
 the fruit of the womb a reward.

⁴ Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
 are the children of one's youth.

REFLECTION

Please reflect on the Psalm and write personal lessons and applications.

Tuesday, May 5

TEXT: PSALM 139

¹ O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.

³ You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.

⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.

⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

⁹ If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"

¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.

¹³ For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,

the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.

¹⁷How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!

How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸If I would count them, they are more than the sand.

I awake, and I am still with you.

¹⁹Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God!

O men of blood, depart from me!

²⁰They speak against you with malicious intent;

your enemies take your name in vain.

²¹Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?

And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?

²²I hate them with complete hatred;

I count them my enemies.

²³Search me, O God, and know my heart!

Try me and know my thoughts!

²⁴And see if there be any grievous way in me,

and lead me in the way everlasting!

COMMENTARY: PSALM 139

The All-seeing Eye of God

This has been called "the crown of all psalms." It is certainly a sublime exposition of one man's personal awareness of God's universal knowledge and presence. It is best known for verses 6 to 11, which unfold the impossibility of escape from God.

God's omniscience (verses 1-6)

The verbs paint a picture of God's perfect knowledge of humankind. He "searches," "knows," "perceives," "discerns," and is "familiar with" everything about us (verses 1-3). The divine knowledge extends to our thoughts, deeds, and words. [...]

In verse 5, the psalmist begins to anticipate the theme of the next paragraph and attributes God's knowledge of him to His constant presence both *behind* and *before*. He pictures himself as a beleaguered city. But this encompassing presence of God fills him with wonder, not fear, and he breaks out in praise of God's amazing, unattainable knowledge (verse 6).

God's omnipresence (verses 7-12)

This section begins with a question: *Where can I go from your Spirit?* (verse 7). It is important to observe, however, that this question expresses not the desire to escape, but the joyful astonishment that escape is impossible and that God's hand is everywhere to guide and hold him (verse 10). [...]

¹ O LORD, you have searched me
and known me!

² You know when I sit down
and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.

³ You search out my path
and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O LORD,
you know it altogether.

⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for
me; it is high; I cannot attain it.

⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee
from your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol,
you are there!

⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and
dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover
me, and the light about me be night,"

¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.

God's omnipotence (verses 13-18)

God's omniscience, which in the previous section has been attributed to his omnipresence, is now attributed to His omnipotence. God can search man out not only because He sees him, but because He made him. The Creator knows His creatures through and through. The psalmist ascribes the wonderful development of the embryo in the womb to the creative power of God. Both his *inmost being* and his *frame* (verses 13, 15) are God's. [...]

He ends the paragraph with a statement whose meaning is doubtful: *When I awake, I am still with you* (verse 18). Some writers suppose that he is referring again, as in the first two verses, to God's continuous presence with him whether he wakes or sleeps. Others think that he is referring to awaking from the sleep of death.

God's judgment (verses 19-24)

If only you would slay the wicked, O God (verse 19). Many Christian readers feel that this sudden prayer sounds a jarring note after what has gone before. Yet it is perfectly consistent with it. When a person's world is full of God, they long for the elimination of evil. These evildoers are described both as *bloodthirsty* (verse 19) and as those who misuse God's name (verse 20), either taking His name in vain or exalting themselves against His authority. That is, they set themselves against both God and their fellows. In utter revolt against God's two great commandments to love Him and their neighbor, they do not even stop short of blood (violence, murder) or of blasphemy.

This, then, is the first point to notice. The psalmist is not expressing feelings of personal animosity or revenge. He has come to count God's enemies (verse 20) as his own enemies (verse 22). He is righteously indignant, where we would be unrighteously tolerant. He burns with a divine hatred of sin.

But, it may be said, this man failed to distinguish between evil and the evildoer. Should he (and we with him) not learn to love the sinner and hate the sin? Of course there is some truth in this. Yet it can be overpressed, for "evil" is not something abstract; it exists in the hearts and ways of evildoers. So when the judgment of God falls, it will fall upon evildoers, not upon evil in the abstract.

But, an objector may further ask, while hope remains we should surely desire not judgment of sinners, but their salvation? Yes indeed, but what if sinners refuse to repent? We cannot desire their salvation in defiance of their own willingness to receive it. This is the heart of the matter. The Bible teaches that the sinner is at one and the same time the object of God's love and wrath (compare John 3:16, 36), and we should seek by grace at least to approximate our attitude to God's. We should earnestly desire the salvation of sinners if they will repent, and equally earnestly their (and indeed our own) destruction if they (or we) will not. It is because we find it difficult if not impossible to feel such sentiments, in divine purity without any admixture of personal venom, that we cannot easily echo the psalmist's words. But let us acknowledge the reason: it is because we know little of a truly righteous indignation.

¹³For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together
in my mother's womb.

¹⁴I praise you, for I am fearfully
and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.

¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven
in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶Your eyes saw my
unformed substance;
in your book were written,
every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.

¹⁷How precious to me
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²¹Do I not hate those
who hate you, O LORD?
And do I not loathe

those who rise up against you?
²²I hate them with complete hatred;
I count them my enemies.

²³Search me, O God,
and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!

²⁴And see if there be
any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!

REFLECTION

Please reflect on the Psalm and write personal lessons and applications.