

PSALM 101

Of David. A Psalm.

¹ I will sing of loyalty and of justice;
to you, O LORD, I will sing.

² I will study the way that is blameless.
When shall I attain it?

I will walk with integrity of heart
within my house;

³ I will not set before my eyes
anything that is base.

I hate the work of those who fall away;
it shall not cling to me.

⁴ Perverseness of heart shall be far from me;
I will know nothing of evil.

⁶ I will look with favour on the faithful in the land,
so that they may live with me;
whoever walks in the way that is blameless
shall minister to me.

⁷ No one who practises deceit
shall remain in my house;
no one who utters lies
shall continue in my presence.

This Psalm is identified as “of David.” Does this mean David (the king) composed it? While many of the psalms in the psalter are attributed to David, this is intended more as a way of honouring him and what he represents for the people of Israel rather than a literal identification of him as composer. In the stories about David we know that he was musical and we know that as far as kings go, he was as spiritual and faithful in seeking God’s will as they come. He was also successful as a king in advancing Israel’s strength as a nation.

But here’s the thing. What the person who identifies as “I” in the psalm promises to do and what David actually did are pretty far apart. For all his promises, intentions and efforts, David the king made many big mistakes. Rather than “loyalty” and “justice” to God, rather than being “blameless”, rather than “integrity of heart within (his) house”, and so forth, David committed adultery, murder and incited betrayal within his household. Some of his wives and children turned against him and some of them turned on each other in their bid for status and place in the royal court.

But the thing about David is that he never got over such failure. He was a sad man and terribly disappointed with himself morally speaking. His success as a king was not enough. He genuinely desired to be right before God.

And this is the first important point about this psalm. As much as we may question whether anyone can live a “blameless” life of integrity with perfect “loyalty” and “justice”, and fleeing all “perverseness of heart”, genuinely aspiring to such moral excellence is highly worthy in our world as much as that of David’s or the psalmist’s. People are motivated by many things: success, status, prosperity, health, popularity, pleasing the people that count, or fear. But being genuinely motivated by a desire to do right, to be faithful, pure of heart, compassionate and caring, fair and just... this matters.

But how much does it matter? Why should it matter? What’s the motivation? This psalm pushes past all external motivations to the heart of it all: God within. “God” here is not one who threatens or punishes. God doesn’t speak a word in this psalm. Rather, God is in that secret place inside the person beyond any motivation but love itself, love in and for itself. The “I” is deeply passionate and resolved, driven by a purity of desire to do right and be right, period.

Personally, I find this very attractive. Even as I know I will fail to be my best self all too often, being reminded and drawn into true excellence of character and a passion for love as compassion is something all too rare in our world. We are pushed and pulled by all kinds of other motivators, motivators that all too often disfigure our character and take us away from compassion. We judge and we blame, we tear down, dismiss, ignore and rarely take the time to pay attention. What kind of humanity does that all lead to?...

But one last thing too. The psalmist knows that environment matters. They want to be around those who inspire and support a beautiful character and compassionate heart. What persons and what communities inspire and support our personal development and growth into the humans we want to become ever more fully? May this psalm reset your life goals and motivations. May the passion for compassion, integrity of heart, and loyalty to God within you be kindled and re-kindled.

PRAYER: We want to be good, O God, we want to be pure in our hearts, we want to be genuinely compassionate... And yet, even as we touch this in ourselves and savour it in moments of engagement and passion within, all too often we falter, fail and fall... We are vulnerable to the currents and situations around us... We are affected by what others say, their moods, their struggles, their aggravations and their sorrows... Sometimes this is good, O God. Being unsettled because we care arises from a compassionate heart. Other

times, we can turn negative, miserable, self-engrossed and self-pitying... We can resent and react, criticize and dismiss... Come into us again, O God... Find some room in us... Renew us in a simple and pure passion for compassion... with others and with ourselves... In Jesus' name; Amen.