

City View Church
September 10, 2017

Psalms 1 and 2: Seeing the Psalms through the Lenses of God's Law and God's Reign.

Introduction

Last time Cameron invited me to preach, they had me close out our series on Ephesians. This week I'm introducing a new series on the Book of Psalms. I'll cover Psalms 1 and 2 today, so if we do two Psalms a week, and there are 150 chapters in Psalms, we should be done by 2019 or so... Just kidding. I am covering the first two Psalms today, but we will be selective as we go through the book, which we plan to finish the week before Advent.

During this series, Pastor Duane, Pastor Cameron, and I are hoping to see a few things happen: We want you to...

1. Have a greater knowledge / vision of and hunger / desire for God. (This should probably be true in any series.) Just like when you're introducing a food you love to your kids or skeptical friends, and they need your encouragement to acquire the taste, we want the Psalms to help creating a longing and thirst for God (Psalm 42:1), but we also want you to find the satisfaction for that longing in the pages of the Psalter. This is the "heart" transformation we trust the Spirit will work in us as we are feed by the Psalms.
2. We want you to have a fuller knowledge of the content, context, structure, function, and theology of the Book of Psalms. This is definitely in the category of "head" knowledge. But we believe your familiarity with the Book of Psalms and how individual psalms "work" will make them more meaningful in your lives.
3. We hope you will have a greater appreciation for Biblical poetry so they can more easily be moved by its imagery and vision of our God. There's a difference between the "Hallelujah Chorus" and "Jesus Loves Me," and if you don't recognize those are different styles of music, with different styles of poetry, created for different purposes, you are going to fail to appreciate the importance of each. There are a wide scope of types of songs and poems in the book of Psalms, and the better you can understand how those different genres work, the more they will mean for you.
4. Both of those last two goals should help you grow in their familiarity with Psalms and feel confidence in reading for: encouragement, edification, prayer, and worship (individually and collectively). This is the old "Give a man a fish and he eats for a day, teach a man to fish and they eat for a lifetime." We want you to be able to use the Psalms in your own spirituality. At City View, we read a Psalm together almost every week. Many Christians around the world read Psalms daily. This is the longest book in the entire Bible. They are the source of much of our theology, most of our music, and should be at the heart of many of our prayers. The Psalms can and should be your prayer book. Cameron, Duane, and I want to help you take advantage of this rich, God-given resource.
5. Finally, it is our prayer that throughout our study, you would more readily see Christ and the Good news of His salvation throughout the Psalms. Psalms is the most frequently quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament. Jesus, Paul, and the other writers of the New Testament heard echoes of the Psalms throughout the life and ministry of Jesus and often turned there to reflect upon the good news. We want the Gospel to jump of the page as you read the Psalms! (And really, there is no point in preaching any series that doesn't consistent point you to Christ.

This morning, I want to introduce the basic themes in the book of Psalms. While I believe the Psalms provide model prayers that can be applied to any individual situation we face, we miss out on the depth of these songs if we only look at them in isolation, if they're just an emotional reflection on "me and God" going through life together. I believe there is a reason God wanted us to have *these* Psalms in *this* order. And while they can and should be used individually, they offer much more when we recognize that they're working together. We should be careful not to miss the forest of the Psalter for the trees of the individual psalms. They provide the "soundtrack" for the epic story of God's salvation of His people.

A few of the key themes are obvious, and should be impossible to miss. These are extremely important, so I want to be sure to mention them, but I won't spend a lot of time here, because I think they are so obvious.

1. First, the character and glory of Yahweh are central to this book (and the Bible as a whole). The Psalms are packed with images of God's holiness, power, wisdom, compassion, and perhaps most importantly Yahweh's covenant faithfulness. The Psalms are a celebration of who God is and what he has done to save his people.
2. Which is why the second major theme is the praise and thanksgiving of God's people. This technically more of a Psalm genre than a theological them, but if you read the Psalms and miss the point that God's people are supposed to give thanks and praise to Yahweh, you have not been paying attention. The *forms* of the Psalms establish the *content* of the Psalms—so we can't disconnect genre from meaning. Rather genre is the first clue to the theological vision being established by a psalm.
3. Likewise, many of the Psalms fall into a category called "Lament". Again, this is a form or genre, but also a major theme in the book. These are the Psalms where God's people either cry out asking why God isn't doing what they expect Him to do, or they cry out in repentance for not doing what God expected them to do. These psalms have a much more negative feel to them.

Those are the big ones: Who God is, why He should be praised, and lament because things rarely go as hoped.

But there are two other themes that are just as important, but are a lot easier to miss. They don't come up in every Psalm, and when they do, they can sometimes be tucked into one or two verses. However, as the Psalms were collected and preserved by God's people over the centuries, these two themes were significant for why we have *these* psalms in *this* order.

4. One theme we should watch for is the importance of the Law / Torah / Rules and/or Covenant of God. We'll see this in Psalm 1 today. And I believe Psalm 1 is there precisely because we are to have the Law of God in mind consistently as we read the Psalms. Psalms knows that Israel was given the Law through Moses and was expected to keep their Covenant with Yahweh. As the Psalms were compiled during and after their exile in Assyria and Babylon, the scribes wanted their people to realize that it was Israel's failure to obey God that led them to their punishment. And they realize the importance of faithfulness to God's covenant if they had any hope of enjoying the blessings of that Covenant.
5. But Psalms teaches that perfect obedience was never going to happen in their own power, bringing us to a second theme we risk missing—the King of Israel. While Psalm 1 points us to the Law / Rules / Torah of God, Psalm 2 points us to the Reign / Rule / Messiah of God. Remember, when God gave the Law, Israel had no king and didn't need a king. But God knew they would eventually want one (Deut 17) and eventually Saul was appointed. Saul's reign proved disappointing, and David was anointed as his successor. David's reign became emblematic of two conflicting realities. First, he was the ideal hero who followed God and was victorious in everything God called him to do. God promised him an eternal Kingdom, "*Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.*" (2 Samuel 7:16) Throughout Israel's history and throughout Psalms, David is viewed as the

ideal king, and it was his heir who would restore Israel.

However, as Psalm 51 highlights, even David **failed** to follow the Law perfectly, and the Psalms are suspicious that a human King could live up to the ideals of a faithful ruler who followed Yahweh in everything. As the Psalms were collected during and following the exile (when any hope of a Davidic king was rapidly fading), they began to turn the focus back to Yahweh as the true King of Israel who is enthroned forever. Yet they still cling to the hope of a Davidic heir who would be faithful to Yahweh (because Yahweh had promised as much in 2 Sam 7). Sometimes the lines get very blurred and it isn't clear if a psalm is talking about King Yahweh or King David. And often it seems like the Psalms are looking for someone who would be both the Davidic Messiah and the Divine Representative. Are you beginning to see why the New Testament kept going back to the Psalms to explain who Jesus was? Jesus himself does as much in Matthew 22:42-46 when he quoted Psalm 110? How is the Son of David also the Lord of David? Jesus is how. So watch for references to David, to the King, the anointed, and the throne of God.

These two themes—Gods Law and Israel's King, Torah and Messiah—are given in Psalms 1 and 2 as two lenses through which to read the entire book. Like 3D glasses, these two hues should color our understanding of every Psalm in the book. Every Psalm is important, but there is so much more depth when we read them through these two lenses.

So, let's look at Psalms 1 and 2 which are placed here as an introduction to the entire book, setting the tone for the major themes to listen for in the rest of the Psalter.

Part One: Rules / Law / Torah (Psalm 1)

¹ *Blessed is the one*

*who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,*

² *but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.*

³ *That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.*

⁴ *Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.*

⁵ *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*

⁶ *For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.*

Psalm 1 presents to ways of being—righteous and wicked.

¹ *Blessed is the one*

*who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,*

Verse 1 starts with an affirmation of blessing or “happiness.” It’s “A celebration of life that takes real pleasure in living according to God’s will.” (Miller, 82) The happy life is for those who do not fraternize with evil. There is a clear progression from casually walking in step with to actually sitting down and residing in the company of mockers.

Verse 2 explains that the blessed one:

*delights in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.*

Here is our first statement of the importance of “law” or “Torah” in the Psalms. Torah is “God’s will or design” (Schaefer, 3) and “the fine tuning to the divine will, and it is a source of pleasure, an object of desire.” (Schaefer, 6)

This should remind of the beginning of the historical books in the Old Testament in Joshua chapter 1:7-8: “*Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.*”

Verse 3 goes on to poetically describe the person who delights in the teaching of the law as:

*a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.*

This person is nourished and flourishing. They don’t fade from season to season but are strong and rooted in the living water of God’s word. God gives them success in everything.

⁴ *Not so the wicked!* Verse 4 abruptly interjects. They’re not steady and flourishing, instead
*They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.*

As the farmers harvested grain, they had to separate the edible seeds from the kernels. So they would winnow the wheat, beating the chaff off of the seeds, and letting the wind blow away the worthless leftovers. That’s what the wicked are like. One theologian pointed out that the wicked aren’t just those who rebel against God’s Word, “The ‘wicked’ include all who live independently of God’s word.” (Waltke, 127) Because they aren’t rooted.

That is why verse 5 says they *will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*

Verse 6 concludes by reiterating that contrast:

⁶ *For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.*

Another translation say that the Lord *knows* the way of the righteous. The image is almost that the wicked perish simply because the Lord stops paying attention to them.

So Psalm 1 introduces the entire book with a contrast between two ways of being—righteous and wicked—and the thing that sets them apart is their study of and obedience to the teaching / Torah / Law of God.

Part 2: Reign / King / Messiah (Psalm 2)

Psalm 2 continues that contrast, but offers another distinction between the righteous and the wicked, now it isn't their obedience to the Law, but their obedience to God's anointed King.

¹ *Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?*

Verse 1 recognizes that the world is not on board with the purpose of Yahweh. The word "plot" can also be translated "meditate" or "murmur", and is the same word for the righteous meditating on the law in Psalm 1. But now the nations are murmuring about pointless plots to thwart God.

² *The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord and against his anointed, saying,*

³ *"Let us break their chains
and throw off their shackles."*

Verses 2 and 3 show us that the default position of the world's leaders is pride and rebellion. Verse 2 introduces our second major theme—the Lord's "anointed". This is the same word "messiah" which in the New Testament is translated "Christ". The default position of the world's leaders is rebellion against God's appointed and anointed representative.

But this doesn't alarm God in the least bit, instead:

⁴ *The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord scoffs at them.*

⁵ *He rebukes them in his anger
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,*

Yahweh is the King of Heaven itself, and therefore is King of the entire Cosmos. God is sitting. He's not pacing about, wringing His hands over what he should do next. He's laughing, scoffing. But this isn't the "knock, knock, who's there" type of laugh. This is the "Oh ho ho, now you have done it" laugh! "Listen up people:"

⁶ *"I have installed my king
on Zion, my holy mountain."*

Verse 6 makes clear that God can establish whatever ruler he chooses. In this case, the Psalm was probably originally written for a coronation of one of Israel's kings, possibly David. And Yahweh is saying that this is indeed His king.

In verse 7 the speaker changes to the king himself, but he is quoting the Lord.

⁷ *I will proclaim the Lord's decree:
He said to me, "You are my son;
today I have become your father."*

The concept that the ancient kings were adopted sons of their gods was not unique to Israel, but the message of verse 8 is unique.

⁸ *Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance,*

the ends of the earth your possession.

The mission of God throughout scripture has always had a vision of God's reign extending around the world, unopposed, though we have yet to see such a time. The nations are the inheritance of Israel's king. We see this verse beginning to be fulfilled in Acts 2 when people from all over Asia minor are baptized into the church of Jesus the Messiah. The rest of Acts describes how the Good News that Jesus is King Yahweh extends from Judea, to Samaria, and on to the ends of the earth through Rome. This is why every expression of racism is not only damaging to people of every tribe and language, but racism is also a theological heresy which denies that Christ's saving work of redemption extends to every nation. And the Psalmist says there's hell to pay for those who won't submit to that vision.

*⁹ You will break them with a rod of iron;
you will dash them to pieces like pottery. "*

*¹⁰ Therefore, you kings, be wise;
be warned, you rulers of the earth.*

*¹¹ Serve the Lord with fear
and celebrate his rule with trembling.*

*¹² Kiss his son, or he will be angry
and your way will lead to your destruction,
for his wrath can flare up in a moment.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*

Verses 9 to 12 warn world leaders to recognize their limited rule and that their authority is ultimately subject to the God of Israel. They are to serve the Lord. Verse 12 says, "Kiss the son," which can be understood as paying homage to God's anointed King. But let me warn you that there is a galactic difference between paying homage to Christ and paying homage to Christians—Kissing the son, and kissing up to those who claim to represent Him.

This is where we need to make sure we are reading the Psalm through the lens of Christ, the true Anointed King. The human temptation is to think that any access to power, because it is tolerated by God for now, is endorsed by God. The temptation is to pay lip service to Jesus and claim to be supportive of Christians, while enacting policies that are the exact opposite of faithful service to Jesus. If "kissing the Son" is merely kissing up, God will ultimately destroy you.

Let's turn to Luke 22:47 to illustrate the difference.

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, ⁴⁸ but Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

⁴⁹ When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" ⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

⁵¹ But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him.

⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? ⁵³ Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns."

Judas literally kissed the Son, but in his quest for money and power with the religious leaders, he sold his soul to the devil. I pray Christians today won't reject their savior for access to money and power, while many of our religious leaders do exactly that. Recently politicians have promised, "And by the way, Christianity will have power, without having to form. Because if I'm there, you're going to have plenty of power. You don't need

anybody else. You're going to have somebody representing you very, very well. Remember that." In November of 2015, a politician claimed a vote for him would "save Christianity once and for all."

No, Jesus saved Christianity once and for all. And it wasn't by seizing power, and fundraising, and becoming a person of influence. "What sort of king is it, however, who wears a crown of thorns and manifests his kingship on a cross instead of a throne." (Miller, 92)

Instead, look at Luke 7, where Jesus was anointed and kissed by someone who was spared the wrath of the king. ⁶ *When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.* ³⁷ *A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume.* ³⁸ *As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.*

³⁹ *When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."*

...

⁴⁸ *Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."*

⁴⁹ *The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"*

⁵⁰ *Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

"The kingship of Christ is real but not obvious." (Miller, 93) The Psalms invite us to kiss the Son, and commit our lives to the King who is coming to reign. Who will bring judgment, though certainly not in the ways we expect. We're not asked to make elaborate, religiously acceptable displays of allegiance to "Christians" in power. Christ calls us to humble ourselves and bow at his feet as we kiss him through tears of repentance. As the nations rage and the world looks like it is falling into chaos, Psalm 1 gives us the simple answer that righteous people are blessed and wicked people are cursed. But the rest of the Psalter will wrestle with it as we realize that not only are our enemies rebellious, but we—the people of God—aren't that righteous either. We're not going to keep the law perfectly! We need a savior who fulfills it for us.

And Jesus is the anointed Christ, who not only kept the Law perfectly, he took the punishments promised to the wicked in Psalms 1 and 2. And as we wait for the final judgment, the Psalter is always in that tension of knowing that God will be faithful to His promises, while living in a world that often looks like he has forgotten them altogether.

Conclusion

"Psalms reaffirms the teachings of the law and the prophets in compelling and potent ways... Psalms claims that the Davidic savior will rule as king and priest at a future time that will vindicate the faithful and punish the wicked." (House, 423)

Psalms 1 and 2 set us up to listen to these songs as the sound track to the entire redemptive history of Israel. The Psalms remind us that Israel was given the Law of God as a source of blessing, but they rejected the covenant and were led by a series of David's heirs into further and further rebellion until the monarch was completely collapse, yet the Psalms confess a hope that God had not forgotten his covenant at Sinai or his promises to David and would provide a ruler who would be perfectly faithful to the Torah of God while ruling as a faithful Davidic representative of Yahweh. Psalms have "a wardrobe of royal robes in in their hymnody waiting ... for a king with shoulders broad enough to wear them." (Waltke, 107)