May 16

Happy Monday, everyone. Today we will continue our walk through the books of the Bible by taking a brief look at the Book of Psalms. Since there are 150 of them, we will spend two weeks doing so.

First, an introduction. Of the 150 psalms, King David wrote 73, Asaph wrote 12, the sons of Korah wrote nine, Solomon wrote two, Heman, Ethan, and Moses each wrote one, and 51 are anonymous. They were written over a period of almost 900 years, from about 1440 BC to 586 BC.

Generally speaking, the Psalms are a collection of poetry and song for the expression of praise, confession, and worship of the Lord. The book of Psalms itself is divided into five books. This week we will look at the first three books, which are divided as follows: Book I: Psalms 1 – 41; Book II: Psalms 42 – 72, and Book III: Psalms 73 – 89.

When reading the Psalms, the first thing that comes to mind is this: the fact that they exist at all. By that I mean that in 150 instances, at a moment of deep despair, at a moment of intensely personal confession, or at a moment of grateful worship, someone took the time to write down their thoughts. That may seem self-evident but let me pause here for a moment and ask a question. Under similar circumstances, how many of us have taken the time to write a poem, or a song, to the Lord? I know I certainly haven’t. But here we have 150 Spirit-inspired Psalms written by people in just such circumstances.

So, here we go. From Psalm 8. A Psalm of David.

“Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

…You made [mankind] rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet:
all flocks and herds,
and the animals of the wild,
the birds in the sky,
and the fish in the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas” (vs. 1; 6-9).

Here David is praising the Lord for the beauty and splendor of Creation. Additionally, David reminds us that God has entrusted Creation into our stewardship. We are to exercise our role as “rulers” in God’s name; that is, with care and prudence. Creation is
not something to be exploited for our own gain or purpose but something that is to be honored and treasured as the work of the Almighty.

So today, I would encourage you to take a copy of Psalm 8 and find someplace outdoors, even if it's your patio, and read it reverently as you observe the beauty of God's gift of Creation all around you.

IHS,
Pastor Lou

May 17
Grace and peace to you this day.

Today we will look at parts of Psalm 42, which begins the second book of Psalms. Psalm 42 was written by the sons of Korah, who were temple musicians. Korah was a Levite who led a rebellion against Moses and who was eventually killed, though his sons remained faithful to the Lord and to their role in the temple (you can read about in Numbers 16).

In any case, this is a Psalm that was meant to be sung. It is a Psalm that expresses deep longing for the Lord in times of distress.

“As the deer pants for streams of water,  
so my soul pants for you, my God.  
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When can I go and meet with God?  
My tears have been my food  
day and night,  
while people say to me all day long,  
“Where is your God?”  
These things I remember  
as I pour out my soul:  
how I used to go to the house of God  
under the protection of the Mighty One  
with shouts of joy and praise  
among the festive throng.

Why, my soul, are you downcast?  
Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,  
my Savior and my God” (vs. 1-5).

Close your eyes and picture the imagery: A deer at the stream, in the heat of the day,  
thirst so consuming that he is panting. And then he finds a stream of cool, clear water.  
His thirst is quenched, his panting eased, and his strength restored. The Psalmists  
paint this picture to describe how their souls “thirst for God, for the living God.”

Have you ever been so thirsty and hot that you are panting? Your mouth is dry? And  
them you take that first drink of cold, delicious water. You gulp it down because it almost  
seems that you can’t get enough. And then you fill the glass again.

Psalm 42 assures us that when it is our soul rather than our mouth that is parched,  
when our spirit seems dried up and withered, the living God is there with an endless  
 supply of living water to restore and to refresh our parched and weary souls. And He  
encourages us to go ahead and drink…as much as we want.

IHS,  
Pastor Lou

May 18  
Greetings to you this day.

Many of the Psalms look to the Lord for comfort, for strength, and for protection. The  
world of the Psalmists was a world constantly at war and full of violence. The Jewish  
nation was surrounded by warring pagan nations whose kings and rulers were  
constantly looking to expand their empires. It is within this context that Psalm 46 is  
written, also by the sons of Korah.

“God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way  
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,  
though its waters roar and foam  
and the mountains quake with their surging…

He says, “Be still, and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth” (vs. 1 – 3; 10).

Notice here that the opening line is “God is our refuge and our strength.” When I think  
about what my earthly refuge is, I think of two things: my home office with my computer  
and family pictures and cards and knick knacks my wife and children have given me  
over the years (along with a framed cover of Sports Illustrated magazine from when the
Cubs won the World Series). My other refuge is...don’t laugh...my Lazy Boy recliner in our bedroom. It’s soooo comfy. It’s where I do a lot of my praying, studying, and reading.

Both places are personal, comfortable, and a place to which I can “escape.”

Nothing wrong with that, except that here the Psalmists remind us that our real refuge is in the protection, and the strength, of the Almighty. The Hebrew word used here for “refuge” can also mean “shelter.” He is our “refuge,” our “shelter,” and our “ever-present help in trouble.”

I like my office, and I like my comfy chair. But neither of them provides strength, or shelter, or ever-present help. As we are reminded here today, God, and only God, can provide that.

IHS,
Pastor Lou

May 19

Greetings to you today with the Shalom of the Messiah.

Today we take a very brief foray into Book III of the Psalms with a look at Psalm 90. I have to confess that I never knew before today that Moses is the author of one of the Psalms. As such, it is the oldest of all the Psalms.

Moses certainly knew troubles and hardship. But hand in hand, he certainly knew the Lord. He was privileged to be in the Lord’s personal presence, and to hear His personal voice. It is to Moses that God also revealed His personal name (“I AM.”)

Because of this, Moses may have had a somewhat unique perspective on who God is, and so he begins his Psalm like this:

“Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.
Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

You turn people back to dust,
saying, “Return to dust, you mortals.”
A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by,
or like a watch in the night” (vs. 1-4).
Here Moses reminds us of one of the great mysteries of God: His eternal nature. By saying that God has been “from everlasting to everlasting” Moses is acknowledging that God always has been, always is, and always will be.

Furthermore, Moses reminds us that God exists outside the constraints of time: “A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by.”

When I read this, it makes both the majesty, and the love and intimacy, of God that much more powerful. Think of it. The God that exists in eternity, for whom a thousand days is like a passing night, nonetheless, took the care to knit us together in our mother’s wombs, count the hairs on our heads, and, above all else, sent His Son so that we could exist with Him in eternity.

Amen, and amen.

IHS,

Pastor Lou

May 20

Happy Friday, everyone!

Here’s your musical devotional for the week. As always, turn up the volume and enjoy!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dugb_8SIWU0

IHS,

Pastor Lou