May 23

Happy Monday, everyone.

This week we will continue our brief look at the Book of Psalms, starting with Psalm 107.

The author of Psalm 107 is unknown, but I think the language of it is especially powerful, in part because it speaks to how the Lord rescues people in different, and difficult, moments of distress. Here it is, in part:

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
his love endures forever.

Some wandered in desert wastelands,  
finding no way to a city where they could settle.  
Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,  
and he delivered them from their distress.

Some sat in darkness, in utter darkness,  
prisoners suffering in iron chains,  
Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,  
and he saved them from their distress.  
He brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness,  
and broke away their chains.

Some became fools through their rebellious ways  
and suffered affliction because of their iniquities.  
Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,  
and he saved them from their distress.  
He sent out his word and healed them;  
he rescued them from the grave.

Some went out on the sea in ships;  
they were merchants on the mighty waters.  
Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,  
and he brought them out of their distress.  
He stilled the storm to a whisper;  
the waves of the sea were hushed.

Let the one who is wise heed these things  
and ponder the loving deeds of the Lord.”
Wandering in wastelands. Sitting in utter darkness. Rebelling against the Lord. Sailing through stormy seas. The manner of our distress is irrelevant to the Lord and, as the Psalmist here implies, in fact is powerless against the Lord.

Our God is a God of redemption. Our God is a God of healing. Our God is a God of rescue. Most importantly, our God is a God of salvation. And what should our response be? As the Psalmist says, in the light of His salvation, all He asks is that we “ponder His loving deeds.” Amen to that.

IHS,
Pastor Lou

May 24
Grace and peace to you this day.

Psalm 75 was written by a man named Asaph. Asaph was a temple musician during the reign of King David, and the Biblical notes indicate that this Psalm is to be sung to the tune of the song “Do Not Destroy.” This same melody, which is now lost to history, was also used as the musical setting for Psalms 57, 58, and 59. In any case, here is the beginning of Psalm 75:

“We praise you, God, we praise you, for your Name is near; people tell of your wonderful deeds.

You say, “I choose the appointed time; it is I who judge with equity. When the earth and all its people quake, it is I who hold its pillars firm.

To the arrogant I say, ‘Boast no more,’ and to the wicked, ‘Do not lift up your horns. Do not lift your horns against heaven; do not speak so defiantly’” (vs. 1-5).

Sometimes the Old Testament writers used language and phrases that are peculiar to the modern ear. These verses are good examples of that. For example, the phrase “for your Name is near” is difficult to understand in modern times. However, to the ancient Israelites, this would have had deep meaning. Someone’s “name,” especially for men, was deeply associated with the core of their being, with their honor, and with who they were as a person. In this case, in saying that God’s “Name is near,” the Psalmist is saying that the very essence of the Almighty is near and within touch.
Second, the phrase “Do not lift up your horns” would also have had meaning. This phrase was attributed to the historical enemies of the Israelites. At the time this was written, it would have referred to the Egyptians and the Assyrians. Later it would also include the Babylonians and the Persians. The Psalmist here is imploring the Lord to keep his enemies from him, and from Israel.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the Psalmist reminds us, as we saw in Job, that it is the Lord, and the Lord alone, who is sovereign over all things: “I choose the appointed time; it is I who judge with equity. When the earth and all its people quake, it is I who hold its pillars firm.”

I don’t know about you, but sometimes the troubles of the world seem to make the foundations of the earth shudder or, in the words of the Psalmist, “quake.” And thus, it is a timely reminder that during such times, the God of the universe, the God of salvation “holds the pillars firm.”

IHS,

Pastor Lou
May 25
Greetings to you this day.
Psalm 113, author unknown:

Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord, you his servants;
praise the name of the Lord.
Let the name of the Lord be praised,
both now and forevermore.
From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets,
the name of the Lord is to be praised.

The Lord is exalted over all the nations,
his glory above the heavens.
Who is like the Lord our God,
the One who sits enthroned on high,
who stoops down to look
on the heavens and the earth?

He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
his seats them with princes,
with the princes of his people.
He settles the childless woman in her home
as a happy mother of children.

Praise the Lord.

I love this Psalm. First, it contains a beautiful description of how our praise of the Lord should be all encompassing: “Now and forevermore...from rising sun to where it sets.”

Second, it gives an equally poignant description of the nature of God’s justice. Raising “the poor from the dust” and “the needy from the ash heap.” Here he is not just describing someone who is financially poor or materially needy. God is concerned with much more than that. By using imagery such as “dust” and “ash heap,” the Psalmist is saying that the Lord lifts them from places lacking human dignity, and in “seating them with princes,” restores to them the dignity He intends for all people.

Lastly, in placing the childless woman “in her home as a happy mother of children,” the Psalmist is saying that the Lord understands when people are in anguish, and that it is He, and only He, who relieves them of their distress and turns it into happiness.

Lastly, I love this Psalm because, like all the Psalms and, of course, all of Scripture, it is timeless. So, this day, let me encourage you. As the sun rises, praise the Lord. As the
sun sets, praise the Lord. Are you in a place of dust, maybe sitting on some ash heap, or maybe you are in a place of distress or difficulty? Praise Him. Exalt Him. Lift your hand up to Him and see how wonderful it will be when the hand that cast the stars in the heavens takes a hold of yours.

IHS,
Pastor Lou

May 26
Shalom to you today with the peace of Jesus.

We will conclude our study of the Psalms with the final Psalm, Psalm 150, which is anonymous, and which I also love:

Praise the Lord.

Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens.
Praise him for his acts of power;
praise him for his surpassing greatness.
Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
praise him with the harp and lyre,
praise him with timbrel and dancing,
praise him with the strings and pipe,
praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord.

What a beautiful song of praise and adoration. As I’ve said before, the Lord doesn’t really need me to add to what He says, but I will give you a little word study on the phrases “Praise the Lord.” (You knew you were going to get a little Hebrew lesson at some point!)

In Hebrew, the phrase “Praise the Lord” is hallelu yah. “Hallelu” is the word that means to express joyous praise in song. The word “yah” is a shortened version of the Hebrew word YHWH, (Hebrew has no vowels, and the name of the Lord is always fully capitalized) which we know in English as “Yahweh.”
So, there you have it. And with that, we conclude the Book of Psalms with a loud HALLELUJAH! PRAISE THE LORD!

IHS,
Pastor Lou

May 27
Happy Friday, everyone.
Here’s your musical devotional for the week. Turn up the volume and enjoy!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7Ivyd1JdQU

IHS,
Pastor Lou