

USING THE PSALMS (4)

Living the Psalms

A. Introduction

1. No other book of the Bible has had a richer history in the life of the church than the book of Psalms.

The Lord Jesus we know sang the Psalms, prayed the Psalms, quoted the Psalms and said that the Psalms are about Him.

The first followers of Jesus, as Jews, would have prayed and sung the Psalms and known them by heart.

For majority of the history of the church, the Psalms have been read, preached, sung, memorised, and prayed by God's people.

Yet that is not true today.

Apart from a few famous Psalms and a few famous verses from the Psalms, we no longer use or are as familiar with them, as Christ's followers once were.

One reason for this, is that we don't know how to use them or to use them well.

2. My purpose for this series is to help us to use this book again.

By reading the Psalms.

By praying the Psalms.

By singing the Psalms.

By living the Psalms.

3. The Psalms are to be read.

Read as a book: A book written to give hope to the people of God after the exile was over that the Christ was coming, and to teach them how to live faithfully as they waited.

Read as a book that describes the Christ: The Christ, the people of Israel, were waiting for, who has come in the person of Jesus, is described in each individual psalm, each of the five books within the Psalms, and in the book of Psalms as a whole.

Read as a book that describes the Christian: Those who take refuge in the Christ have been united to Him by faith, so His life becomes our life. The blessings we're told that come to the Christ come to us. The kind of life we're told He experienced is the kind of life we will experience.

4. The Psalms, as well as being read, are also to be prayed.

We pray the Psalms because it is how Jesus prayed and it is how Jesus teaches us to pray.

We pray the Psalms either as we find them in each individual psalm or by letting the words of each individual psalm shape our prayers.

5. But the Psalms are not just the prayer book of God's people, the Psalms are also the hymnbook of God's people too.

The Psalms were written to be sung.

They are songs that used to be sung by God's people.

They are songs like no other sung as they are both inspired songs and King-led songs.

They are songs that should be sung as it is both a Biblical and beneficial thing to do.

They are songs that could be sung again.

6. When we read and study, pray and sing the Psalms, we will find that this changes us.

It leads to us living the Psalms.

Remember that this is one of the purposes of the Psalms – to teach us how to live faithfully as followers of Jesus as we wait for Him to come.

B. Songs that show the way to live

1. This Book of the Law is a companion to the Book of the Law.

In Deuteronomy 31, we are told that Moses wrote both a book and a song.

The book was given to the Levites and to the elders of all the tribes, and the song was given to the whole assembly of Israel.

It appears that the song was a popular and accessible summary of the book to help the people remember the truths found within it, outside of the gatherings where the book was taught.

The Psalms of David seem to have the same function as the song.

The people are to meditate on the Psalms, like the King was to meditate on the Book.

“But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.” (Psalm 1:2-3)

“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.” (Joshua 1:8)

The Psalms have five books like the Law of Moses does.

The Psalms as songs are easier for the people to memorise than the Law of Moses is.

The poetic form is easier to memorise with its repetition and rhyme.

The musical accompaniment makes the words more memorable.

The sequence of the psalms tells a story (see Reading the Psalms) which aids memorisation.

2. This Book of the Law instructs us to obey the Book of the Law.

“You shall have no other gods before me.”

“Among the gods there is none like you, O Lord; no deeds can compare with yours.” (Psalm 86:8)

“For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods.” (Psalm 96:4)

“You shall not make for yourself an idol... You shall not bow down to them or worship them.”

“Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.” (Psalm 24:3-4)

“I hate those who cling to worthless idols; I trust in the LORD.” (Psalm 31:6)

"The idols of the nations are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, nor is there breath in their mouths. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them." (Psalm 135:15-18)

"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God."

"O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8:1)

"Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to his name." (Psalm 96:8)

"Honour your father and your mother."

"Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him." (Psalm 127:3)

"You shall not murder."

"O Lord, how long will you look on? Rescue my life from their ravages, my precious life from these lions." (Psalm 35:17)

"May all those who seek my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace." (Psalm 70:2)

"They slay the widow and the alien; they murder the fatherless." (Psalm 94:6)

"You shall not commit adultery... You shall not steal... You shall not covet."

"But to the wicked, God says: "What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you. When you see a thief, you join with him; you throw in your lot with adulterers. You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit." (Psalm 50:16-19)

"For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba." (Psalm 51)

"He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD." (Psalm 10:3)

"You shall not give false testimony."

"You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the LORD abhors." (Psalm 5:6)

"His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue." (Psalm 10:7)

"Everyone lies to his neighbour; their flattering lips speak with deceptions." (Psalm 12:2)

The only commandment that seems to be ignored by the Psalms is "Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy".

The Psalms also draws out the implications of the narratives we find in the Book of the Law, especially Israel's tendency to sin and disobey God's commands and by doing so forfeit His blessings.

3. This Book of the Law warns us about what will happen if we don't obey the Book of the Law.

It does this by presenting two ways to live: the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked.

The righteous trust God and keep His commands.

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding." (Psalm 111:10)

"Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge." (Psalm 62:8)

"I am a friend to all who fear you, to all who follow your precepts." (Psalm 119:63)

The righteous will enjoy eternal life in God's presence.

"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God." (Psalm 92:12-13)

"The righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it for ever." (Psalm 37:29)

"Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever." (Psalm 23:6)

The wicked are disobedient.

"Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies." (Psalm 58:3)

"But to the wicked, God says: "What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you. When you see a thief, you join with him; you throw in your lot with adulterers. You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit." (Psalm 50:16-19)

The wicked will perish.

"For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish." (Psalm 1:6)

"A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found." (Psalm 37:10)

"Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned." (Psalm 34:21)

"How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors!" (Psalm 73:19)

"...though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be for ever destroyed." (Psalm 92:7)

The purpose of presenting this contrasting picture is to encourage us to follow the example of the righteous not the wicked.

C. Songs that shape the way we live

1. They change us subconsciously to a way of living.

As we read, pray and sing the Psalms, we find over time that we are shaped by them, and the life they speak of becomes second nature to us.

2. They change us by committing us to a way of living.

Praying and singing the Psalms is different to listening to the Book of the Law being read and preached.

When you listen to the Law it is up to you whether you then keep it or reject it.

When you sing or pray the Law by singing or praying the Psalms, you are committing before God that you will have particular attitude or live in a particular way. We are also asking for the strength we need to live this way too.

The Psalms are to be read, prayed, sung, and lived out.