

Past and Present

Today In Your Reading...

We read two longer psalms that flow together as a pair, one the sequel of the other. Someone, perhaps David, wrote these songs to remind the people of Israel of the great things God had done for them. "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good! His faithful love endures forever. Who can list the glorious miracles of the Lord? Who can ever praise Him half enough?" (105:1).

For over 25 years, I have taught the subject of history. While it is not everyone's favorite subject, I have come to recognize its place in society, its significance to the health of a nation. If people look closely at their past, I mean seriously observe their establishment, their growth, the timing of events, the bigger storyline and interwoven purposes, **they will soon acknowledge and own a providential perspective**, for the hand of God directs the paths of men. Those people will be humble and grateful. They will credit the correct source of their strength and success.

However, when people neglect their history, gloss over the details, and major only on man's successes and accomplishments, **they will soon own a secular perspective and credit themselves for their growth and greatness**. If people forget their past, then they consequently forfeit their future. If they do not know where they have come from, how then can they know where they are going or what they are to be doing? *Their purpose is tied to their past, particularly in how they view it.*

The same phenomenon happened to the people of Israel. The psalmist said, "Our ancestors in Egypt were not impressed by the Lord's miracles. They soon forgot His many acts of kindness to them. Instead, they rebelled against Him... How quickly they forgot what He had done. They wouldn't wait for His counsel." Before long,

"they traded their glorious God for a statue of a grass-eating ox! They forgot God, their Savior, who had done such great things..." (106:7, 13, 20, 21).

Daily Reflection

What has been your attitude regarding what God has done in the history of your nation, in the Church, in your family, and in your life?

What are some other reasons why it is good to remind yourself what God has done in the past?

Forgetfulness is a weapon of your spiritual enemy. He wants you to be ignorant of what has happened in the past and, instead, focus only on yourself in the here and now. Why? What could he possibly gain by keeping you ignorant of history?

Don't allow the enemy to sabotage your present by stealing your past. Remember what God has done and remind yourself often of His love, provision, protection, and grace. **Ignorant people are enslaved to pride and purposelessness.**

Let the Redeemed Say So

July 10 — *Psalms 107, 111, 112, 113, 114*

Day 191 — 174 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We advanced five more psalms, in some ways a continuation from yesterday, when we discussed the importance of remembering the past. The psalmist wrote, "The godly will see these things and be glad, while the wicked are stricken silent. Those who are wise will take all this to heart; *they will see in our history the faithful love of the Lord*" (107:42, 43).

However, today's emphasis is not so much in just remembering what God has done in the past but telling others in the present. "**Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out! Tell others He has saved you** from your enemies" (107:2). A common refrain today was "Let them praise the Lord for His great love and for all His wonderful deeds..." (107:8, 13, 21, 31).

The psalmist also added, "**Let the people exalt Him publicly** before the congregation and before the leaders of the nation... I will thank the Lord with all my heart as I meet with His godly people... Everywhere, from east to west, praise the name of the Lord" (107:32; 111:1; 113:3).

Though the psalmist was writing about what the Lord had accomplished in the history of Israel, I couldn't help but be reminded of what He has done for me regarding to my salvation. "Lord, help!' They cried in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress. He led them from the darkness and deepest gloom; He snapped their chains. He broke down their prison gates and He cut apart their bars of iron. He spoke and they were healed, snatched from the door of death... *He has paid a full ransom for His people.* He has guaranteed His covenant with them forever" (107:13-16, 20; 111:9).

It is a common theme throughout Scripture — **those whom the Lord has freed from sin will desire to tell others the good news!**

Daily Reflection

More than likely, whenever you receive good news, you do not keep it to yourself. Instead, you cannot wait to tell someone else, maybe even many people. Perhaps you are one of those who even likes to share your bad news with others. The point is that **when something momentous happens to us, we cannot keep it in. We instinctively want to share it!**

What was the last thing that happened to you that you could not wait to tell others? Why did you feel so compelled to share it?

Now think of the things that God has done for you, particularly regarding your salvation. Are you as eager to share this good news with others as you are the other things you listed? Why or why not?

If you are in Christ, then your sins have been forgiven, you are no longer under the curse of death, you have been given new life, and your destiny is to spend eternity with Christ! **That is the best news ever! Share it!**

The Love of God

Today In Your Reading...

We looked at four psalms, all with the common theme of love, God's love. "Not to us, O Lord, but to You goes all the glory for Your *unfailing love* and faithfulness" (115:1). "Praise the Lord, all you people of the earth, for **He loves us with unfailing love...**" (117:1, 2). "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! His *faithful love* endures forever!" (118:1-4, 29).

God loves us, not sometimes but at all times, not because He has to, but because He wants to. It is His nature to love. "God is love" (1 John 4:8). He has loved us from the beginning, and He will love us to the end. That's what it means that His faithful love endures forever. He always give of Himself for others, for us.

Consider these verses that describe God's unfailing love. "**This is real love** — not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins" (1 John 4:10).

"God showed **His great love** for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8).

"This is how **God loved the world** — He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Does it not produce great joy to swell up knowing that God has always loved us and that He will continue to give of Himself for us for the rest of time? **There is no greater love than His love!**

Other religions and idols of the world, which we know are of Satan, require us to sacrifice ourselves for elusive gain. Take Islam, for example, in which Allah requires his followers to kill themselves and others, to attain his approval and a place in paradise. **But with the God of the Bible, He sacrificed Himself on our behalf, so that we might gain from His love.** What a marvelous mystery this is! What a wonderful truth! He loves us with an everlasting love!

Daily Reflection

How does hearing and knowing God's love for you provoke you to action? What is your response?

You can reflect God's love first by loving Him in return, then by loving others in the same way that He loves you, by giving of yourself to them. "If God so loved you, you also ought to love others" (1 John 4:11).

Loving God and others is not easy to do. Why not? What sacrifices are necessary for you to demonstrate your love to them?

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30, 31).

The Well of His Word

Today In Your Reading...

We were privileged to consider *Psalm 119*, the climax of the book, as it is the longest of the 150 songs. Though we do not know who the writer was (possibly David, Daniel, or Ezra), we do know that he took great pains to pen these words, for he used all twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet to do so. Each letter was assigned a section, each section given eight lines, meaning that each set of eight lines begins with the same letter. From a literary standpoint, this psalm is a work of art.

However, it is not the style of the psalm that I admire so much but the subject — *the author's love for God's Word*. "Oh how I love Your law! I think about it all day long... How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey... I rejoice in Your word like one who finds great treasure! Your law is more valuable than millions in silver and gold" (v.72, 97, 103, 162). Why is God's Word such a valuable resource to us? Consider the following benefits.

Those who adhere to it will develop a life of integrity (v.1-8). They will consistently do what is right by God and reap the blessings of obedience — true happiness, an uncompromising faith, a clear conscience, and a good name.

Those who hide it in their hearts will endure their battles against sin (v.9-16).

"How can a young person stay pure? By obeying Your Word... I have hidden Your word in my heart, that I might not sin against You."

Those who seek to understand its truths will gain godly wisdom (v.17-24, 113-136, 161-176). "I am a foreigner here on earth; I need the guidance of your commands. Don't hide them from me! Your decrees please me; they give me wise advice."

In God's Word is salvation, hope, joy, peace, and comfort (v.25-88). "I lie in the dust, completely discouraged; revive me by Your word. I weep with grief; encourage me by Your word... Give to me Your unfailing love, the salvation that You promised me... Remember Your promise to me, for it is my only hope. Your promise revives me; it comforts me in all my troubles... I will meditate on Your age-old laws, for they comfort me... I faint with longing for Your salvation; but I have put my hope in Your Word."

Those who study it will find truth for life (v.89-112, 137-160). "Forever, O Lord, Your word stands firm in heaven... Your laws remain true today... Your commandments give me understanding; no wonder I hate every false way of life. *Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light for my path*... Your decrees are perfect, entirely worthy of our trust... All Your words are true; Your just laws will stand forever."

Daily Reflection

What other benefits did you find in *Psalm 119*?

Your Creator, Sustainer, and Savior has given you His words for life and living. Do you delight in them, treasure them, and obey them, as the psalmist did? Or do you only read them out of religious "duty," to check off your list of spiritual "obligations"?

Are you a man or woman of the deep well of God's Word, not someone who is vaguely familiar with it but one who desires to read it, study it, memorize it, practice it, and share it?

Pilgrim Preparation

July 13 — *Psalms 120, 121, 123, 125, 126*

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Day 194 — 171 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We opened the famous "Songs of Ascent" today by reading five of the fifteen (120-134). These psalms were sung by the people of Israel when they traveled to Jerusalem for their three annual festivals — the Feast of Unleavened Bread (or Passover), the Feast of Weeks (or Pentecost), and the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles or Tents).

Jerusalem was set in the hills. Therefore, travelers on this pilgrimage, therefore, ascended to the city. Thus, sometimes these songs were referred to as the "Pilgrim Psalms." They were short songs that helped make the long trip bearable. They reminded God's people of the things He had done for them and prepared them to be ready to worship Him at the Temple.

As these pilgrims walked, they started from long distances. All they could see, at first, were the mountains of Judea. "I look up to the mountains," they sang. "Does my help come from there?" (121:1). As they got closer, Mount Zion became their focus, the loft of the City of God. "Those who trust in the Lord are as secure as Mount Zion; they will not be defeated but will endure forever" (125:1). Then, the city itself came into view, Jerusalem with its beautiful walls and mighty towers. "Just as the mountains surround and protect Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds and protects His people, both now and forever" (125:2).

Finally, as they approached the city, they saw the beautiful Temple towering over everything else, and their hearts began to sing for joy! "When the Lord restored His exiles to Jerusalem, it was like a dream! We were filled with laughter and we sang for joy! The other nations said, 'What amazing things the Lord has done for them.' Yes, the Lord has done amazing things for us! What joy!" (126:1-3).

Daily Reflection

In those days, the Jews rallied around the Temple. It was their focus of worship, a reminder that the Lord was with them. Today, **we do not focus on a place but a person, the person of Jesus Christ, who is with us wherever we go.** "Our help comes from the Lord, who made the heavens and earth! We lift our eyes to You, O God, enthroned in the heavens. We look to our God for His mercy" (121:2; 123:1).

However, we can learn some things from these pilgrims and their songs of ascent. For example, **they prepared their hearts for worship.** By the time they arrived at the Temple, they were eager and expectant. Their minds were on the things of God and they were ready to be in His presence, ready to offer their sacrifice of praise. Can we say the same, when we come into the house of God? Are we as focused and prepared to worship the Lord? More often than not we take all of our distractions to church with us, and our minds are anywhere else but there.

How expectant are you when you approach the house of God? Are you dialed in or distracted?

What are your primary distractions before, during, or after a worship service? How do you prepare your heart to make the most of your time with the Lord?

Sin and Salvation

Today In Your Reading...

We continued the "Songs of Ascent," which were sung by Jewish pilgrims making their way to the City of God, Jerusalem, to worship at the Temple. The topics of today's psalms included the rewards for fearing the Lord (128), a prayer for God's persecuted people (129), a song for David, the anointed King (132), and a reminder of what God had done in Israel's past (135).

However, the song that stood out to me today was *Psalm 130*, in which were recorded these words, **"Lord, if you kept a record of our sins, who could ever survive?"** (v.3). If we were asked the question, "Would you consider yourself to be a good person," we would answer in the affirmative. Who doesn't consider himself to be a good person, right? Yet, if we took five minutes to list out all of our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds, our countenance and confidence would soon dissipate. Why? **Because each of us is rotten to the core, having wicked hearts, full of deceit and corruption.**

Take the Ten Commandments, for example, God's moral law. Do we worship things or people other than God. Yes. Have we ever dishonored our parents? Sure. Have we lied, stolen, or cheated? Of course. Have we ever looked at others with lust, been disrespectful to God's name, or desired what a friend or neighbor had? If we considered them carefully one by one, I would bet that every one of us have broken each law countless times. **We are all guilty before God of falling short of His moral standards.** If our sins were put on a big screen for all to see and read, we would run out of the room in shame! We are broken, ruined, sick, and selfish; and, we deserve judgment and punishment!

However, *praise God that the psalm does not end there.* "He offers forgiveness! O Israel, hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is unending

love and an overflowing supply of salvation! He Himself will free Israel from every kind of sin" (v.4, 7, 8). Though we deserve judgment, God extends His grace. Though we deserve punishment, God gives us mercy; and, though we deserve death, He gives us life!

All of these things are found in one person — Jesus Christ. "There is no other name under heaven or on earth by which men may be saved" (*Acts 4:12*). Because the wrath of God was poured out on Him, on our behalf, we are free from the penalty of sin and made clean by His blood! Praise God for His salvation! Praise Him for His endless love! Praise Him for the freedom we have because of His forgiveness!

Daily Reflection

Some people, perhaps even you, are tempted to reply to these charges by saying that their good deeds far outweigh their bad ones. Surely God will consider these things in His judgment. Why won't this logic stand up in His presence?

Others deceive themselves by thinking that their God would never condemn them to eternity in hell. He is loving and kind. What is wrong with this line of thinking?

Do you recognize that *your only hope is Christ*, or have you placed your confidence in yourself?

A Life of Praise

July 15 — *Psalms 136, 146-148, 150*

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Day 196 — 169 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We closed the book of *Psalms* with the last five songs. It has been quite a journey reading all 150 of them in such a short time, but it has been a joy. One cannot help but see, when covering them this way, the prevailing themes of God's unfailing love, of putting our hope and trust in Him, like David, and, finally, praising Him for who He is and what He's done.

What better way could you end the *Psalms* than with thoughts like these:

"Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! His faithful love endures forever" (136:1).

"How good it is to sing praises to our God! How delightful and how right!" (147:1).

"Let every created thing give praise to the Lord, for He issued His command and they came into being" (148:5).

"Sing to the Lord a new song. Sing His praises in the assembly of the faithful. Rejoice in your Maker and exult in your King" (149:1, 2).

"Praise the Lord! Praise God in His heavenly dwelling. Praise Him in His mighty heaven! Praise Him for His mighty works; praise His unequalled greatness! Let everything that lives sing praises to the Lord" (150:1, 2, 6).

Then my personal favorite, "I will praise the Lord *as long as I live*. I will sing praises to my God even with my dying breath" (146:2).

Everything that the Lord created was made to praise His name, to reflect glory to Him. That, of course, includes us. As the climax of His creation, **we, more capable than anything else He has made, are charged with the purpose of praise.** But are we praising Him with our

words? Are we praising Him with our deeds? Do we reflect glory to Him or to ourselves?

While the mountains may not speak in words, they do reflect glory to God, and they never praise anyone other than their Maker. While the rocks and trees may not sing aloud to music, they praise the One who created them, and they will never forsake Him for someone else. **But we, God's most prized possession, often neglect to praise Him, or even worse, praise something or someone else.**

Daily Reflection

What about you? Do your words praise your God? Does your life reflect glory to Him? Or are you guilty of praising another, even yourself?

Why does God deserve your praise? What has He done to be the center of your attention?

Will you commit to a lifetime of praise? Will you be one who will worship Him even to your dying breath? What will that entail? What will that require of you? Are you willing to do it?
