

SONGS OF THE SAVIOUR

Throughout my years of pastoral ministry, whenever I have asked people if there is a passage of Scripture they would like me to read, the most common answer has been the Psalms. The Psalms contain the full variety of the human experience: sadness and joy, despair and hope. For this reason, the French Reformer John Calvin would say about the Psalms, they are “an anatomy of the soul, for there is not an emotion of which anyone can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated.”

People love the Psalms. Individual psalms meet people’s hearts in special ways at certain times. But the Psalms can also be confusing. People notice that there are these headings – it’s broken into five books. This has caused a lot of confusion throughout the ages. Even the fourth century church father Augustine said “The arrangement of the Psalms seems to contain a great mystery but it has not been revealed to me.” While I’m not smarter than Augustine, Christians have poured over the depths of this book to understand what is going on.

If we look closely at the Psalms, what we discover is that the Psalms are placed together like a well-ordered hymnal. In days gone by, hymnals took individual hymns and collected them into sections with common themes – from who God is, to what God has done, to who Christ is and what he has accomplished by his death, to the church and her mission. In the same way, the Psalms have been collected to sing the story of Israel’s experience of God’s promise to David. For this reason, Luther called the Psalms a ‘little Bible’ – that they tell the story of God’s promise that David’s house would be built and that a son of David would rule the throne forever.

The Psalms move our soul because they connect us with the deepest of human emotions, and the Psalms tell us the story of how humans have experienced the ups and downs of a relationship with God – how we struggle to keep faith when we don’t see how God is keeping his promises. Like the five books of Moses (the Law), the Psalms are structured to help us reflect upon God’s law and how he is working for our good. It tells the story in poetic form of the rise of David (Book 1), the establishment of his kingdom (Book 2), its loss, destruction, and the exile (Book 3), the promise of a renewed kingdom (Book 4) and a future king (Book 5). It works out the covenant of David that God had promised in 2 Samuel 7:12-14. It moves from lament and sorrow to praise and begins with two introductory Psalms that set the table for our experience of the rest of the book.

Two themes emerge in Psalms 1 & 2 that shape the rest of the book: God’s Law and God’s King. And these two themes help us to see that the Word of the King is the way we move from lament to praise. So how is it that we move from lament to praise? In order to understand how we move from lament to praise, Psalms 1 & 2 are connected with a few words to help us reflect on how we can move from lament to praise.

Songs of the Saviour: The Word of the King – Psalms 1 & 2

CBC Ilderton

Andrew Hall
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What is the blessed life?

Psalms 1 begins with the promise of blessing. There is a way to be blessed and there is a way that is not blessed. What is important to note is that Psalm 1 begins by describing the movement of someone who is blessed by what they avoid. They're careful about the movement of their life. The blessed person knows that sin is sneaky and can trap you if you don't keep on going in the way of the Lord. Sin will take you from walking to standing to sitting. They know that taking consistent counsel from ungodly people will stop your walk with the Lord because over time you'll become absorbed in the way of ungodly people.

Psalms 2 ends with the promise of blessing for those who take refuge in the Lord. In the second Psalm, we hear how nations rage and plot against the Lord and his king. We hear how the Lord's wrath will come against those who plot against him and his fury will bring evil to an end. We are reminded that the way we find blessing in the midst of the fury of his wrath is to find our refuge in the Lord. The British pastor John Stott said that we find refuge from God in God.

What is the way of blessing?

At this point, however, we need to stop and correct our view of the blessed life. We tend to use the word 'blessing' in a way that sets us up for failure and disappointment. If I succeed at something or I receive some nice gift or find that my life has become more comfortable, I talk about how 'blessed' I am. We associate blessing with material prosperity, ease, and happiness. And in one sense, there is an element of truth to this idea – because the man who is blessed has whatever he does prospers (Ps. 1:3). However, if we think the blessed life is an easy life of prosperity, we will find ourselves in a lot of trouble when opposition comes (Ps. 2:1-3) and we will fail to understand how we move from lament to praise. In the difficulties of life, we won't always be lifted out of our trials; but we can move from lament to praise.

The way of blessing and the way of death is described in Psalms 1:1, 6 & 2:12. First, the way of blessing is described as avoiding sin because the way of sin leads to death and judgment, like chaff that is blown away (Ps. 1:4, 6). In Psalm 1, the blessed man does not walk in the way of sinners because Psalm 2 tells us that the way of sinners results in death. There is a way that seems right to people, but Proverbs tells us that its way leads to death. And Psalm 2:1-3 tells us that those who oppose God's way are opposed to God's king, his Anointed One on the throne, casting off God's way because it's seen as oppressive. But casting off God's way does not move us to blessing, but moves us to despair.

The way of blessing is found in God's "Law". When we hear the word "law", we tend to think of rules, and the 10 commandments. We think of "do this" and "don't do that". But the word that is used here is larger than rules. Yes, it includes rules for life. But the word used here is *torah*. God's *torah* is much larger than a set of rules. God's *torah* is his instruction. What we learn here is that the blessed life comes from delighting in the way of God, not in delighting in the ways of

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the nations. The way of the nations gets frustrated and angry and rage against God's ways. But the person who delights in God's instruction is like a tree planted by streams of waters, and it is a fruitful life. Here we have a picture of the Garden of Eden with a tree transplanted by the river, and it is growing fruitfully and productively. But the way of those who do not delight in God's instruction is that they want to throw off God's ways, rejecting his instruction and getting rid of it. The way of the nations is to throw off and get rid of God's instruction. His instruction is seen to be a life of bondage and cords that bind people up. God's instruction to the sinner is seen to stifle life, not create a flourishing life.

So much of the human struggle and lament comes from wrongly viewing God's 'law'. If God is seen as oppressive and restrictive, God is a cosmic killjoy. God is seen as oppressive and his way needs to be cast off, rejected, overthrown, and destroyed (Ps. 2:1-3). But this way leads to death. But God's way, his instruction is intended to cause you to flourish and grow and produce much fruit like a tree transplanted by a stream of life that causes the tree to grow and flourish and produce much fruit like the Edenic Garden, just as God is moving an exiled people who were removed from the presence of God because of sin and redeemed by his grace, being restored to his presence in the Promised Land.

What God does is he transplants you like a tree – and this is the story of the first five books of the Bible. God takes an exiled people and transplants them into a Promised Land with restored fellowship with him. The blessed life comes from God transplanting you. The *Torah* is God's restorative work by transplanting us, saving us, and rescuing us, moving us from lament to praise. To chafe at God's commands is to delight in the way of death, but to delight in *Torah* is to delight in his redeeming work.

The promises God made to David in 2 Sam. 7:12-14 – God promised he would give his people a permanent place, dynasty for his name, secure rule and rest on every side, an expansive growth of the kingdom that would bless the world through a son whom God would call "my son". And as the Psalms move forward, we hear about God's promise to David being fulfilled – that God has always been our dwelling place. God's people live in God's place under God's rule experiencing God's blessing.

So if the blessed life is found in God's instruction that leads to a life that follows the redeeming way of God rather than the way of sinners...

What is the meditation of the blessed life?

The way that we see if we are living the blessed life is to reflect upon what we murmur about. In Pss. 1 & 2 the word that is used is the word that is translated as "meditate" or "rage". The blessed life meditates on the instructions of the Lord; the destructive life murmurs against God and his king.

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We need to understand how these two words are connected. In the ancient world, when people contemplated something, they didn't think silently in their heads but would mutter. In English, we use the word 'mutter' or 'murmur' in a negative way – to murmur has the connotation of complaining. But in Hebrew, the word is used to show that a person was reflecting upon something by speaking quietly.

The way of the blessed life that produces fruit is a life that is meditating on God's instruction. By thinking about God, his ways, and his goodness, the meditation produces a life and heart that wants to apply God's instruction to all of life. The blessed life is finding refuge in God and kisses his Son. The meditation on God's instruction sees that God is good, and that to kiss the Son is to acknowledge that we will submit and follow the way of God's anointed one. It is to acknowledge our humble servitude to the one who rules over us with goodness. It is to bow down before a king and kissing his feet as an act of submission to his rule.

But the meditation of the wicked is to murmur against the Lord. It is to complain about him and his ways. It is to be angry and rage against his ways and think that his rule is oppressive. It is to oppose him and stand against him. But this is like living as chaff that is blown away by the wind.

Today, we are living in days where we live with a choice. There are two types of people who respond to God: one receives blessing in the way by meditating on his *torah* and finding that God's word is a delight because his plan is to transplant you from death to life, to take you from exile to the Promised Land and live under his rule; the other way is to see God's ways as oppressive that have to be thrown off and disregarded like a war against anything good and beautiful.

But there is a problem that we experience. None of us keeps God's instruction and fully delights in it. None of us have always walked in the way of righteousness. And all of us feel the rage of those who oppose the King of kings and his rule.

There is One blessed man, however, who came and kept God's law perfectly. There is One man who always delighted in God's *torah*, keeping every word. And he was the Son of David who came and ruled and reigned, taking people from exile to the Promised Land. The nations raged against him and even put him on a cross, killing him because they murmured against this Anointed One. But God laughed at the nations by raising him to life, displaying to the world that the wrath of the nations is nothing because Jesus has been raised to life. Instead, the Son of David who has come to keep God's instruction will receive the blessing of Abraham – that all the nations of the world would be blessed through him. The Son of David comes to show us that there is a blessed way – even when nations rage and plot against the Lord and his Anointed One. And it is found by delighting in him, rejoicing in him, and serving him.

And when we walk in his way, what we find is that the laments of this life are reoriented into the life of praise – which is what the word "Psalm" means. We can delight in Jesus, the

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Anointed One, the Blessed Man, because he is the King who brings a good word of life. And when we take refuge in him, when we hide ourselves in him, what we find is that the blessed life isn't dependent upon our circumstances, but upon the One who is our King, who fights for us and keeps us, because he is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

So as we read the Psalms, what we find is that the Songs of the Saviour are our songs. The heart resonates with these words because in them we find the Blessed Anointed One who rules over us to bring us into the blessed life, and he is worthy of praise.