

Sermon Series “Praying the Psalms”: Psalm 125

(Regula A. Brandle, St. Paul's, Edmonton, Sept.6/09)

Prayer.

Today we are concluding our summer sermon series on the psalms.

I don't know about you, but I personally found it very inspiring to dig a bit deeper into the psalms, as I usually tend to read them more superficially.

Now, today's psalm is very short, so I will try to keep this sermon short too! ☺

I think it is quite marvellous though that today's psalm is a psalm that fits so well into this time of transition between summer break and the beginning of the regular school year, which determines the rhythm of a majority of people and us in this church community.

I like to call Psalm 125 a psalm of encouragement, a psalm that invites us to set our compass in the right direction for the time ahead.

And, it could be called a psalm of trust.

So, let's read the psalm together.

> *Pew Bible, p.441*

So, what is this psalm all about?

Here it is from the book of Isaiah, chapter 3, verses 10 and 11:

“Tell the righteous it will be well with them,
for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds.

Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them!

They will be paid back for what their hands have done.”

It is a rather straightforward message.

Now, just to give you a bit of context.

This psalm most likely comes from the post-exilic period, and it was probably used in the temple liturgy.

Kind of the same idea for how we regularly use Psalm 23 in our funeral liturgy.

Not the same context, but the same practice of using a psalm in the liturgy of a worship service.

And here is a simple graphic to show you what we mean by post-exilic period.

> *show chart*

The post-exilic period started when many of the people of Israel had come back from 70 years of exile in Babylon and the temple was rebuilt after destruction.

It was a time to remember and a time to look ahead.

v.1 –2

“Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be shaken but endures forever.
As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
So the Lord surrounds his people.”

What a powerful picture!

Those who trust the Lord are like Mount Robson, which stands there strong, stable and secure.

And as the mountains surround you on a hiking trail in the Rocky Mountains - or –
As the skyscrapers surround you in Manhattan, so the Lord surrounds those who put their trust in him.

The invitation is not about behaving well, or saying the right things, or having your act together, but the invitation is to put your trust, hope, security and reliance in the Lord. Such trust builds the strong foundation for everything else.

Some people are like sand, ever shifting and unsafe.
Some people are like wind, uncertain and unpredictable.
But those who trust in the Lord are stable, secure and strong like a mountain.

v.3

“The sceptre of the wicked will not remain
over the land allotted to the righteous.
For then the righteous might use
their hands to do evil.”

The sceptre of the wicked was usually taken as a symbol of foreign domination. But again, the picture is that, although this verse presupposes that bad things can and will happen to good people, the Lord and his righteousness will prevail.

And if the faithful ones did not know this, the temptation would be great to take things into their own hands.

And whenever we take things into our own hands.....sin is never far from it!

Does this resonate with you?

Have you experienced or witnessed great injustice or wickedness and felt like taking matters into your and....I know that whenever the temptation rises in me that my solutions are rarely righteous and pure!

v.4

“Do good, O Lord, to those who are good,
to those who are upright in heart.”

Who are those that are good?

Those who are pure at the centre of their being.

In Biblical thought the heart is the centre of the human spirit, from which spring emotions, thought, motivations, courage and actions.
The heart is the wellspring of life (Pr.4:23)

When the heart is good, the person is good.
But let's not forget it - the good heart in us comes only from God in us!

V.5

"But those who turn to crooked ways
the Lord will banish with the evildoers.
Peace be upon Israel."

There is a real warning in here for all of us.
To think that because you love the Lord you will be fine, is a false security.
Those who start out following the Lord can slide away if they do not attend constantly to the condition of their heart.
Just read the stories of King Saul and King Solomon.
It's not how you start out, but how you end!

And the end ties in with the beginning.
Those who trust in the Lord will experience "shalom".
Shalom is not simply an absence of difficulty or oppression, but the positive state of well-being and rightness.

This psalm is meant to be an encouragement and a reminder of where stability, strength, safety are to be found in the turbulences of life.
It is a call to trust the Lord with all your heart and mind and soul.

Amen.