

Psalms, part two “What is it like to follow the Lord?”

Intro: I turn on the TV and there are gaudily decorated sets populated with gaudily decorated people and a band and choir that look like Lawrence Welk on crack. Is this what it’s like to follow the Lord?

Another religious program tells me to be afraid: of the end of the world, of abortion, of the moral collapse of the nation, of secret messages in Revelation... is this what it’s like to follow the Lord?

I go to the bookstore and there’s a book telling me to pray this prayer and God will pour blessings on me? Is that the way this works?

(the conversation in Alabama) Is the fact that I suffer headaches a sign that I’m not following God right? (the comment about missionaries) Are the struggles of missionaries in dark and cold places merely signs that they aren’t doing their mission work right?

And so we arrive at the Psalms.

I. An Overview

A. Joshua Graves and Sara Barton have done a great job in recent weeks explaining how the Psalms work and how each one differs. We owe them thanks for how they have opened up this book to us.

B. Allow me to approach it from a different angle. I am a man who has had several complaints against God. I have complained that He stood too close to me and wouldn’t let me move or live freely. I have complained that He stood too far away and accused Him of not caring that my life was collapsing around me, that my house wasn’t selling, that my personal relationships – those people I counted on to make my life matter – had failed.

1. I saw good people being blessed and I complained to Him that it wasn’t always that way.
2. I got blessings from His hands and yet I didn’t trust Him to keep the taps flowing.
3. I saw failed mission works, failed missionaries, failed marriages, failed churches and asked “God, how could you?”
4. I saw nation groups that had never received the gospel and had no chance at saving faith and asked, “God, where are you? Don’t you care?”
5. I sang the old song “Carest thou not that we perish? How canst thou lie asleep?” with gusto.

- 6. I knew and believed that God was good. Yet, I was angry because He refused to explain Himself, to reveal Himself, and to move where I could see Him.
- 7. I knew and believed that God was good, but I wasn't convinced He loved us. Or me.
- C. And then I come to the Psalms. Some treat them as a medicine cabinet: sick? Go to this Psalm. Depressed? Go to this Psalm. Want to worship? Go to this Psalm.
- D. That doesn't work for me. I see the Psalms as a description of what it is like to follow God. It isn't like TV. It's real. It's anger and joy and praise and pain. It's knowing that "surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will live in the house of the Lord forever" while saying in the same breath "I walk through the valley of the shadow of death."

II. **Can't say He didn't warn us**

- A. The Psalms remind me of the prophets. Isaiah and Jeremiah spend a lot of time telling their listeners that their world is over and that terrible, terrible things are going to happen to them and their children... but that the Lord WILL return and make it right in a future time. THAT was supposed to comfort them.
- B. And here's the thing... it did.
- C. They had a long view of history. THAT is something that reading the Psalms can give us: patience and the knowledge that we are not alone.
 - 1. When they give your disease a name.
 - 2. When there is a group to help you deal with it – even if no cure will be available to you.
- D. Jesus died on the cross and that should have been a clue, but he knew we would need more clues before we would understand that walking with the Lord can bring up every possible human emotion and every possible beneficial or tragic result.
 - 1. Matthew 5:11,12 – for great is your reward *in heaven*.
 - 2. Hebrews 11:13-16 – when we gather at the table, and when we sacrifice and place our money in God's hands, we are declaring that we are aware that this world is not our home; we are looking for a better country.

[BREAK for communion and offering]

III. Other people's prayers

- A. When we read the Psalms we have to remember that they were not written with us in mind. They were written as personal journals, personal songs, personal prayers. We are reading some else's mail.
- B. When I read a Psalm I remember a time when my life was like that. It takes me back to recall a time when – let's say – my heart was light with joy and I felt that God was with me and I was with God and all was right – and would always be right – in the world.
- C. Then I read a Psalm and it reminds me that I have had days, months, and years where I bruised the shins of my soul in the dark; when I called out to a God who seemed to keep me in a holding pattern. Or maybe He just liked His other kids better.
- D. As I read I remember those other days and that prepares me for the day I'm in now: I realize that today is not forever; a new country is coming and God will one day rule in fact as He now rules by law.
- E. When I move my stiff hands or when my heart sags under the weight of life and the burdens of the ministry, I remember that it won't always be this way. God will give me wonderful blessings – probably now, but certainly later.
- F. A review and discussion of Psalm 22 ending with “*and there will be dancing!*”