



Week 4: Psalms of Wisdom

Day 1

Psalm 37: 1-20

Exhortation to Patience and Trust of David

- ¹ Do not fret because of the wicked;
do not be envious of wrongdoers,
² for they will soon fade like the grass,
and wither like the green herb.
- ³ Trust in the Lord, and do good;
so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.
- ⁴ Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
- ⁵ Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.
- ⁶ He will make your vindication shine like the light,
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.
- ⁷ Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him;
do not fret over those who prosper in their way,
over those who carry out evil devices.
- ⁸ Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.
Do not fret—it leads only to evil.
- ⁹ For the wicked shall be cut off,
but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.
- ¹⁰ Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more;
though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.
- ¹¹ But the meek shall inherit the land,
and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.
- ¹² The wicked plot against the righteous,
and gnash their teeth at them;
- ¹³ but the Lord laughs at the wicked,
for he sees that their day is coming.

- ¹⁴The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows
to bring down the poor and needy,
to kill those who walk uprightly;
¹⁵their sword shall enter their own heart,
and their bows shall be broken.
- ¹⁶Better is a little that the righteous person has
than the abundance of many wicked.
¹⁷For the arms of the wicked shall be broken,
but the Lord upholds the righteous.
- ¹⁸The Lord knows the days of the blameless,
and their heritage will abide forever;
¹⁹they are not put to shame in evil times,
in the days of famine they have abundance.
- ²⁰But the wicked perish,
and the enemies of the Lord are like the glory of the pastures;
they vanish—like smoke they vanish away.

Commentary

The fourth category of psalms that we are looking at are referred to as “Wisdom” psalms because they closely resemble the genre of wisdom literature found in Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. Wisdom psalms deal with the sovereignty of God and the character of the righteous, and how the pursuit of this righteousness leads to questions regarding deeper moral and spiritual issues. They frequently deal with topics such as the injustices of life and the justice of God, the responsibilities of choosing the correct path or living life the right way. Regardless of the content, however, the goal of the psalmist is to argue for the superiority of God and God’s ways. Other recurring themes include:

1. A sharp contrast between the righteous and the wicked
2. Advice about living life well
3. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom
4. The consequences for living the life of the fool or unrighteous

Psalms 37 is a perfect example of a wisdom psalm; it has the tone of a wise parent advising their child to live life the right way even when they see others around them who seem to be prospering by taking the easy or wicked path. Trust that God is good and that God’s ways are better even if the immediate evidence may suggest otherwise.

Reflection Question

Do you believe in your heart that what God has for you is better than what the world can offer you?

Day 2

Psalm 49

The Folly of Trust in Riches

- ¹Hear this, all you peoples;
give ear, all inhabitants of the world,
²both low and high,
rich and poor together.
³My mouth shall speak wisdom;
the meditation of my heart shall be understanding.

- ⁴ I will incline my ear to a proverb;
I will solve my riddle to the music of the harp.
- ⁵ Why should I fear in times of trouble,
when the iniquity of my persecutors surrounds me,
- ⁶ those who trust in their wealth
and boast of the abundance of their riches?
- ⁷ Truly, no ransom avails for one's life,
there is no price one can give to God for it.
- ⁸ For the ransom of life is costly,
and can never suffice,
- ⁹ that one should live on forever
and never see the grave.
- ¹⁰ When we look at the wise, they die;
fool and dolt perish together
and leave their wealth to others.
- ¹¹ Their graves are their homes forever,
their dwelling places to all generations,
though they named lands their own.
- ¹² Mortals cannot abide in their pomp;
they are like the animals that perish.
- ¹³ Such is the fate of the foolhardy,
the end of those who are pleased with their lot. *Selah*
- ¹⁴ Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol;
Death shall be their shepherd;
straight to the grave they descend,
and their form shall waste away;
Sheol shall be their home.
- ¹⁵ But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol,
for he will receive me. *Selah*
- ¹⁶ Do not be afraid when some become rich,
when the wealth of their houses increases.
- ¹⁷ For when they die they will carry nothing away;
their wealth will not go down after them.
- ¹⁸ Though in their lifetime they count themselves happy
—for you are praised when you do well for yourself—
- ¹⁹ they will go to the company of their ancestors,
who will never again see the light.
- ²⁰ Mortals cannot abide in their pomp;
they are like the animals that perish.

Commentary

The psalmist is warning the reader about the folly of trusting in wealth for peace and security. We are reminded of the fact that money can only take us so far, and there is no amount of money that will prevent us from dying in the end. Once we have died, all of our earthly possessions are left behind revealing the truth that our lives are not about amassing things for comfort. Instead, life is about fearing

(or knowing) the God who created us. The psalmist wants you to find worth and purpose in the work that God is calling you to do.

The pursuit of wealth has many of the same trappings for us today as it did some three thousand years ago when this was written. It may be uncomfortable to be reminded of our mortality but it also serves as an important reminder that whether we are the richest or the poorest among us, we will all die in the end. So how you choose to live and prioritize your life should not be based solely on the almighty dollar. That is how the fools live, worshiping their money or accomplishments rather than their creator. It has been commonly said that no one looks back on their life and says, "I wish I had spent more time at work." The word of wisdom here is you can't take your stuff with you, so live your life in a way that really matters in the end: loving God and loving others.

Reflection Question

What are you worshipping? What is currently in danger of taking God's rightful place in your heart?

Day 3

Psalm 112

Blessings of the Righteous

¹ Praise the Lord!

Happy are those who fear the Lord,
who greatly delight in his commandments.

² Their descendants will be mighty in the land;
the generation of the upright will be blessed.

³ Wealth and riches are in their houses,
and their righteousness endures forever.

⁴ They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright;
they are gracious, merciful, and righteous.

⁵ It is well with those who deal generously and lend,
who conduct their affairs with justice.

⁶ For the righteous will never be moved;
they will be remembered forever.

⁷ They are not afraid of evil tidings;
their hearts are firm, secure in the Lord.

⁸ Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid;
in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.

⁹ They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor;
their righteousness endures forever;
their horn is exalted in honor.

¹⁰ The wicked see it and are angry;
they gnash their teeth and melt away;
the desire of the wicked comes to nothing.

Commentary

The premise of this wisdom psalm is that living a righteous life is conducive to living a happy life. Those who draw close to the Lord will find more fulfillment in life than those who are wicked and far from God. Theologians have struggled to understand what a happy or abundant life looks like, suggesting that those who are faithful to God are the ones who are seemingly rewarded with earthly blessings. It is tempting to see people who are "down on their luck" as people who have somehow displeased God, but wisdom literature reminds us that Godly wealth and riches often look differently than we might think.

Those who fear the Lord will find themselves not afraid of anything else. You can watch your bank account go up and down over time, but you need to trust that God is there by your side. You can see your job as a means to glorify God rather than a constant struggle to reach the top of the professional ladder. Most importantly you can find contentment in all things because you put your trust in the eternal and not in things that wither and fade away.

Reflection Question

What is one way you can actively draw near to God today?

Day 4

Psalm 127

God's Blessings in the Home

¹Unless the Lord builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.

Unless the Lord guards the city,
the guard keeps watch in vain.

²It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives sleep to his beloved.

³Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord,
the fruit of the womb a reward.

⁴Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the sons of one's youth.

⁵Happy is the man who has
his quiver full of them.

He shall not be put to shame
when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

Commentary

Psalm 127 is the eighth of the Songs of Ascent and reminds us that God is the ultimate reason for everything. God not only cares about what happens to us when we die but about all aspects of our lives. Having a nice house may be part of the American dream, but it does not necessarily fulfill the will of God. Having a crime free neighborhood does little good if we have nothing to live for except our possessions, and making a living means nothing if we do not know what life is all about. Even our families can become a means of idolatry if we seek to love our family at the expense of loving God.

C. S. Lewis reminded us of the wisdom of this psalm when he said that God is our first and most sacred love; when we love our earthy dearests at the cost of loving God then we will actually find ourselves loving our family less. But when we love God first, our secondary love for our family is actually enhanced rather than diminished. Simply put, God is the reason we love others, work hard, and fight against injustice. If we remove the ultimate purpose of our life then we will find ourselves wandering aimlessly.

Reflection Question

What area of your life are you holding back from God? Is this because you think God doesn't care about this part of your life, or because you are not ready give it to God yet?

Day 5

Psalm 133

The Blessedness of Unity

¹How very good and pleasant it is
when kindred live together in unity!
²It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down over the collar of his robes.
³It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion.
For there the Lord ordained his blessing,
life forevermore.

Commentary

This psalm reflects an obvious concern in ancient Israel, the importance of family values. The family is a crucial institution for every culture. It affects everyone, for better or for worse. By its very nature, it can be the place where one experiences and learns intimacy, love, and growth, or it can be the place where one experiences and learns resentment, pain, abuse, and destructive behavior. Think about how much your own family and family values have shaped how you see the world today.

It is always preferable to live together in unity rather than to be separated by our differences, but we can all testify to the fact that unity is sometimes elusive in life. Our values can define who we are and it is difficult to commune with others who look at the world a little differently than we do. This psalm is telling us that it is better for us to be united in fellowship and love, choosing to focus more on our common ground rather than the things that divide us. There are always things that we will disagree on but we can choose to love others and choose to lift up the things we do agree on over the things we don't for the purpose of our relationships.

Reflection Question

Think about a relationship that is currently strained, and ask God if there is some common ground that you can find in order to diminish the power your differences have over that relationship.