

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

COME, JOIN THE CONVERSATION!
ON
THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Lesson Plan for Thursday – October 10, 2013

Conversation #3 – “*Psalms, First and Foremost –
A Prayer Book for God’s People*”

Our objectives for this Thursday’s Conversation:

- to share personal ideas, attitudes, and experiences relating to The Psalms; and, in doing so, strengthen our SAKLC fellowship;
- to finish a discussion from session #2 on understanding the “Psalms as Poetry;”
- to describe the historical development of Psalms as an important book of the Bible;
- to identify aspects of selected psalms that provide clues relating to their use in the worship life of the Hebrew people;

AN OPENING PRAYER OF WORSHIP AND PRAISE ... (PSALM 63:1-4)

(First, the leader will speak each verse; then, the group will repeat that verse in unison.)

O God, you are my God,
and I long for you.

My whole being desires you;
like a dry, worn-out, and waterless land,
my soul is thirsty for you.

Let me see you in the sanctuary;
let me see how mighty and glorious you are.

Your constant love is better than life itself,
and so I will praise you.

I will give you thanks as long as I live;
I will raise my hands to you in prayer.

Amen.

(from the Good News Bible)

A) THE PSALMS AS POETRY *(all 150 selections in Book of Psalms are composed as poetry!)*

A continuation from last session - see Psalms Lesson Plan #2 – pages 5-9

B) BRIEF SYNOPSIS - THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE BOOK OF PSALMS

- When the collection of 150 psalms was truly finalized is unknown – definite evidence that many psalms existed as part of a rich “*oral tradition*” long before they were committed to writing.
- Psalms are mentioned in N.T. and were included, therein, with “The Law” and “The Prophets” as integral part of Holy Scripture.
- Many modern-day Christians presume that what we read in the N.T. is a fulfillment of what the psalmist wrote hundreds of years earlier. In one sense this is true. From a post-resurrection point of view we, Christians, often see connections between what happened in Jesus’ life, ministry, death and resurrection and matters to which the psalmists refer.

However, to approach the relationship between O.T. and N. T. from this viewpoint can be misleading. For example, Jesus did not cry out on the cross, “***My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?***” ... because the writer of Psalm 22 directly envisioned a suffering savior being crucified by his enemies centuries later. The theological bias of the facilitator of this course is that the psalmist, himself, had a profound experience of being abandoned by God because of the enemies he encountered in his own time; and, he wrote those words out of a deep personal agony. Which is to say that Jesus did not utter the words because the psalmist predicted he would, but because Jesus had lived with the power and passion of the Psalms all of his earthly life. So, in the midst of his own terrible agony, Jesus called upon these familiar words to express his own sense of abandonment even as we have, at some extraordinary times in our own lives, used the psalms in our personal and corporate prayers!

- Most 20th century theories about the development of the Hebrew Canon suggest that the inclusion of 39 O.T. books (as they appear today) was closed @ The Council of Jamnia, held about 90 AD. However, even more recent 21st century biblical research has now concluded that there is no real evidence for such a council, nor for any binding canonical decisions at that time. Instead, there appears to have existed a consensus that the content of the O. T., even early in the first century AD, was already considered “*ancient*” by the time when N.T. books were being written.
- Many scholars currently suggest that we think about Psalms primarily as “the songs that accompany the people of God on their journey through history”* as opposed to many of us who see the book as a collection of prayers and hymns to be used primarily for personal reading and devotions. Even though many of the psalms are written in the first-person, they were not composed by individuals who were isolated from the faith community. Persons who were solidly connected with the faith community, and thereby intimately related to the Holy One of Israel, wrote them. (*Bernard W. Anderson “OUT OF THE DEPTHS” page 21.)

- The composition of many psalms can be traced to the historical period of Israel's exile. Rooted in this period is the development of the institution of the **Synagogue**. Removed from the physical and spiritual presence of the Jerusalem Temple as the focus for their devotion to God, the people needed an alternative means to preserve and celebrate their marvelous heritage. Psalms became an important part of the worship life and instruction of the Jewish people in every generation from that point in history to the present. It was during this time period that many of the psalms were gathered from the people's collective memory to form a basis for remembering their spiritual heritage and worshipping God in the "foreign land."

A CHRONOLOGY OF BIBLICAL & WORLD EVENTS DURING PERIOD (B.C.E.) OF PSALMS

<u>Year</u>	<u>Biblical Event</u>	<u>additional comments</u>
1010	David becomes Israel's King	
970	Solomon ascends to Israel's throne	
959	Temple in Jerusalem completed	
930	Kingdom of Israel divides	north="Israel" / south="Judah"
875	Elijah, prophet in Israel	
874	Ahab becomes Israel's King	
848	Elisha, prophet in Israel	
835	Joash becomes Judah's King	
793	Jonah, becomes a prophet	
753	Hosea, becomes a prophet	
743	Israel invaded by Assyria	
740	Isaiah, becomes a prophet	
722	Israel falls	destruction of northern kingdom
715	Hezekiah becomes Judah's King	
701	Jerusalem besieged by Sennacherib	
640	Josiah becomes Judah's King	
627	Jeremiah, becomes a prophet	
612		Assyrian capital of Nineveh destroyed
605	Daniel taken captive to Babylon	
586	Judah falls	destruction of southern kingdom by Babylon
562		King Nebuchadnezzar dies (Babylon)
550		King Cyrus conquers Medes; founds Persian Empire
539		Babylon overthrown by Cyrus of Persia
537	1 st Jewish exiles return to Jerusalem	
516	New Temple completed	
509		Rome becomes a republic
479	Esther, Queen of Persia	
469		Socrates born
458	Ezra returns to Jerusalem	
457		Golden Age of Athens begins (Greek influences)
445	Nehemiah builds Jerusalem wall	
430	Malachi, becomes a prophet	
399		Socrates condemned to death in Athens
390	Aramaic replaces Hebrew in Judaism	
255	Septuagint	Greek translation of O.T.
169	Temple plundered	by Antiochus IV

C) PRACTICUM: PSALMS AS USED IN JEWISH CORPORATE WORSHIP

1. Psalm 137

- First read this historical account provided in *II Kings 25:9, 21*, which dates to 586 BC, when the invading armies of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, invaded Israel:

⁹ He burned the house of the LORD, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. ... ²¹ The king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah went into exile out of its land.

- Now, in the context of the above setting, understand more fully the opening words of Psalm 137:

*¹ By the rivers of Babylon—
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.*

*² On the willows there
we hung up our harps.*

*³ For there our captors
asked us for songs,
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"*

*⁴ How could we sing the LORD's song
in a foreign land?*

*⁵ If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither!*

*⁶ Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy.*

2. Psalm 106:1 –

*¹ Praise the LORD!
O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.*

- In its entirety, Psalm 106 is identified as a song of national repentance. It was used when the Hebrew people returned from captivity. The following O. T. reference includes a portion of it, and suggests the overall importance of the psalms in the corporate worship experience of the people: **Ezra 3:10-13**,

¹⁰ When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments were stationed to praise the LORD with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, according to the directions of King David of Israel; ¹¹ and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD,

*‘For he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.’*

And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. ¹² But many of the priests and Levites and heads of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations, wept with a loud voice when they saw this house, though many shouted aloud for joy, ¹³ so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people’s weeping, for the people shouted so loudly that the sound was heard far away.” (NRSV)

3. **Psalm 81** – first read this passage from your Bible

- Now, understand that this psalm was included in the liturgical worship of the Hebrew people during the annual celebration of the Festival of Booths as commanded in **Deuteronomy 16:13-15** – (see below)

¹³ You shall keep the festival of booths for seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your wine press. ¹⁴ Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns. ¹⁵ Seven days you shall keep the festival to the LORD your God at the place that the LORD will choose; for the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all your undertakings, and you shall surely celebrate.”

- As a renewal of the covenant, Psalm 81 recalls to the people their deliverance and God’s continued faithfulness to them. Language used here is not unlike the ancient covenant renewal ceremony described in **Joshua 24:14-15** –

¹⁴ “Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served

in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

- **Psalm 81** is one of few examples where the psalmist speaks words of the Lord (see vss. 6-16). These words convey God’s deep passion and yearning for the people to respond in faith. Imagine the same words spoken to us in the name of God as we are gathered for worship: **“O THAT MY PEOPLE WOULD LISTEN TO ME; THAT THE MEMBERS OF SAKLC WOULD WALK IN MY WAYS!”**

4. Songs of Ascent – Psalms 120 to 134 (sometimes also referred to as “Pilgrim Psalms” because they were sung by the faithful who journeyed to the Temple in Jerusalem for the 3 major annual festivals.)

- **Deuteronomy 16:16-17**, lays down the basic requirement:
¹⁶ **Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the festival of unleavened bread, at the festival of weeks, and at the festival of booths. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed; ¹⁷ all shall give as they are able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God that he has given you.**
- **Read Psalms 121 & 122** – *imagine that you are among a large company of people making the trek from their homes to be present in Jerusalem and the Temple on the occasion of one of the 3 major festivals. What elements of liturgy do you notice as you read these 2 psalms of ascent?*

5. Concluding thoughts:

- Do not underestimate the significance of The Psalms in serving as a “prayer book” for God’s people in corporate worship (*past & present!*)
- Even though there are many psalms where individuals address God, there is no sense of individual prayer and worship apart from corporate worship.
- Consider this quotation: **“The psalms lend no support to the notion that a person’s relationship with God is a private affair and that God is accessible outside the liturgical forms and sacraments of the worshipping community. On the contrary, the individual is related to God as a member of the covenant community. To be sure, God is not bound by the limitations of the community but can deal with people freely and graciously Yet if persons would have access to God in worship, then they must come, or even make a pilgrimage, to the established meeting place with others and engage in a corporate form of worship. In the Psalter, therefore, the individual praises God in concert with the worshipping community.”*** (Out of the Depths, by Bernhard W. Anderson, pg. 150)
- Discussion ... additional, as time will allow

A CORPORATE PRAYER SPOKEN AS A CONCLUSION TO THIS CONVERSATION

(in unison – Psalm 103:1-5)

¹ **Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name.**

² **Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits—**

³ **who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,**

⁴ **who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,**

⁵ **who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.**

Amen

(SAKLC 2013 per hjm)

PSALM SUGGESTIONS FOR PRIVATE READING AND REFLECTION DURING WEEK 3

<u>DAY</u>	<u>PSALM(s)</u>	<u>NOTES TO ACCOMPANY YOUR READING, REFLECTION and PRAYERS:</u>
1	23	Name or recall times you have felt yourself led by God ... <i>beside still waters ... in right paths ...and through the darkest valley ...</i> Select one line or verse of the psalm to be your special words to live with today
2	46	How long has God been <i>a refuge and strength, a very present help for you?</i> Select one line or verse of the psalm to be your special words to live with today
3	81	What aspects of worship do you see reflected in this psalm? Select one line or verse of the psalm to be your special words to live with today
4	84	Which verse would serve well as a call to Sunday worship? Select one line or verse of the psalm to be your special words to live with today
5	98	What <i>new song</i> would you like to sing to the Lord? Or hear from the Lord? Select one line or verse of the psalm to be your special words to live with today
6	121	From where does your help come? What kind of help is it? The psalmist writes: <i>"The Lord is your keeper."</i> What are some synonyms for <i>"keeper?"</i>
7	122	What makes you particularly glad to go to the house of the Lord? The psalmist speaks of <i>"peace."</i> What kind of peace? How will peace be realized? How will we know when there is peace?

(SAKLC 2013 per hjm)