

19. Psalm 85-89

June 11, 2015

We now have 5 chapters at the end of the third book of Psalms.

Psalm 85

This psalm was probably written after the exiles returned from Babylon to their homeland Israel. Their returned life was not easy. They had to start everything from ground up. They had to rebuild the wall around their cities, the temple, their homes, vineyards, etc. Though they didn't always obey the Lord, He allowed them to have a new beginning.

Psalm 85:7-10 Show us Your mercy, Lord, And grant us Your salvation. 8 I will hear what God the Lord will speak, For He will speak peace To His people and to His saints; But let them not turn back to folly. 9 Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, That glory may dwell in our land. 10 Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.

According to the Book of Judges, the Lord sent 7 kingdoms to chastise Israel that continually strayed away from the Lord. Under the foreign oppressions, the Israelites repented and cried out to the Lord for His mercy; God came to rescue; then they always lapsed back into the same idolatry again and again. It was a vicious cycle.

The Lord was not demanding their cows and bulls, rather their obedient hearts. Their task was to fear Him and glorify His name. Though the time has changed, what He asks us to do hasn't changed.

In v9, there is a word "dwell". Its Hebrew word is "shechinah". Many of you remember a short phrase we learned from the tabernacle – "Shechinah glory." It is God's dwelling glory in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle.

I just love the way it was written in v10: "*Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.*" Can you come up with a person's name who brought mercy and truth together and righteousness and peace to join together? All of these happened in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the righteousness and peace of God and through Him we receive God's mercy and He is the Way of our salvation.

Psalm 86

This psalm was written by David and it is the only David's psalm in the entire third book of Psalms. There is no reference of the time or background.

Psalm 86:8-12 Among the gods there is none like You, O Lord; Nor are there any works like Your works. 9 All nations whom You have made Shall come and worship before You, O Lord, And shall glorify Your name. 10 For You are great, and do wondrous things; You alone are God. 11 Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name. 12 I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, And I will glorify Your name forevermore.

During the time when David was chased by king Saul in the desert, David learned a lot about God's character and the way He works in the lives of His people. The more he served the Lord, the more David realized that God is real and all the other gods were nothing more than figments of the heathens' imaginations.

Isn't that the truth as we go through difficult times in our lives, as long as we stay close to the Lord, we get to learn a lot about our Lord? How kind and merciful He is; how faithful He is; and how strong and dependable He is. While we feel that we are all alone in the midst of turmoil, He is right there with us and gives us His assurance.

Isaiah 30:15b In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.

As a prophet of God, David declared in v9 that all nations will come and worship before the Lord. Whenever I see the people, especially the leaders of nations stand against Israel, I say in my heart that they will not do this in future – either they will be perished or they will change their minds.

V11 should be our motto as followers of Jesus Christ. Our walk with Christ must start from His Word. If you are like me, your thought can be distracted from one thought to next. That's why apostle Paul taught us to take our thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:5b bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ

I see the exact same pattern of all the backsliders:

- 1) **They let go of their thoughts and allow them to run wild.**
- 2) **They start to neglect reading the Word of God.**
- 3) **They come up with excuses why they cannot pray to the Lord.**
- 4) **They refuse to take accountability for what they do.**
- 5) **They become secretive about what they do.**

Deuteronomy 8:11 "Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today

Psalm 87

Here is another psalm that praises the Mount Zion. When we see praises of Mount Zion or Jerusalem in the Bible, we can be assured that they were not worshipping the mount or city itself, rather praising God's kindness toward Israel.

This psalm must be comprehended in two ways:

- 1) **A prophecy of the future kingdom – v1-6**
- 2) **A picture of the heavenly Zion where the children of God has their spiritual citizenship. – v7**

Psalm 87:1-3 His foundation is in the holy mountains. 2 The Lord loves the gates of Zion More than all the dwellings of Jacob. 3 Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God! Selah

Zion, the city of God, symbolizes the presence of God's kingdom. He has sovereignly established it by entering into a covenant relationship with Israel.

Psalm 87:4 "I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to those who know Me; Behold, O Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia: 'This one was born there.'"

Just in case you are wondering what 'Rahab' means, here is an explanation. It is not representing a person whose name was Rahab, rather it was a symbolic and poetic name of Egypt. The definition itself here is "arrogant, boisterous." Though Egypt enslaved the Jews and yet will share with them citizenship in the city of God and membership in the family of God in the future.

Isaiah 19:21 Then the Lord will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day, and will make sacrifice and offering

Psalm 88

There are many psalms that record frail emotions of the authors. Their hearts are in the trenches where they feel like there is no tomorrow and no hope. These psalms start with "Woe is me," but always end with praises to the Lord and confidence in Him. But psalm 88 does not have that. From the beginning to the end, the author's heart is in the dump.

It is the most mournful psalm in the whole Book. If we were compiling the Bible, we might have said, "Chuck this one. Who needs this kind of chapter?!" But the Lord knew how we feel during our depression in spiritual and emotional darkness. The author Heman, one of the sons of Korah, speaks of feelings of darkness, drowning, loneliness, imprisonment, and even death. Have you ever been there?

Though Heman was a man of God and His servant did not understand why. But he is willing to pray to the Lord persistently and is not going to abandon his faith in Him. Let's face it, not all of our lives will end with happy endings. But it doesn't mean that our God has forsaken us.

From Heman's experience, we can learn 4 lessons when our life crumbles under the weight of oncoming difficulties and feel that our prayers bouncing off the ceiling:

1) Come before the Lord in continuing prayers – v1-2

2) Tell Him how you feel. – v3-9

The Lord already know how we feel. No sense in pretending. There is no place for hypocrisy in personal prayer. One of the first steps toward a personal revival is to be completely honest with the Lord and don't tell Him anything we don't mean.

3) Plea your cause before the Lord – v10-14

The author Heman asked the Lord how he is going to praise Him when he is dead.

4) Wait for His answer – v15-18

I am sure that you've been in the situation that you felt like it is the end. No answer for your prayers. Not even a peep sound from heaven. I am sure that Job has a few things to say about this kind of situation.

Job 13:15a Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.

Christian singer Jeremy Camp and his first wife, Melissa Camp were married on October 21, 2000. She was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and died on February 5, 2001 and she was 21. Some of his early songs reflect the emotional ordeal of her illness. After her death, he wrote the song "I Still Believe" to show his unwavering faith in the Lord. Did Jeremy understand why the Lord took his first wife? No, it didn't change his faith in the Lord, rather his devotion to the Lord and his faith in Him only increased.

Psalm 89

This psalm was written by unknown Ethan after Judah had fallen into Babylon's captivity. There was no king David's descendant sitting on the throne of Judah at that

time. All of Israelis knew that God promised king David that his throne would continue with his descendants, but no king from the lineage of David at this point. Does it mean that God couldn't keep His promise or was it too much for Him to handle it?

Psalm 89:1-4 A Contemplation of Ethan the Ezrahite. I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever; With my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations. 2 For I have said, "Mercy shall be built up forever; Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens." 3 "I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: 4 'Your seed I will establish forever, And build up your throne to all generations.'" Selah

What Ethan didn't see was the viewpoint from the eternal perspective like many of us. To his credit, by faith, Ethan still believed in the Lord for His faithfulness.

Listen, when we are facing the situation that passes our logic so much that we cannot understand what the Lord is doing, we need to fall back to what we understand – our Lord is good; our Lord is faithful no matter what; and our Lord is our Shepherd who leads us and never forsakes us. That's the real faith in God.

Psalm 89:46-52 How long, Lord? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your wrath burn like fire? 47 Remember how short my time is; For what futility have You created all the children of men? 48 What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave? Selah 49 Lord, where are Your former lovingkindnesses, Which You swore to David in Your truth? 50 Remember, Lord, the reproach of Your servants-- How I bear in my bosom the reproach of all the many peoples, 51 With which Your enemies have reproached, O Lord, With which they have reproached the footsteps of Your anointed. 52 Blessed be the Lord forevermore! Amen and Amen.

How long...?

Will you hide...?

How long will your wrath burn...?

Remember....

What man can live...?

Where is your former great love...?

Remember.

The questions brings out the intensity of the agony. If the Lord continues to hide His face and to maintain His displeasure, faith and hope may become despair. It is no wonder that he asks, "How long?" and prays to the Lord to remember that his people are human.

The author of this psalm believed that God's love is forever, yet he was fully aware that man, a creature of God, is subject to God's decision.

I wonder that apostle Paul felt the same way like this psalmist when he prayed for his thorn in the flesh.

2 Corinthians 12:9 He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

We've learned that when we ask God for something through prayer, His answer may be "Yes," "No," or "Wait." We're told that even "No" is an answer, though obviously not the one we may want. It certainly wasn't the answer Paul wanted when he begged God three times to remove his thorn in the flesh.

Whatever Paul's thorn was, it weakened him physically. Because he wanted to be strong in his ministry, Paul asked God for deliverance. Although God didn't grant his

request, He answered his prayer. The all-sufficient strength of Christ became Paul's new energy.

Christian author J. Oswald Sanders summarized Paul's attitude about his thorn like this: "At first he viewed it as a limiting handicap, but later he came to regard it as a heavenly advantage." Paul could eagerly testify,

2 Corinthians 12:10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Have you prayed for deliverance from something that weakens you, but deliverance hasn't come? Remember, God's grace is sufficient for you and me. He can transform your earthly limitation into your "heavenly advantage." Our weakness is a blessing when we lean on God's strength.