

## Psalm 63

The setting of the psalm is the desert of Judah and verse 9 informs us David is a target. *Those who want to kill me...* In v11 he seems to refer to himself as 'the king'. It follows that the likely background is his flight from Absalom rather than his experience at the hands of Saul.

V1. The physical environment mirrors David's spiritual condition. He is in a place where God seems absent. The circumstances, the difficulties, the weariness of the flight from Jerusalem all allege the King is on his own. In addition David knows these events are a consequence of his sin. We may know the experience of our lives seeming to lack any sign of God's blessing. David teaches us not to fatalistically accept such a state of affairs. His response to this situation is not resignation but pursuit. Note the language: *earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you.*

V2-5. The psalmist turns his attention away from the desert and towards Gods sanctuary. There he describes himself as having seen God and beheld his power and glory (2) In Psalm 27 David writes of wanting to '*gaze on the beauty of the Lord and seek him in his temple*' (27:4) David has experienced for himself Gods very great goodness. That goodness arises out of his matchless character. The sanctuary put on display Gods holiness, his mercy, his wisdom, his power in a most attractive manner. The place that holds the same beauty for the Christian is the cross of Christ. It is what spurs us on to keep seeking God when our circumstances might seem like a desert.

V6-11. The theme of this final section is dependence and praise. David maybe the king but the song lacks self- confidence. It summed up in v8 with the statement: *I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.* Here is what healthy faith looks like. David is not manoeuvring to find some allies, he is not digging deep within himself, he is not hoping for the best, he is clinging to God. He is clinging to the God whose love for him is better than life (3) And whatever may happen out there in the desert nothing can change that fact. That is a very secure place to be in.

- We tend to associate seeking God with coming to faith when in fact seeking seem to be more an activity for believers. What might seeking God look like in your life?
- Take some time to reflect on the cross of Christ. Ask God to enable you to 'see' his power and glory in that event.
- Are we learning that 'clinging to God' is in fact what we are meant to do?

## Psalm 64

What are we to do and where are we to turn when we face danger?

This psalm provides something of a masterclass in the ways of the enemy. The emphasis falls on their words. *They sharpen their tongues like swords and aim cruel words like deadly arrows.* (3) These 'attacks' are often unprovoked and emerge 'out of the blue' (4) There is though nothing haphazard or casual. They involve careful planning and much preparation. They come concealed and camouflaged. (5,6)

It is in the ministry of the Lord Jesus that we see this kind of activity most clearly. *And the teachers of the law .... said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."* (Mark 3:22) Mark 12 lists a series of people who come to 'catch him in his words'. The Jewish leadership present Jesus to Pilate as a political threat to Rome.

This psalm would teach us and Jesus would confirm that we ought not to be afraid of these enemies. God is not mocked and the outcome is not in doubt. *But God will shoot*

*them with his arrows.... He will turn their own tongues against them and bring them to ruin (7,8)*

The Bible is clear. Satan is the father of lies. To collaborate with him and his plans is to invite disaster. The Sanhedrin's deceit may have achieved the end they desired but the price would be expensive. The Rome they feigned to support would turn on them and destroy their way of life (AD 66-70)

The conclusion is described in v9,10. God will turn the plots and schemes of his enemies to his advantage. *People .... will ponder what he has done. (9)* That surely was the outcome of death and resurrection of Christ.

The psalm begins with the request: *Protect my life from the threat of the enemy. (1)* It ends *The righteous will rejoice in the Lord and take refuge in him. (10)*. Jesus pursued that path of righteousness despite the plots of his enemies. He shows us what it means to take refuge in our God.

- Make sure your tongue is not 'sharp' nor your words 'cruel'.
- Don't be intimidated by those who use their ability with words to direct contempt at the gospel. God will not be mocked
- The emphasis in the psalm is not on reply but refuge. God is able to protect his own name and we are encouraged to entrust ourselves to him.

## **Psalm 65**

The psalms explore all the emotions of life. Here we will find grief and lament, distress and doubt. But there are also songs of praise and thanksgiving. At a time when criticism and complaint almost seem our native language those who composed these songs and prayers have much to teach us.

The good things of God's house. (1-4)

By going to church we are affirming our belief that God is accessible. *You who answer prayer, to you all people will come. (2)* We come as those who are all too conscious of our flaws and shortcomings only to be met by God's grace. The tabernacle contained the altar of sacrifice. The new covenant reveals that God has provided a new and living way into his presence by the blood of Jesus. Such costly provision leaves us in no doubt about attitude towards. *Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts!*

Awesome deeds (5-8)

The secular culture we live in today has become intolerant of Christian faith. Its not hard to feel intimidated by the views and attitudes of its prominent thinkers. The psalmist would invite us to measure all this against God and his power. He formed the mountains, he stilled the roaring of the seas and subdued the turmoil of the nations. V5 describes him as *God our Saviour*. With such a Saviour we are in safe hands. *The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders (8)* We are glad to be part of that audience that senses the greatness of our God.

Abundant provision (9-13)

The world that we live in is one that is sustained by God. Those people who lived around the time of King David knew how reliant their lives were on God. The rain needed to fall at the right time and in the right quantity. Sinful behaviour had a habit of shutting the heavens. We have come to think of ourselves as immune from food shortage and natural disaster. All too easily though we lose that sense of just how fragile our lives are and how deep is our dependence on God. The psalm commends to us the blessing of living our lives

under God's wise rule. And those who do will find themselves drawn into the joyful songs of the meadows and valleys.

- Next time you are in church, take some time to list the 'good things of your house'
- We are reluctant to be impressed. All too easily we are preoccupied with the world of technology and its ability to amuse us. Ask God to recreate a sense of wonder at what he has done.
- Let God's generosity and ingenuity, revealed in his created order, promote a spirit of joy.

## Psalm 66

There is nothing parochial about the psalms. They may arise out of a small nation in the Middle East but they contain huge ambition and great expectation. The first line is directed at the nations who make up the earth and v4 looks ahead with confidence to the day when *All the earth bows down to you (4)* We tend to associate the OT with separation and exclusivism, this missionary vision challenges our concern for the nations.

This outlook arises out of who God is, displayed in his international activity. So the psalmist invites his listeners to '*Come and see what God has done, his awesome deeds for mankind*' (5) Clearly the Exodus is in view (6,7) What is worth noticing is the conclusions the nations are invited to draw from this event. By redeeming Israel from Egypt the superpower of the day, they are being invited to appreciate the Lord's power over all the countries of the world.

The same could be said from the lesson of v8-12 where the psalmist recounts the experience of the exile. God tested his people. He put them in prison. He made them subject to their enemies. But Babylon was not the end. He brought them out to a place of abundance. The lesson: *Praise our God all people, let the sound of his praise be heard; he has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping. (8,9)*

To this picture of God moving freely about in nations and armies, the psalmist adds his personal experience. *Come and hear all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me. (16)*. The God of international politics hears the cries of his people and answers. And he does so out of love for them.

The psalm presents two alternatives. Either people sing for joy or else they cringe before him as one of his enemies. There is no middle ground.

- How does our missionary zeal look in the light of the psalmists?
- Come and see what God has done (5) What event would we want to draw people's attention to that revealed God's power?
- Come and hear what he has done for me. (16) Review God's provision in your life and ask him to provide an opportunity to share that with someone.

## Psalm 67

The psalm opens with language that recalls God's covenant with its promise of blessing on Israel. Genesis 12 records God's promise to Abraham. This is sometimes referred to as God's quad promise. (People, Place, Protection, Programme) It is that last element that often seems to get forgotten. (*and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you Gen 12:3*) Here though, it's to the fore. The psalmist looks for God's ways and salvation to be known among the nations. The prayer is that they too would be able to join in the enthusiastic praise of God.

*May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth. (4)* Israel are to be a nation that showcased God's just rule and wise government. We see the prayer answered in the amazement of the Queen of Sheba as she observes Solomon's leadership and administration. Sadly though this turns out to be the exception. Too often Israel adopts the systems of its pagan neighbours.

There is challenge here for us. It's easy to hear mission as exclusively the call to go and proclaim. The psalm would remind us of blessing that attracts. Can the Church be a people who display the attractiveness of life lived under God's law? And can we reveal a progress that comes from following his direction?

Blessing is never intended to be an end in itself. The good things God brings into our lives are intended to flow over to the benefit of others. *May God bless us still, so that all the ends of the earth will fear him. (7)*

- Do the nations feature in our praying, as they do in the concern of the psalmist?
- Review the way God has blessed your life. Have these 'mercies' benefitted the lives of others?
- Could our shared life as God's church be more attractive to those on the outside?