

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Speaker: Mr. George Bell

Comments from Book 1 of the Psalms: Psalms 1 and 2

The book of Psalms is well known. Many will have read, or heard Psalm 23 – the Shepherd Psalm. If you are in the older age bracket, you would have learned some of the Psalms in your school days. I can remember standing up in front of the class and reciting the whole of Psalm 121. Look that one up; you may remember! The whole book is divided into five parts. We are going to think about the first book - (1 to 41).

The Psalms have been a source of comfort to the faithful whether in Old Testament times or in our present Christian era. Over seventy Psalms were written by King David, reflecting his experiences when hunted by Saul. Believers have profited from these compositions describing his afflictions and adversities. David's trust in Jehovah as his strong tower, fortress and rock comes through on many occasions. We, too, need that simple trust in the Lord Jesus Christ in our day. The apostle Paul writes of this in his letter to the Philippians: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (4:13).

However, it should be said that the Psalms are not really Christian compositions. In many Psalms there are sentiments that we, as present day believers, could not use. Just listen to one: "Arise, O LORD in thine anger, lift up thyself because of the rage of mine enemies..." (Psalm 7:6). Contrast this with the words of the martyr Stephen as the stones battered his body: "...Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60). Today, is the day of God's grace. Since the great work of redemption has been completed, God's attitude towards all men has changed. Listen to Paul as he writes to Timothy, "God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved..." The outlook of the Christian believer has been changed. Another difference is that the hope of those addressed in the Psalms is blessing on earth. This comes through as we read them. The hope of the Christian is heaven: "... from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ".

Another important feature in the Psalms is that they are primarily prophetic and look forward to times on earth after the Church has been taken to heaven at the Rapture. The conditions surrounding the godly remnant in Israel in those coming days will be very similar to those of the godly whose experiences we read of in the Psalms. The first Psalm, on which we shall concentrate our thoughts today, shows this theme very clearly. There are four mentions of the ungodly in this Psalm as well as those who do not follow their counsel. This theme, beginning in Psalm 1, is continued, not only in the first book, but throughout the whole. If the sufferings of a godly remnant in future days of tribulation are described in the Psalms, so also are the glories of the future kingdom of Christ. Each of the first four books ends with a doxology; these are expressions of glory given to God. They are the sentiments of true believers in Israel looking forward to their hopes being realised on earth. The whole book closes with striking words which we will quote, "Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD" (150:6). This will be realised in the millennial kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

No introduction to the Psalms would be complete without reference to those known as "Messianic Psalms". This is the name given to Psalms pointing to the Messiah. To Christians, He is the Son of God, our Lord and Saviour. There are many of these, more being found in the first book than in each of the other four books. It should be said that the first Psalm is not a Messianic Psalm, although much of it could be applied to Him. Psalm 2 is the first one referring clearly to Christ. There are seven references to this Psalm in the New Testament. Just as the first Psalm begins the subject of the Jewish Remnant, so the second begins the Messianic line running through the whole book. The study of these Psalms have great interest for believers. They strengthen faith in the inspiration of the Scriptures. Some of the Psalms which refer to the Lord Jesus fall into the area of fulfilled prophecy. Others which look forward to future times are of course unfulfilled as yet. Let us recall the words of the Saviour as He talked to His disciples after He had risen from the dead: "And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:44-45). Let us be thankful that we can look back on these Psalms with help given by the Holy Spirit, and see "...the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (1 Peter 1:11).

Let's think now about the first two Psalms. They form a preface, not only to the first book, but also to the whole book. Originally these two were one writing. They begin and end with a beatitude. There are many of these in the Bible. The word 'blessed' may be rendered 'happy'. There is happiness possessed by those who put the scriptures into practice.

Neither of these two Psalms has any author given. They are generally referred to as "Orphan Psalms". However, in Acts 4, the Apostle Peter attributes Psalm 2 to David.

The practical content of the first Psalm is just as relevant to the Christian today as ever it was. The world has not changed its colour. There are still the godly and the ungodly. There is a call for separation from the world. The first verse is made up of three negative statements, therefore let's think about them: "walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly". The expression "walketh" has to do with our manner of life. There are lots of occasions all over the Bible where this meaning is given to "walk". It is dangerous to listen to the counsel of the ungodly. One of the names given to the Lord Jesus Christ in the Old Testament is "Counsellor" (Isaiah 9:6). It is to Him we must go for guidance and direction as to our daily living. The second of these warnings is: "nor standeth in the way of sinners". The Bible says that sin is lawlessness, wilfulness if you like. This time it is not walking: it is standing, taking up a position! Let us beware, the way of sinners is the way of self-will. The Lord Jesus always did God's will when He was here. If we are subject to the will of God, we will find it to be "good, and acceptable and perfect". The third warning is: "nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful". There is a sense of finality here. It is neither walking or standing, but sitting!! There is a downward trend here. No Christian wishes to be in fellowship with scorners. The Apostle Peter in his second letter says it is a mark of the last days; listen to what he says, "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?" (2 Peter 3:3-4).

In Psalm 1:2 we come to the importance of the Word of God. If we are to be faithful in carrying out the truth of verse 1, we must be diligent in our 'reading of the Scriptures'. This reading is not considered a burden, but a delight. Christians have a new nature which makes it a joy to read the scriptures and to put them into practice. How interesting it is to see that in Psalm 40, the words of the Lord Jesus are these, "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart". In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul uses similar words, "for I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Romans 7:22). The same writer encouraged his son in the faith, Timothy, to "give attendance to reading". Let's take this to heart. Now the Psalm says more than this: "and in His law doth he meditate day and night". It is possible to read our Bibles quickly and not get any benefit from our reading. It is a good practice to 'meditate' on what we read. Paul says "think on these things" turn things over in our minds. In the dietary instructions given to the Jews in the book of Leviticus the creatures considered as clean and suitable to eat must "chew the cud".

'Fruitfulness' is the next feature to be considered. It is the outcome of reading the Word. Let's listen to the first part of verse 3: "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water". There is much said about vegetation and trees in the Bible. On many occasions the tree is seen to be dependent upon water and moisture for fruitbearing. It is well known that a tree will push down its roots until it reaches water. If that resource is not there the tree will die. The tree is just like us. We are dependent on water for life naturally. The Lord Jesus told many parables when He was on earth. One of them is usually referred to as "the parable of the sower". It is of vital importance and therefore, is told three times. In this parable, the sower is seen sowing the seed. There are differing kinds of ground. That which is of interest to us at the moment is the stony ground. The tiny seed put down its root, but because of the stones it could not get deep enough to reach the moisture. When the sun was up, the tender shoot was scorched and because there was no depth of earth it withered away. The seed speaks of the Word of God, but how necessary the moisture is for growth. Now, what does this moisture mean? On one occasion the Lord Jesus spoke about "rivers of living water" and the comment is added by the writer, John, "But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive" (John 7:39). Let's think of one other scripture on the theme of fruitfulness, this time from the pen of the Apostle Paul. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." (Galatians 5:22). The Word gives life, but the Holy Spirit gives power to produce fruit. Considering the fruit of the Spirit just referred to, it is very obvious that this fruit is the reproduction of the life of the Lord Jesus in us. Let's continue further "bringeth forth his fruit in his season".

Our next point then is 'seasonable fruit'. What does this mean? In our lives we have to meet many differing situations. Day by day these situations change. This is why Christians should always pray for guidance at the start of each day. We have to make contact with different people. How careful we should be! Fruit is primarily for God's pleasure. It is Christ-likeness that gives Him joy. To illustrate this, just think of the life of the Lord Jesus. He was found in varying home situations. Two come to mind. You may remember how He dealt with Simon the Pharisee in his home and the way He met the need of the woman of the city. And then there was the home at Bethany, how different it was. All was in perfect balance. In each of these situations there was fruit in season.

We come now to 'prosperity': "and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper". People around us in the world think of prosperity as wealth, position and possessions. In this Psalm, it is spiritual prosperity which goes along with fruitfulness. Notice the reference to the leaf. If the leaf does not wither there is the prospect of more fruit. As we leave this part of our talk, let us make it our aim to be really prosperous for God.

The last half of the Psalm is 'a warning'. The ungodly have no stability. They are described as "the chaff which the wind driveth away". They have no standing in the time of judgement. Their way is to perish.

Let's think now of the second Psalm. Already we have said that it is a Messianic Psalm, which clearly refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. David is not the subject of the Psalm. It was the Spirit of Christ that wrote through David. These Old Testament scriptures are of interest to every Christian. The Psalm contains 12 verses, divided into 4 equal parts.

Verses 1-3 describe 'man's rebellion against God'. "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us". This antagonism will come to its head in the last days. These days are referred to in the book of Revelation 19. Events in the world today are rapidly heading toward that time. There was a partial fulfilment of this when Israel crucified their Messiah. The Apostle Peter addresses the nation of Israel in Acts 4. He quotes directly from the first two verses of this Psalm and then he applies it to the Lord's death. Let's listen to it. "For a truth against thy holy child (or servant) Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together". Going back to the Psalm again, men refuse any restraint put upon them. They will not have bands and cords, in spite of these being for their profit.

Verses 4-6 is 'God's reaction to this rebellion'. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath." God's purpose will not be thwarted. He says, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion".

How puny is man! The King is the very person whom men crucified. As the Son of David, Zion is His rightful place.

Verses 7-9 tell of 'the Person' into whose hand God has put all rule and all judgement. "The LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee". This was said to Him when He came into the world. This does not of course detract from His relationship as Son before He came. He was eternally the Son! Into His hand God has put a rod of iron with which He will dash His foes in pieces.

Verses 10-12 contain 'an invitation.' "Kiss the Son". Have we given Him our allegiance? Have we confessed Him as Lord? We finish with another beatitude! "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him". Let us all do this and find true happiness. May the Lord enable us to follow in the steps of the happy man of Psalm 1 while we wait for the return of the Lord Jesus and his coming kingdom.

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