

LIFE'S UPS AND DOWNS IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Life on earth is full of ups and downs – highs and lows – joys and hurts – good times and bad. Of course, we enjoy positive feelings more than negative – but both *pleasure and pain* are a part of the human experience, and serve to enrich our lives. We should never run from hurt... but embrace it, and learn from it.

There is a poem by Lois Cheney that sums up the way many people in today's society deal with their sullen moods, and emotional pains, and negative feelings...

Ms. Cheney writes, "*Feeling blue?* Buy some clothes. *Feeling lonely?* Turn on the radio. *Feeling despondent?* Read a funny book. *Feeling bored?* Watch TV. *Feeling empty?* Eat a sundae. *Feeling worthless?* Clean the house. *Feeling sad?* Tell a joke. Ain't this modern age wonderful? You don't gotta feel nothin', there's a substitute for everythin'!... God have mercy on us." We try to escape unpleasant feelings rather than let God use them to mold and shape and deepen our lives.

A FATHER'S LEGACY

Psalm 73-83 are attributed to "Asaph". Psalm 74 deals with the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem... which brings up a problem. The Asaph of David's day lived not only before the temple's *destruction*, but its *construction*, 400 years earlier...

The psalms attributed to "Asaph" were probably written by different "Asaphs" - descendants of David's worship leader who perpetuated not only his name, but his heart for God. Sons of Asaph oversaw the grand opening of Solomon's temple. They were instrumental 270 years later, in Hezekiah's revival - and a 100 years after that in Josiah's revival. Still, 100 years later, they dedicated the rebuilt temple.

To me, the fact that the sons of Asaph kept popping up over and over in Israel's history is evidence of the strength of their father's legacy. Asaph had a heart for God, and was able to plant it in his sons, who planted it in their sons, etc.

It reminds me of Dan Fogelberg's song about his dad, "I'm just a living legacy to the leader of the band." Asaph was a band leader who left a powerful legacy.

Today's "prozac generation" now has the chemical means to numb the pain rather than grapple with it. Yet as a result, we lack the strength and depth we could gain if we were forced to emotionally deal with the harsher side of life.

Many people today put their hope more in *medication* than *dedication*.

Today's society has overlooked the underlying premise of the Psalms - that God has created humankind with a full range of emotion... each of us has the capacity to rise to heights of ecstasy, or to sink into the pit of despair... and there are times when you and I will be near either end of the pendulum.

The Psalms teach us that both *pleasure and pain* are opportunities for God to speak. There are lessons learned only on the *peaks of joy*, and there are lessons learned only in the *valleys of depression*. And the book of Psalms takes us both places. It's been said, "all 88 keys of human emotion get played in the Psalms."

Devotion Box - Exaltation Comes From God

In Psalm 74:6-7 Asaph observes, "For exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another." God arranges the pecking order. He doles out opportunities, and establishes authority. If you've been placed in a position of honor— don't get the "big-head"— God has placed you there for His purposes.

Bible Scan - Psalms 73-83
A N N O U N C E M E N T

PSALM 73 - THE VIEW FROM THE SANCTUARY

Warren Wiersbe offers an outline of Psalm 73, "The psalm begins 'God is good' and ends with 'It is good', but (in) between... things are not so good!" Along with Psalms 10, 37, and 49, Psalm 73 deals with the thorny problem, "If God is good and just, then why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper?"

Asaph begins, "Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart." That's the psalmist's creed - a line from Asaph's personal statement of faith - he believes it, but he's having a tough time reconciling what he believes with what he sees... Asaph admits, "But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." When he sees the drug dealer's mansion - the tax evader's new sports car - the crime boss' beachfront condo... He grew envious and almost stumbled. He almost bought into the idea, "good guys finish last" - that sin does pay.

He was almost blinded by the apparent contradictions. The psalmist came close to denying what he knew... because of situations he couldn't explain...

I hope you know, how things appear is not always how things are... Asaph is walking by sight, not faith. As a result, he's tempted to draw wrong conclusions. He says in verse 12, "these are the ungodly, who are always at ease..." The wicked may appear to have it made, but sin has its own ugly consequences...

The ungodly experience a tormented conscience - destructive addictions - a helplessness in the face of life's challenges - a growing despair about the meaning of life - selfish living fragments relationships - an inevitable judgment hangs over their head. Hey, there is nothing easy about the life of the ungodly...

But the psalmist is tempted to draw another false conclusion in verse 13, "Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain..." *There's no gain in being good* - but that's not true either. Asaph is shortsighted. His perspective is myopic. He's lost sight of the big picture. He needs to view life from an eternal perspective...

This is what saves the chief musician. He recovers his perspective... in verse 16-17, "When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me - until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end."

Life on the mean streets is dog eat dog. It's easy for our concern to shift from *eternal salvation* to *momentary survival*. Heaven's viewpoint can get lost in everyday's rough and tumble. That's why we need to retreat daily to the sanctuary. We revive the *right perspective* when we refresh ourselves in *God's presence*.

The rest of the psalm reveals the change in perspective that came after the psalmist aligned his thoughts with God's thoughts. He sees what will become of the wicked. Verse 19, "Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment!"

MEANING OF MANNA

Psalm 78:18 says of the Hebrews in the wilderness, "They tested God in their heart by asking for the food of their fancy." God provided a daily diet of miraculous manna. The word "*manna*" means "*what is it?*". It was a new genre of breakfast cereal. Numbers 11:7 tells us it looked like a white seed. Verse 25 calls the manna, "angel's food".

Hey, angel's food cake is my favorite. I love the sugary sweet taste. Apparently, though real angel's food is not sweet, but bland. Deuteronomy 8:3 tells us God fed Israel the manna to humble them, and teach them that "man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD."

The menu God cooked up for the Hebrews was His way of cultivating in them a taste for the eternal - an appetite for spiritual delights, not physical pleasures.

Devotion Box - Limiting God

Psalm 78:41 tells us, "Again and again they tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel." The Hebrew word translated "limited" means "*to scratch off*".

Since Israel chose to *grumble at God* rather than *trust in God* - the Lord scratched off blessings He intended to give them. The older generation died in the wilderness having never entered the promised land.

I love to collect oxymorons - statements that appear contradictory, but actually make sense. Here're a few: "government organization, temporary tax increase, airline food, congressional action, city worker, legal brief, male intellect, female logic." But verse 41 gives us the mother of all oxymorons...

The Hebrews *limited the God who has no limits*. The word "limit" means "*to draw a circle around*". They drew lines in their relationship with God...

In essence, they said, "God, You can be Lord of these areas of my life, but this other area is off-limits. I want to stay in control."

Are you *limiting the Unlimitable* by not giving God total control of your life?

THE COURTS OF THE LORD

Psalms 84 is one of my favorite psalms. It's in 3 stanzas. The first stanza depicts the psalmist's *passion for God's presence*. The second stanza describes his *pilgrimage to God's presence*. And the third stanza... *peace in God's presence*.

Think of it this way... *His thirst for God. His trip to God. The treats of God.*

He begins, "How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts!" Remember, the tabernacle was the happenin' place in the Old Testament. The Hebrews worshiped God at the tabernacle in Jerusalem, and it had probably been six months since the psalmist had made his last pilgrimage. How he missed the aura and tranquility and meaning he had experienced in God's presence.

He longs to return to the courts of the Lord. He hungers and thirsts for God. He envies the birds who nest in the rafters. They spend all their time in the courts of the Lord. He only comes to Jerusalem three times a year at the major feasts.

And the pilgrimage to Jerusalem was tough and tricky. The holy city was a difficult destination. The roads led through deserts, and over mountains. They were tight and windy, and laced with danger. It required determination.

The same is true today. All kinds of distractions and barriers get in our way from seeking God. The Lord will strengthen the man who wants to know Him - but as with the psalmist, our heart needs to be "set on pilgrimage." Desire is required.

When the psalmist arrives in the tabernacle precincts he's overjoyed. He says in verse 10, "For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness." He'd swap a thousand days in Hawaii, for 24 hours in God's presence. He'd rather be a doorkeeper in the temple just so he could gaze in at God's glory when the door cracked, than to have front row seats in the tents of wickedness.

We find beauty, peace, and satisfaction when we hang out with Jesus. Verse 11 tells us, "The LORD will give grace and glory..." He embraces us with a love we could never earn on our own - and He enriches us with a loveliness we would never have seen on our own. He gives both grace and glory!

I love verse 11, "No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly."

GOD JUDGES THE JUDGES

John Philips introduces Psalm 82, "The judges suddenly find themselves in court. Now, however, they are not arrogantly sitting on the bench, pocketing their bribes, bullying witnesses, bending justice to suit themselves. They are in the dock, God sits on the bench."

Verse 1 says of God, "He judges among the gods."

This word translated "gods" can also mean "mighty ones". It referred to the judges of the land. Judges in Israel were often called *gods* with a small "g" because they were God's authority. One commentator explains, "The judges decisions were to be based on the Law of God, guided by the Mind of God, and derived through the Spirit of God. The office of judge was the most 'godlike' position in ancient Israel."

Don't get confused by the peculiar Hebrew usage of the word "gods". There are cults, including the Mormons, who use Psalm 82 to justify their unbiblical, heretical teaching that man can become a god. There is only one God - Jehovah and His Son Jesus. We can become like God in character - but not in substance or essence. Humans remain human forever.

It's ironic, but read Psalm 82 in context, and the one thing it definitely teaches is that the wicked judges of Israel were painfully, sinfully, human.

Note verses 6-7, "I said, "You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High. But you shall die like men..." Here's what the evil judges had forgotten. Yes, God entrusted them with His authority, but they were still men. Rather than teach *man's potential for deity* Psalm 82 was intended to *remind man of his mortality*.

Devotion Box - The Speed Of Need

I love Psalm 79:8, "Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us! Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us..." God's mercies must run a 4.2 second 40 yard dash. They sprint. We love God's mercies because they are tender, but they're also speedy, and get to us when needed. You might say, "*God's mercies travel at the speed of need.*"

Devotion Box - Unite My Heart

In Psalm 86:11 the psalmist asks the Lord, "Unite my heart to fear Your name." We're often churned up with conflicting and competing emotions. Our inner life can become a swirl of hormones, and feelings, and thoughts. My wife will tell me, "*Honey, get a grip!*" But here the psalmist asks God to get a grip on him.

In essence he says, "*Lord, help me pull it all together - rally my energy, and emotions, and mental activity around you. Make my heart bow before You.*"

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org

Calvary Chapel Announcements - August 27, 2000 - pick up the latest "LikeMinds" - 8/30 Dennis Zech—"Ministry Through Mystery" - 9/10 Baptism - 9/17 Baby Dedications - 9/24 CCSM's 20th Birthday Celebration

For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: www.calvarychapel.org/stonemountain/biblescan.htm

Next Bible Scan - September 3 - Psalm 90-106

"For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness." - Psalm 84:10

**Bible Scan
Memory
Verse**

THERE IS NONE LIKE YOU

Psalm 86:5 says of God, "For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You." He then says in verses 7-8, "In the day of my trouble I will call upon You, for You will answer me. Among the gods there is none like You, O Lord; nor are there any works like Your works."

Think about it, what other gods are as willing to forgive and deliver as our God?

Compare the true God with the false gods of other religions... *Islam* crushes its opponents. Allah is not looking to show mercy and forgive. *Buddhism* locks a sinner in countless reincarnations where they return as slugs and snails, as punishment for past mistakes. The best Buddha offers is eternal nothingness. And the *Hindu pantheon* is full of vicious gods who feed on the blood of men.

Only Jesus bleeds for His people. He alone loves and delights to forgive.

JERUSALEM AND JESUS

Psalm 87 focuses on the most strategic city in the world.. and it's not Washington, or Moscow, or Tokyo, or London...
...it's Jerusalem.

Commentator John Philips writes of Jerusalem's surprising importance, "It stands where no city has any business standing. It has no river, it commands no strategic highway, its roads have always led straight out into the desert..."

Yet, 34 times in its history Jerusalem has been fought over, and besieged. Even today, eyes around the world are focused on the status of Jerusalem...

Verses 2-3 tell us why Jerusalem is so special. "The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!" Jerusalem is God's city. It's central to His plans - both past and future. God has a glorious destiny planned for the city of Jerusalem.

The rest of Psalm 87 describes how being born in Jerusalem is a unique honor, and how the city is a source of inspiration for singers and musicians. The last line reads, "All my springs are in you." I can say the same of Jesus. He is a source of refreshment and praise and inspiration for all who know Him.

DEVOTION BOX - LETTING IT ALL HANG OUT

Psalm 88 is "Set to Mahalath Leannoth", or "*dancing and shouting*" - yet there is nothing in this psalm to dance or shout about. Psalm 88 is the saddest of all the psalms. One man writes, "We thank God that, if there has to be such a psalm in the Bible, there is only one of them." In Psalm 88 the psalmist *sings the blues!*

In verse 3 he says, "For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to the grave." The psalmist is suffering a terminal disease... possibly leprosy. He's got one foot in the grave. His friends have forsaken him. There's no hope. Not one ray of sunshine lights up the agony of Psalm 88. Yet maybe that's the point - maybe God is teaching us that no matter how depressing our situation gets we can always cry out to Him. We can go to God and "*let it all hang out*". When the poison of pain fills our cup it's better to pour it out, than to let it eat a hole in the bottom of our heart.