

NCAC Adult Sunday School  
August 14, 2022

**Learning to Love the Psalms**  
**W. Robert Godfrey**  
**Week 4**

**Review**

Last week we looked at Psalm 52 in Book 2 of the Psalms. Dr. Godfrey helped us to see how knowing the historical context of a psalm can provide us with additional help in understanding in interpreting it. Last week we clearly saw the difference between one who finds his refuge in God and his steadfast love and one who finds his refuge in his evil schemes and self-serving ways. We also looked at the appropriateness of praying an imprecatory psalm with an important distinction being maintained between how we should treat our enemies versus God's enemies. As Romans 12:18-19 reminds us, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay says the Lord.'"

**This Week**

**Psalm 81: The Word at the Center**

Psalm 81 can be said to be the most important psalm because of its placement at the center of the Psalter. In this lesson, Dr. Godfrey reviews the themes of Psalm 81, pointing out how they ultimately center on the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Psalm 81**

Sing aloud to God our strength;  
shout for joy to the God of Jacob!  
<sup>2</sup> Raise a song; sound the tambourine,  
the sweet lyre with the harp.  
<sup>3</sup> Blow the trumpet at the new moon,  
at the full moon, on our feast day.  
<sup>4</sup> For it is a statute for Israel,  
a rule<sup>[b]</sup> of the God of Jacob.  
<sup>5</sup> He made it a decree in Joseph  
when he went out over<sup>[c]</sup> the land of Egypt.

I hear a language I had not known:

<sup>6</sup> “I relieved your<sup>[d]</sup> shoulder of the burden;  
your hands were freed from the basket.

<sup>7</sup> In distress you called, and I delivered you;  
I answered you in the secret place of thunder;  
I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah

<sup>8</sup> Hear, O my people, while I admonish you!  
O Israel, if you would but listen to me!

<sup>9</sup> There shall be no strange god among you;  
you shall not bow down to a foreign god.

<sup>10</sup> I am the Lord your God,  
who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.  
Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

<sup>11</sup> “But my people did not listen to my voice;  
Israel would not submit to me.

<sup>12</sup> So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts,  
to follow their own counsels.

<sup>13</sup> Oh, that my people would listen to me,  
that Israel would walk in my ways!

<sup>14</sup> I would soon subdue their enemies  
and turn my hand against their foes.

<sup>15</sup> Those who hate the Lord would cringe toward him,  
and their fate would last forever.

<sup>16</sup> But he would feed you<sup>[e]</sup> with the finest of the wheat,  
and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”

Dr. Godfrey is going to make some references to Israel’s liturgical calendar in his teaching. That may be a term that is unfamiliar to some so let me briefly explain what he means. As part of the law that God gave to Moses, God commanded his people to observe certain feasts and fast days. One of the places these feasts are described are in Leviticus 23 where we they are listed as the Sabbath, the Passover, the Feast of Firstfruits, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. These special days and week events made up the liturgical calendar of Israel.

## **Lecture Outline**

A. Psalm 81 is the central point in the Psalter, which makes it the most important psalm for making sense of the overarching theme of Israel’s crisis in the Psalms.

1. Psalm 81 stands at the center of the Psalter, even though there are 150 psalms, because it is the central psalm in Book 3.

- a. Psalm 81 is arguably the most important psalm in the Psalter when considering the emphasis Hebrew poetry places on the center.
- b. Psalm 81, as an explanation of the history of Israel and the history of redemption, makes it an organizing principle of the whole of Scripture.
- 2. Psalm 81 focuses on one of the central texts in the Old Testament and the central holy day of Israel's liturgical calendar.
  - a. Psalm 81:8 is the central point of the psalm, which echoes the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4 and points to the primary problem of all mankind.
  - b. Psalm 81:3 calls Israel to worship on the Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month of Israel's liturgical calendar.
- 3. The language in Psalm 81:3 of the new moon and the full moon are meant to center the astute reader's attention on the Day of Atonement.
  - a. The new moon marked the New Year in the seventh month of Israel's liturgical calendar; the full moon marked the Feast of Tabernacles.
  - b. The Day of Atonement is the fast day situated between the new moon and the full moon of the seventh month.
  - c. The Day of Atonement is the heart of Israel's year of worship, so in the central psalm we are brought to the center of Israel's worship.

B. Psalm 81 contains a word of deliverance, direction and destruction to Israel.

- 1. Psalm 81 calls Israel to listen to God's word of deliverance during this season of remembrance of God's renewing, forgiving, and provisional power.
- 2. Psalm 81 uses the poetic device of allusion to develop upon God's mighty acts of deliverance.
  - a. Psalm 81 readies us to meditate on the hardship of Israel's slavery: "I relieved your shoulder of the burden" (v. 6).
  - b. Only after such a vivid imagery and allusion to Israel's slavery does the psalmist speak directly of Israel's redemption from slavery in Egypt.
- 3. God's word of deliverance in Psalm 81 is not only a word about His past acts of redemption but also a word of promise about His future acts of redemption.
- 4. Psalm 81 calls Israel to listen to God's word as a directive for deliverance out the crisis in which she finds herself because of her failures in right worship.
- 5. The key way that God measures the faithfulness of His people concerns whether they will worship Him the way He has commanded them.
  - a. Worship is a measure of obedience because if God's people are not obedient when they come before Him, they will not be obedient elsewhere.
  - b. Verse 8 sets up the directive of Psalm 81 for Israel's remedy to disobedient worship: "O Israel, if you would but listen to me!"
- 6. Israel's history demonstrates an unwillingness to abide by the most explicit commands of God concerning worship.

- a. One of the most explicit commands God gives concerning His worship is His command against graven images (Exodus 20:4).
  - b. Israel continually broke this commandment and chose instead to be as other nations, worshipping worthless idols made with human hands.
  - c. We must not consider ourselves wiser than God, thinking we can improve upon His worship beyond what He has commanded.
7. Psalm 81 calls Israel to listen to God's word to be delivered from patterns of false worship and the destruction of God's enemies.
- C. Psalm 81 points to the Lord Jesus Christ, who listened to the Father perfectly, as our hope and redemption, that we may worship God from a true heart.
- 1. Jesus is at the heart of Psalm 81; He has perfectly listened to the Father.
    - a. The context of Psalm 81 is the prayer of deliverance in Psalm 80 in which is acknowledged the need of God's restoration by a Redeemer.
    - b. Jesus is the Redeemer who understood the Word of deliverance, followed the Word of direction, and embraced the Word of destruction.
  - 2. Jesus succeeded in every way Israel failed.
    - a. Psalm 81 reflects on three of Israel's problems in the wilderness: food, power and worship.
    - b. The wilderness temptations of Jesus demonstrate how He withstood against Satan over food, power, and worship (Matt. 4:1-11).
  - 3. The preparations of God in the history of Israel through institutions and signs come together in the person and work of Christ as the true Israel.
    - a. Jesus is the fulfillment of the New Year, the Feast of Tabernacles and the Day of Atonement.
    - b. Psalm 81 helps us to understand the perfect obedience of Christ and helps us to worship God fully illumined by His gracious forgiveness.

### **Discussion**

1. From the heart of this psalm, verse 8, what is the main problem for Israel? How is this the problem of Adam, Abraham, David, and the church too?

"Blessed is the one who listens to me (Wisdom), watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors." Proverbs 8:34

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. Matthew 7:24

"And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "' This is my beloved Son: listen to him.'" Mark 9:7

Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." John 18:37

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. John 10:27

As it is said, "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."  
Hebrews 3:15

"Will You Not Listen?" by Michael Card

2. What are some of the ways God has given us opportunity to listen to Him?

3. One of the primary ways we can judge if we are listening to God well is if we are listening to what he says about how we should worship Him. Israel failed miserably in this area throughout their history, and we do not want to repeat their errors. How are we to worship God then? What are some Scriptural commands or principles we should follow?

### **We are to only worship the one true God**

"You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them..."

Exodus 20:3-5

### **We are to love (worship) God with our whole being**

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (see also Matthew 22:36-40)

### **We are to worship God in spirit and truth**

"But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

John 4:23-24

**“True worship must be “in spirit,” that is, engaging the whole heart. Unless there’s a real passion for God, there is no worship in spirit. At the same time, worship must be “in truth,” that is, properly informed. Unless we have knowledge of the God we worship, there is no worship in truth. Both are necessary for God-honoring worship. Spirit without truth leads to a shallow, overly emotional experience that could be compared to a high. As soon as the emotion is over, when the fervor cools, the worship ends. Truth without spirit can result in a dry, passionless encounter that can easily lead to a form of joyless legalism. The best combination of both aspects of worship results in a joyous appreciation of God informed by Scripture. The more we know about God, the more we appreciate Him. The more we appreciate, the deeper our worship. The deeper our worship, the more God is glorified.”**

Taken from the website gotquestions.org

### **We are to worship together regularly around the word of God**

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Acts 2:42

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

Hebrews 10:24-25

### **Our worship should be centered on Jesus Christ and his work of redemption for us.**

“Jesus said to him, “ I am the way and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

John 14:6

“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Acts 4:12

“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.”

Philippians 3:7-8

4. What should we do if upon examining our lives we find that we have not been listening well to God and His Son Jesus Christ? What should we do if we find that we are worshipping other things besides God?

- Run to Jesus and confess our sin and receive His forgiveness. 1 John 1:9
- Remind ourselves that it is for these sins he died, and the penalty of these sins has been borne by him. Believe in the forgiveness he provided.
- Learn to listen and worship connected to Jesus

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:27-29

What is our hope in life and death?  
 Christ alone, Christ alone  
 What is our only confidence?  
 That our souls to him belong  
 Who holds our days within his hand?  
 What comes, apart from his command?  
 And what will keep us to the end?  
 The love of Christ, in which we stand

What truth can calm the troubled soul?  
 God is good, God is good  
 Where is his grace and goodness known?  
 In our great Redeemer’s blood  
 Who holds our faith when fears arise?  
 Who stands above the stormy trial?  
 Who sends the waves that bring us nigh  
 Unto the shore, the rock of Christ?

Unto the grave, what shall we sing?  
 “Christ, he lives; Christ, he lives!”  
 And what reward will heaven bring?  
 Everlasting life with him  
 There we will rise to meet the Lord  
 Then sin and death will be destroyed  
 And we will feast in endless joy  
 When Christ is ours forevermore

Next Week: Psalm 127, The Lord’s Beloved