

December 16, 2018
Lesson 3: Love and Worship God
Scripture: Psalm 103: 1-17, 21-22

Context:

Continuing with our love for God and those scriptures that support such a sentiment, our lesson moves us to the Book of Psalms. The psalms are some of the most prolific in the Bible as they offer us the ancient peoples' understanding of God. We find that the same feelings and emotions they express resemble many of the same we experience today. At times in life we are angry at God or saddened by events in our life. At other times, we feel helpless and cry out to God for help. Yet for the most part, we also feel great joy as we look around us and give thanks for all the many blessings in our life that we associate with God.

The psalm we read today is one of the most descriptive and evangelical in nature. Every line packs a punch as the psalmist finds a point and carries it home. Scholars have claimed the "favored praise of sinners" as each line have been the means of remembering the Lord is always gracious.¹ It is hard to know the exact author as the psalms were a collection that came together during a certain period, many under the reign of King David and King Solomon. Whoever the author may be, they understand themselves as a sinner, someone who is human and fallible.

The composition of the psalm is very intentional with every line having a detail to serve its purpose. The whole psalm is a liturgical "not forgetting" of all the Lord's dealing with humanity; the whole psalm is a recollecting, remembering, and reminding of who God is and what God has done for humanity.² Several times through the psalm the line "God's faithful love" is repeated. This steadfast love is translated from the Hebrew word *hesed*, which means an eternal love that transcends any anger or frustration in a relationship.³ This kind of love is rare and is a gift to humanity.

The psalm starts with the human giving thanks to God with their whole being at the goodness of God that is redemptive. It then moves through the history of God's goodness noting how God was with Moses and the Israelites. It then moves to how God's love is bigger than we can imagine and how our sin cannot compete with that love. Then God is given the allusion of being like the parent who loves the child with their whole heart. Even time has nothing on God who loves humans forever. The psalm then closes with all beings everywhere praising God. From the individual to the whole cosmos, all are to be in awe of the mighty redeeming love of God.

Application

I love that commentators have labeled this as the "favored praise of sinners." The

¹ James L. Mays, "Psalms," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY 1994), 326.

² *Ibid.*, 326.

³ *Ibid.*, 328.

psalmist is very much in tune with understanding their own journey and the images that would help the ancient people understand God. From the heavens to the earth, God's love abides. From one end of the horizon to the next is how much God has forgotten humanity's sin. Like the tender love a parent feels looking at their child is the same love that God feels for us.

Just reading this text we are given hope that God loves us in spite of ourselves. Even though we make plenty of mistakes and like the stubborn child who messes up time and time again, God redeems and rescues us over and over again. The love God has for us transcends even our understanding of the world and its limits.

How refreshing we read this text in light of the Advent season and the time before a new year. While the time of year certainly brings joy and celebration, it also can conjure up the memories of the past and even of this year that have been less than ideal. Taking that stock of things can be hard as we may have to admit that even as perfect as we may try to be, we are not. We put our hopes that maybe next year things will be different and that somehow we will not mess up.

Even though it may be good to set goals and to examine our growing edges, it might also be time to give yourself grace and bask in the fact that God is in love with you. No sin will separate you and no smidge of imperfection will change that fact. The fact of the matter is that you will mess up in the next year. You will lose your temper and you might yell at the child who pushes you to the breaking point. And you'll lament the fact of those things for a few days.

In the midst of that chaos though, God is still rooting for you. God is not keeping a giant scoreboard of your transgressions and God is not planning an epic storm to punish you for your curse word whispered under your breath when you accidentally burnt the chicken for dinner. Instead, God is rooting for you to keep going and knowing that like a parent, the love for you is deep and wide. Praise God for that gift and simply just be.

So as you make your resolutions and reflect on the year, give yourself grace. You can set goals and resolutions, but always put them in reach. When it comes to relationships, remember that you are only human and can only do so much. You cannot change anyone or fix anyone as you can only change yourself. When it comes to diet and exercise, be realistic about what you can do. Don't give up when the running pace is slower than you want or by week two, your pants are still as tight. When you have a setback, take care of yourself and give yourself time to rest and be renewed.

In all things, remember that you are a child of God and that you are loved. Do not let others dictate who you are and what you are called to be in this world. Go where God leads you and remember that the Lord of lords has made only one you on this earth. No sin and no deed can ever separate you from the giver of life.

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