

Connecting as a Worshiping Community

Connecting with Your Church—part 5

March 15, 2020

Psalms 120-134 are known as the “Song Ascents.” The authorship and time of writing of each psalm is unknown. Some may have been written in as early as the time of David, and some as late as the final prophets of the Old Testament, after return from Babylonian captivity.

The meaning of the “Song of Ascents” is also unknown. Most speculation attributes these fifteen psalms to the time of going up the fifteen steps to temple worship. When climbing each of the fifteen steps to worship, each psalm was sung.

The theme that drives these songs is **the people of God as a community of worship**. Every aspect of their lives, from heartache to hallelujah, from sorrow and suffering to security, from maddening trials to mountain tops, through it all there is a life they share together. It is the worship of God that unites them through hell and high water.

DAY 1: A community in distress

Psalms 120:1, 5 I call on the LORD in my distress, and he answers me. 5 Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech, that I live among the tents of Kedar!

1. This psalm was written in the time of the nation’s exile in Babylon.
2. Imagine your family and your church family being taken captive by a powerful nation and sent to somewhere like Russian Siberia.
3. Everything you loved about your country and homeland was a faint memory, for many years.
4. “Woe” in v. 5 signifies a catastrophe that has fallen on them. In spite of the devastation of being conquered and exiled...
 - a. What is the response of the people?
 - b. What is the response of God?
 - c. What does the writer imply?

Psalms 121:1 I lift up my eyes to the hills-- where does my help come from? 2 My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. 3 He will not let your foot slip-- he who watches over you will not slumber; 4 indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. 5 The LORD watches over you-- the LORD is your shade at your right hand;

5. In time of distress the psalmist calls out to God for help. What responses does the psalmist anticipate from God?

DAY 2: A community that rejoices together

1. In contrast to yesterday's psalm when in distress, today's psalm reminds us that we rejoice together.

Psalms 122:1 I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."

² Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem.

³ Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together.

⁴ That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, to praise the name of the LORD according to the statute given to Israel.

⁵ There the thrones for judgment stand, the thrones of the house of David.

⁶ Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May those who love you be secure.

⁷ May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels."

⁸ For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, "Peace be within you."

⁹ For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your prosperity.

2. Notice how rejoicing occurs in v. 1.

a. *When* did the rejoicing begin?

b. *Who* was rejoicing?

c. *How* did rejoicing begin?

3. vv. 2-5 describe reasons for their rejoicing. Why are they rejoicing?

4. Rejoicing is not just a solo affair. How is praise to God multiplied when done in community?

5. The people were enjoying a time of peace. How does that prompt them to pray in:

v. 6:

v. 7:

v. 8:

6. A rejoicing community adds joy to our lives. We "piggyback" on the joys of others and share in their joy!

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

DAY 3: A community rooted in hope.

1. During a long dry spell the people of God find a different kind of joy—hope.
2. Hope is not the kind of joy in what one *has*, but in what one *sees*!
3. Faith is fortified when that for which we long and hope comes to be!
4. In Psalm 126, there is joy when the nation, once held captive in Babylon is freed from captivity by King Cyrus of Persia!

Psalms 126:1 When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed.

² Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

³ The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.

⁴ Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negev.

⁵ Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.

⁶ He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

5. What strikes you about v. 1?
6. After a long time in “the desert” there is rich joy. But notice, joy is not a solo affair! Notice the plural pronouns in vv. 1-5. Underline each of them.
7. How many plural pronouns were there? What are we to make of this?
8. When you hear someone say, “I don’t need to go to church to worship God. I can worship alone under a tree,” what things are they missing?
9. In what and in whom is their joy found?
10. It’s not until the last verse that the pronouns change to singular. Is there something to make of that?
11. What truth does the psalmist want us to remember in v. 6?

DAY 4: Brokenness, confession, and hope

1. There is another aspect where being a worshipping community is invaluable—in our failures.

Psalms 130:1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD;

² O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.

³ If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.

⁵ I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.

⁶ My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

⁷ O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.

⁸ He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

2. How does the psalmist's prayer begin? (vv. 1-2)

3. The psalmist is deeply moved by his failure, seen in both v. 1 and 2.

4. What does the psalmist realize about himself in v. 3?

5. While it is true that the people of God do grow in maturity in Christ, we will not permanently leave behind our sin nature until we leave this life. In many of our churches, the impression is left that we should progress in maturity at a rate sets us up for extra discouragement and gloom.

6. Notice the psalmist's response to his sin. He doesn't beat himself up. Instead, his failure drives him in redemptive directions! How is this seen in:

v. 3:

v. 4:

v. 5:

v. 6:

v. 7:

v. 8:

7. The experience of our failure and sin should drive us to more wonderfully appreciate the lavish mercy of God, a deepened awareness of love that is deeper than we once believed, and to deepened relationship with the God who loves! The tenor of failure ends in hope (vv. 5-8)!!!

DAY 5: Fellowship, refreshment, unity

Psalms 133:1 How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!

² *It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes.*

³ *It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.*

1. Being part of a worshipping community gives us a taste of the God who loves us and the God we love!
2. The triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit enjoy perfect love among the three as they lavish blessing and love on each other. That is our model!
3. When we relate to one another like the trinity does, we bring God glory.
4. In the world there is always plenty of “drama,” relational fracturing, misunderstandings, resentment and bitterness. A worshipping community is not immune from this. It can be expected because of our still sinful nature. HOWEVER, because of the Holy Spirit’s work, and Christ living in His people, we have the opportunity to redemptively work together through our hurt feelings, misunderstandings, and miscommunications!
5. How does the psalmist describe the effect of unity in v. 1?
6. The pleasantness of unity is illustrated in v. 2. The oil that was poured over the priest was an anointing oil. It was a mixture of sweet-smelling spices including cinnamon, sweet calamus, lignea and olive oil.
7. This metaphor illustrates the sweetness and pleasantness that covers us that we enjoy when we live in sweet brotherhood and sisterhood.
8. A second illustration of unity is found in v. 3. The dew on Mt. Hermon is a symbol of *refreshment*. It was said by some that the dew in the morning had drenched their tents!
9. Everyone needs refreshing, especially when life is difficult. This kind of refreshment is found in community, not in isolation.

*Philemon 1:7 Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have **refreshed the hearts** of the saints.*

Unity, the experience of community that worships God together, serves together, loves together, and who share common purposes provides joy for the heart.