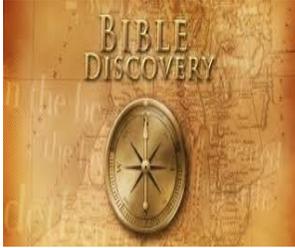


22 Jun 14

Psalm 51:7-17

Preparing Hearts to Come to the Psalms



The story has been told of two men who were the sole survivors of a shipwreck. Afloat on a life raft, after several days they had given up hope of rescue. Finally, one said to the other, “Do you think it would do any good to pray?” The other agreed nothing could be lost by trying. Neither, however, had ever prayed. Finally, one recalled living next door to a church as a child. He had often heard their mid-week meetings through an open window. Bowing his head he began to pray, repeating his recollection of the words he had heard uttered in that church so many years ago. His fervent prayer began, “I-26, B-15, N-7. We may smile at the naiveté of this man and at the fact that some churches know more about Bingo games than about prayer.

Turning to the Book of Psalms we desire to learn to be worshippers - people who, like David, seek after God yearning to know the heart of God. The greatest calling of the church, of individual Christians, isn't to be evangelists, or teachers, or comforters, but worshippers – people of God who know God, who give Him adoration and praise, who come to Him with their whole heart. The central focus of our lives should not be ourselves, or even others, but God. Jesus taught, “Seek first the kingdom of God...”



As we prepare our hearts to come to the Psalms, what most do we require in that preparation? Is it time? We can set aside time to study the Psalms – we're looking to give Him several Sundays this summer as we look at different Psalms each week. Is it meditation? We shall endeavour to meditate upon God's Word and learn from it. But is that what we most need? Pastor and people alike will surely benefit from giving God our time and our meditation, yet may I suggest what is most needed – what we will most benefit from this summer – is renewing a right spirit with God; having Him wash us through the blood of His Son, having Him fill us with joy and gladness; it is giving God our hearts!

I've starting our journey through selected Psalms with Psalm 51 for that very reason. Like King David, we'll find our share of opportunities to pray, lament, petition and praise the Lord but first we must place ourselves in God's merciful, loving hands and let Him have his way with our hearts. Perhaps you've heard the glib prayer, “give me patience, Lord, but hurry...” or you've heard a friend say they wouldn't know what to ask God for – they don't know what they require of God. Well, if we're really honest we know what we want - to be set free from burdens that weigh us down, to be given joy and happiness, to find we are loved and not alone.

Hagar certainly could have added her life story to this pursuit. As an Egyptian slave girl, she already lived a difficult life. She was essentially the property of others. Her life became increasingly more difficult when her mistress, Sarah, gave Hagar to her husband, Abraham. Sarah hoped to gain children through her. When Hagar did become pregnant, Sarah mistreated the young, expectant mother.



**Hagar came
to see God
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her!**

Hagar ran away from the frying pan into the fire! Hagar was pregnant and alone in the desert when the angel of the LORD found her. He comforted her. Hagar took in the angel's words and began addressing God as "*the One who sees me*". Prior to her visit with the angelic being, Hagar didn't think anyone saw her trouble. But she came to see that God was aware and that He cared for her. The One who sees is also aware of you and your needs...and He cares deeply for you so we also can know what God wants for us – and that is really what we need.

So often when we look at ourselves we fail to believe anyone knows us, that no one really sees us, and that there is anything that can change us. We put up a good front with those around us – even our families - but somehow we know we can't fool God. Can I encourage you that you are right in thinking God knows your most innermost thoughts, He knows every action taken – and considered – and He loves you in spite of everything. So I encourage you this morning that it is time to stop running into the desert of your life and to bring God your heart. I encourage you to discover what the Psalmist discovered, that, "*The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart...*"

So, what stops us from bringing God our heart?

- ***Perhaps*** it's your past that keeps you from bringing your heart to God. Often we line up our past and we believe God can never love us. Rick Warren has said, "We are products of our past, but we don't have to be prisoners of it." Rather today is the day we can bring our past to the cross, drop it there like we would drop a heavy boulder, and walk away with our backs straight and our hearts purged.
- ***Perhaps*** its worry that holds us back. Did you ever consider that worry is not part of God's plan for you? It's not natural to worry. It's not healthy to worry. It's not necessary to worry. Many illnesses and troubles which keep the medical profession taxed today would disappear if only we would cease to worry. Proverbs teaches, "*An anxious heart weighs a man down*" [Proverbs 12:25]. Maybe that's what makes you walk so slowly – are you weighed down by worry?
- ***Perhaps*** you've given your heart to light-heartedness always seeking the party, always finding the light side of everything. Consider Proverbs 14:13, "*Even in laughter the heart may ache, and joy may end in grief.*"
- ***Perhaps*** this morning you have a secret. Maybe you are sitting here this morning thinking that if God knew just how horrible that secret was, He would never want anything to do with you. (You may be thinking you can't stand yourself) Can I share a story with you? This morning's Psalm comes from David's repentance before God after his secret is found out. The prophet Nathan confronted the King because David had conspired to have the husband of Bathsheba put in the line of fire on the front lines and killed to hide the fact that Bathsheba had become pregnant while her husband Uriah was at war for Israel. And David was the father. When David's sin saw the light of day, he confessed, rightly saying, "*I have sinned against the Lord.*" Praise the Lord, compared to the sin of King David; most of us have had it pretty good. So I can tell you that God will not shy away from you if you bring your heart to him sincerely, contritely and honestly.

We can come to God despite our circumstances. Rather than letting the excuses hold us back, it is good that we come before our Lord, that we ask Him to purge us and fill us, to “*create in us a clean heart and put a new and right spirit within*” us to lead us as He has promised to do.

As we look to prayer, petitions and praise through the Psalms, let us hold to the heart of God and remember that He has promised to renew our hearts and to make a place for us in His family.

This morning, you may still believe your life is beyond the reach of God’s wonderful grace. Consider this. God promises while we were sinners, He gave His Son Jesus to die for our sins and give us the way back to God. God showed us that He loves us; that He cares about our rough days, our sorrows and pain; He knows our struggles & our trials & He wants to be central in our lives. That means Jesus died for me – & for you; He took care of the most impossible problem we have – coming back to God, so we know He can take care of the rest.

I invite you to renew not only your heart but your life with God. He invites us to die with His Son Jesus Christ at that cross, leaving our burdens with Him, so that we might have eternal life with Him. Paul tells us it is the gift of God – that is eternal life in His Son Jesus Christ.

***Create in me a clean
heart O God and
renew a right spirit
within me!***