

Tuesday, May 26, 2020—Psalms 136-138

Most people consider love to be an emotion. They love their children. They love Blue Bell ice cream. They love a sports team. Because the word has so many meanings, its true meaning can be quite confusing. In reality, love is a verb, an outward response to an inner truth.

Psalm 136 celebrates the enduring love of Yahweh. He did not simply have an inward emotion that gave him warm feelings toward Israel. He acted. His love was a verb. He alone is the One who created. He alone was the One who freed His people from Egypt and gave them victory over their enemies. He alone was the One who fulfilled His promises to give them a home. The never-ending love of God is an action, and His people return the favor by responding with a life of worship.

Psalm 137 is a striking contrast to Psalm 136. When Babylon invaded Jerusalem and deported the people, they sat by the river and wept over their memories of Zion. They felt like they could not sing (an emotion) when the Babylonians taunted them, yet they were able to overcome that heaviness and write a song of lament (an act of worship).

David experienced God's presence and goodness in the highest and lowest moments of life. "When I called, you answered me; you made me bold and stouthearted" (138:3). He wanted everyone, including the strongest on the earth, to turn to God in humility and praise.

Praise God for the purpose He will fulfill in you. Thank Him that His love is more than an emotion. Pray yours will be, too.

Monday, May 25, 2020—Psalms 133-135

Jesus told His disciples the world would know they were His disciples by their love for one another (John 13:35). He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane for the unity of His disciples so the world would believe that God had sent Jesus (John 17:21). Unity is a foundational hallmark of the Body of Christ.

The Jews knew the value of unity as well. They sang in Psalm 133 about how good and pleasant it is when brothers get along (133:1). This unity was the visible sign of God's choosing them, like the anointing oil flowing down the face and beard of the priest who led them. Unity was a blessing from God. Indeed, unity is serious business.

As they finished their approach to the Temple, they sang to those who worked at this holy site (134:1). What a rich blessing working day and night for Yahweh must have been. The pilgrims were only able to come a few times each year while these servants experienced the power of His presence each day. How much more, then, should followers of Christ rejoice when they have the Spirit dwelling within them? Praise the Lord!

He does whatever pleases Him (135:6), so pray in awe and wonder that He was pleased to save you and make you His own. Praise the Lord for saving your soul. Praise the Lord for His call to share the hope you have in Him. Praise the Lord for His greatness, for His indwelling Spirit, and for unity with other believers.

On this Memorial Day, remember those who sacrificed to win, preserve, and defend your freedom. Praise God for them.

In addition, praise God for Jesus, who sacrificed to win your freedom. Praise Him for the Spirit, who preserves and defends your salvation and your unity with others who are in Christ.

Sunday, May 24, 2020—Psalms 130-132

Christians set aside Sunday as the Lord's Day, a time to step out of the daily routine and celebrate the risen Savior. Like the Old Testament Sabbath, the Lord's Day is an opportunity to worship and to rest. Many go through the motions mindlessly or skip it altogether and miss its blessings and the growth that can come from the discipline.

As the Jews approached the Temple, they sang the Psalms of Ascent (Psalms 120-134) to prepare them for being in God's presence. Psalm 130 recognizes the holiness of God and the amazing reality that He forgives sin. If He did not remove our sins, no one could stand before Him (130:3), "But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared" (130:4). This fear did not drive people away from Him but, instead, made them long for him more than a watchman waiting for sunrise. No one who wants God with that intensity would even consider skipping the Sabbath.

Instead, he comes to the Lord, quieting his soul (131:2), knowing God can handle the weighty, mysterious matters of life, placing all his hope in him. To be able to come to a building where this magnificent God was willing to dwell among His people was a privilege and a gift. No wonder King David was so serious about finding the right location for it (132:1-5).

Today, Christians have the Spirit within them, so they don't have to go to a building to know Him, but they continue to need the rhythm of the Lord's Day. Thank God for Jesus and a day each week to celebrate Him.

Saturday, May 23, 2020—Psalms 127-129

The COVID-19 quarantine has given families a great deal more time together. For some, this has been a gift as they have played games, had conversations, and enjoyed one another. For others, this has been challenging as they've balanced work, school, emotions, needs, and expectations. For all, it has likely been a lesson in the value of the family.

As the people of God approached His house for worship, they sang about their own home life and personal goals. They knew if they were not building their lives on the foundation of Yahweh, they were wasting their time (127:1). Rising early and staying up late are useless if one is pursuing something or someone other than Yahweh. One of the most valuable gifts God gives is children, so a parent is wise to give primary focus to shaping them to carry the legacy of Yahweh to the next generation.

Psalms 128 continues this focus on the blessings that come to the home when Yahweh is God. He will provide the fruits of labor. He will enrich the marriage and the family relationships. "Thus is the man blessed who fears the Lord" (128:4). Marriage and family were God's ideas, so it is no surprise He brings flourishing to those aligned with living for His glory.

God is righteous and will free His people from those people and situations that oppress them (129:1-4). He will do this in His time for His glory. Pray for individuals, marriages, and families to live solely for Him.

Friday, May 22, 2020—Psalms 124-126

The COVID-19 crisis has changed the way Sunday mornings look for many. Rather than the tense period of getting dressed, rushing to the car, squabbling on the way, and faking a smile into the church building, Sunday mornings has been much more peaceful as many have gathered in front of a screen for a remote worship service. Getting ready for worship only requires walking to the living room.

Psalms 120-134 are the Psalms of Ascent, a group of songs the Hebrews would sing as they approached Jerusalem for worship. Many would travel great distances, so they were weary. Others were distracted or depressed, so they used these songs to get their souls aligned with Yahweh as they approached His house. Psalm 124 reminded them all, "If the Lord had not been on our side . . ." (124:1), the circumstances of life would have overwhelmed them. Instead, by His grace and help, they escaped.

"As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people both now and forevermore" (125:2). They called on God to bless the righteous and punish the wicked. This was His character, and they asked Him to fulfill that expectation. They had seen Him bring His people out of captivity and cause the nations to take notice. He turned tears into laughter. "The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy" (126:3).

Preparing for worship requires turning the attention from life's circumstances to God's character. Praise Him for who He is and what He has done.

Thursday, May 21, 2020—Psalms 120-123

C.S. Lewis said in *Mere Christianity* that the desires of life are usually fulfilled by the things of life, so if there is a desire that nothing in this world is able to satisfy, that leads to the realization we are made for a life beyond this world. We are not supposed to be completely comfortable or at home here because God has made us for Him in His home. This world is not our final destination. We are only passing through.

The psalmist found himself in that tension. He lived among people who enjoyed

going to war when he was a man of peace (120:6-7). He called on God in his distress to save him from the deceit surrounding him. This was the first song in a set of psalms the people would sing as they approached Jerusalem for worship. Coming to the Temple was a needed reminder that they were made for Yahweh, not for this world.

As they approached Jerusalem, the surrounding hills and high places were dotted with shrines and altars for pagan deities. As they looked to the hills and saw those gods, they remembered where their help came from. They were dependent on Yahweh alone (121:2). He never slept, so He watched over them and kept them from harm. To go to Jerusalem and to the house of Yahweh was a source of great joy (122:1) and a reminder of their total dependence on his mercy to provide and deliver (123:2-4).

Thank God for being real and satisfying what nothing else can.

Wednesday, May 20, 2020—Psalm 119

Psalm 119 celebrates the Law. The psalmist knew God had revealed Himself through His expectations, so the more the psalmist read and obeyed, the more he would know God. The Law was the path to life, so he celebrated that with a memorable song—making eight-line sections with each line in those sections beginning with the same letter. Each section represents successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

(Here is a simple offering in English, with 26 lines of eight syllables.)

All the words of the Law of God
Bless the one who delights in them,
Coming from the Creator God,
Demonstrating His perfection,
Evoking awe, love, trust, desire
For service, allegiance, and praise.
God is holy and needs nothing.
He nonetheless gives us His Word
In mercy, grace, expectation.
Justice, love, righteousness, peace, hope,
Kindness and holiness in our
Living is the outcome when we
Make Him our treasure and teacher.
Never before had a god stooped,
Offering to live among the
People He called His possession,
Quieting their fear, providing
Rest in soul and purpose in life,
Saving them from sin, death, and grave,
Taking their sins upon Himself,
Undoing all that had gone wrong.
Victory won by fulfilling
What was demanded by the Law;
Xenophilia in extreme,
Yearning for those who were His and
Zeal for what is right—that's the Law.

Praise God for giving the Law so we can know Him and the way to be united with Him.