

Sermon & Small Group Study Guide



All of Life is Here
Worship through the Psalms

Contents

Passage	Sunday Sermon	Page
Welcome		2
Small Group Purpose Statement		3
Introduction to Series		4
Why Worship with the Psalms? - Colossians 3:15-17	6 th September	5-6
Confidence - Psalm 46	13 th September	7-8
Confession - Psalm 51	20 th September	9-10
Calm – Psalm 131	27 th September	11-12
Creation – Psalm 104	4 th October	13-14
Complaint – Psalm 39	11 th October	15-16
Closeness – Psalm 63	18 th October	17-18
Confusion – Psalm 73	25 th October	19-20
Celebration – Psalm 98	1 st November	21-22
Cross – Psalm 22	8 th November	23-24
Compassion – Psalm 146	15 th November	25
Christ – Psalm 110	22 nd November	26-27
Advent – 2 Peter 3:1-18	29 th November	28-29
Preparing for Christmas 1 – John 1:1-18	6 th December	30-31
Preparing for Christmas 2 – Luke 1:26-38	13 th December	32-33

Welcome to this new study guide for the autumn teaching series.

This term we are exploring the Psalms - the hymn book of the Bible and of the early Christians.

You may be holding this study guide because you are a member of a small group at St James. That's fantastic! Small groups are key to our strategy for nurture and discipleship, so we are delighted that you are in one. We hope you enjoy using this guide to prepare for your group meetings and then to explore the material together. Being in a small group is by far the best way to learn and grow as a disciple of Christ.

You may be holding this study guide as a member of St James who, for whatever reason, is *not* in a small group. You can find out more about small groups by reading the Small Group Purpose Statement on page 3 of this study guide. If you would like to join one, then please speak to Rob or Johan. If you can't manage that, then we don't want you to miss out on the benefits of the studies. Why not work through the studies yourself after each sermon or, better still, arrange to do them with a friend over a coffee.

The study guide is also available on the church web site – www.stjames-streatham.org

We have had positive feedback on the new feature of blank pages for sermon notes, so we have continued to include them in this guide. Why not bring your study guide to church on Sunday morning and take notes during the sermon, or, if we are still online, do it at home. And, if you miss a sermon, you can always catch up by visiting the church web site where all sermons are posted soon after being preached.

So, fasten your seat belts, here we go!

Small Group Purpose Statement

Small Groups at St James are small, Christ-centred communities meeting regularly for Bible study, fellowship, prayer, worship and service, fun, mutual support, accountability and mission. Group members will encourage each other to grow as active disciples, rather than passive spectators, encourage others to join a group and support those who wish to grow in leadership.

Our expectation is that:

Group members will come to know the saving love of God in their lives more deeply as they pray and study the Bible together.

They will be mutually encouraged to become more like Jesus in every part of their lives.

Group members will support each other in prayer and keep all prayer requests confidential. They will come to trust each other and be accountable to each other for those things the Holy Spirit is prompting them to change in their lives.

Group members will share each other's practical needs and seek to provide what they can to meet them.

They will be encouraged to grow as active disciples rather than passive spectators.

Group members will encourage others to lead and join a group.



Introduction to the Series

“All of life is here!”

This is how one writer characterises the Book of Psalms. The hymn book of the Bible is unlike most modern hymn books in that it isn't just packed with positive, joyful, upbeat songs that *everyone* loves to sing, but includes songs of confusion and complaint, distress and disappointment. We soar on the wings of unadulterated joy in Psalm 98, but also trudge through the valley of despair with tears in our eyes in Psalm 39. All of life is truly here in that these songs emerged from the whole spectrum of human experience and give us a voice to sing to God whatever our circumstances and feelings may be. So, although the word 'Psalms' means 'Praises' this collection of songs and prayers is much more than that.

The Book of Psalms contains 150 songs in our Christian Bible, though slightly fewer in the Hebrew Tanach as some psalms are joined together there. The book is found in the third section of the Hebrew Tanach, the section called Chetuvim or Writings. In fact, such is the dominance of the Book of Psalms within the Writings, that sometimes the whole section is known as The Psalms – see Luke 24:44 where Jesus refers to the three sections of the Old Testament as the Law of Moses (Torah), the Prophets (Nebiim), and the Psalms (shorthand for the Chetuvim or Writings). The Book of Psalms is divided into five main sections or books: Book I (Psalms 1-41), Book II (Psalms 42-72), Book III (Psalms 73-89), Book IV (Psalms 90-106), and Book V (Psalms 107-150). Some tell us the author whilst others are anonymous. David wrote many, hence his reputation as Israel's singer of songs or beloved singer (2 Samuel 23:1). Others were written by Moses, Solomon, Asaph and the sons of Korah. Some psalms tell us the life situation from which they emerged and some even give us musical information as to the tune to be played.

One writer, Walter Brueggemann, suggests that the Book of Psalms has a simple structure to it that helps us appreciate how it can help us as we journey through the ups and downs of life.

Orientation

The book begins with **Psalm 1** which is a confident expression of how life *should* work for those who love God – you should be like a sturdy, well-watered tree, bearing fruit and prospering, unlike the wicked who are blown away like empty chaff.

Disorientation

But we all know that life doesn't always work quite like that! Those who love God can experience suffering and sadness and sin, whilst the wicked can seem to prosper and this can cause us to question God and His ways – we feel disoriented and can lose our grip on God. **Psalm 73** comes slap bang in the middle of the Book of Psalms, as the Hebrew Tanach counts it, and expresses this feeling of disorientation whilst also moving us towards a resolution and a new perspective on life and the ways of God.

Reorientation

The book ends with **Psalm 150**, a song of exalted, unadulterated praise. The implication of this structure is that when you have worked through your disorientation it is possible to come to a place of unconditional praise – *Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!*

So, join us as we dig into the Psalms and learn how to sing and pray biblically in all of life.

Study 1: Why Worship with the Psalms?

Colossians 3 v 15-17

Context:

Colosse was a city in the Roman Province of Asia, modern-day Turkey. Paul writes this letter to the Christians there, though he himself wasn't responsible for planting the church in Colosse and had in fact never visited the city, as far as we can tell. A man named Epaphras, a native of Colosse, had evidently become a believer in Jesus on his travels and had returned home to tell his fellow Colossians the Good News about Christ. He then became a member of Paul's travelling evangelism team and was with Paul when he wrote this letter. Like all Paul's letters to churches, Colossians begins with a reminder of the Gospel and then draws out some implications for their daily lives. In chapter three he gives some brief instructions about public worship and it is here that we focus our attention at the beginning of our series on the Psalms.

Observation:

1. What does Paul exhort them to do in the first part of v 15?
2. What does he tell them to do at the end of that same verse?
3. What does Paul urge them to allow to dwell among them in v 16?
4. How exactly does that happen (v 16)?
5. How should they conduct themselves when they gather for worship (v 17)?

Meaning:

1. The whole of verses 15-17 relate to how Christians should behave when they come together in public worship. What does Paul mean by 'the peace of Christ' (v 15)?
2. The word 'rule' can also mean 'umpire'. How does this help us to understand what Paul means in v 15?
3. What reason does Paul give for this exhortation to peace and why does he give it (v 15)?
4. Why does he end that verse with a command to be thankful?
5. Next Paul urges them to allow 'the word of Christ' to dwell in them. The word 'in' means 'among' i.e. not within individuals but among the gathered church. So, what does he mean by 'the word of Christ'?
6. He then refers to two main ways in which 'the word of Christ' dwells among them richly. First through teaching and admonishing (v 16). Who does he say should do the teaching and admonishing? What implications does this have for us all as church members?
7. The second way in which 'the word of Christ' dwells richly among us is through our sung worship (v 16). Which three types of sung worship does he refer to? What is the difference between them?
8. For the second time in v 15-17 he refers at the end of v 16 to being thankful ('with gratitude in your hearts'). Why should this be the dominant note in our sung worship?
9. In v 17 Paul refers generally to everything we do when we come together as the church for worship – what does it mean to 'do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus'?
10. For the third time he refers to being thankful ('giving thanks to God the Father'). Why such an emphasis on gratitude – 3 times in 3 verses!

Application:

1. How should a church work through tensions in relationships within the church family to obey Paul's command to let the peace of Christ rule/umpire in our hearts? What are the challenges and opportunities?
2. How do you feel about a) having some responsibility to offer teaching & admonition to other church members, and b) receiving teaching and admonition from other church members? How can we ensure this is a positive and life-giving thing?
3. If our sung worship is one of the main ways in which we teach and admonish each other, what does this say about the kind of songs we sing? How should we go about choosing songs for our services? What is more important – the tune or the words?
4. Bearing in mind the strong note about gratitude in these verses, what are some of the ways we can show our gratitude in our public worship gatherings?

Pray:

- For peace in our own church family generally and for God's grace in any particular relationships you find difficult in the church.
- For God's help to be able to give and receive teaching and admonition to and from others in the church family.
- For a richer, deeper and more biblical experience of sung worship at St James – that the songs we sing will be even more effective in teaching us about God.
- For a more thankful heart and the means to show it.

Sermon Notes:

Study 2: Confidence

Psalm 46

Context:

We are told at the beginning of this Psalm that it is a song written for the Director of Music at the Jerusalem Temple. It is written according to *alamoth* – a musical term probably referring to a way of playing the lyre that makes it sound like a group of giggling girls (i.e. very happy and full of life)! It is written by the sons of Korah. They were one of the divisions of Levitical singers who served in the Temple and were descendants of Korah, a man who led a rebellion against his relative, Moses, in the wilderness. How lovely to see that his wickedness did not pass down the family line, but God's grace intervened. Psalm 46 is just one of several Psalms written by the Korahites and it expresses great confidence in God, even in the midst of uncertainty and calamity.

Observation:

1. How is God described in v 1?
2. What is the consequence of this as described in v 2-3?
3. Why is the city of God glad in v 4-5?
4. As well as chaos in creation (v 2-3), where else is threatening chaos seen (v 6)?
5. What is the reassuring promise of v 7?
6. What does God do in v 8-9?
7. Why should we *be still* in the face of the chaotic threats in creation and politics (v 10-11)?

Meaning:

1. The beginning of v 2 suggests that fear is a choice and therefore *not to be afraid* is also a choice. Do you agree with this?
2. How does v 1 encourage us to choose *confidence* rather than *fear*?
3. What kinds of threats do we experience in creation or the natural world (v 2-3) that may cause us to be afraid? Can you share any personal examples?
4. The river mentioned in v 4 is probably a symbolic way of referring to the love and peace which come with God's presence. Can you think of a time when you have experienced the presence of God in the midst of turmoil? What happened?
5. In addition to scary things in the natural world (v 2-3) we can sometimes be fearful of things that happen in the world of politics (v 6). Can you think of any examples, current or past, and how might we take confidence from v 8-9?
6. When the Bible tells us to *be still* (v 10) it usually means something like 'in the face of threats to your security, don't take matters into your own hands, don't panic and try to resolve the situation yourself, but instead trust God and let God be God'. Why is this not an easy thing to do? How can this Psalm help us to do this more? Can you share any personal examples from your own life?

Application:

1. Do you think this Psalm is promising that God will always come to our physical rescue when we are in trouble or danger? Why/Why not?
2. How do we square Luke 21 v 10-19 with what we have learned in Psalm 46 and how in fact do Jesus' words here shed light on how we should interpret Psalm 46.

3. What particular situations are you facing right now that may cause you to be afraid and how does Psalm 46 give you confidence to face them without fear?

Pray:

- For God's grace to believe His words
- For God's help in the fearful situations you are facing
- For God's presence to give you love and peace
- For God's power to enable you to be still and let God be God

Sermon Notes:

Study 3: Confession

Psalm 51

Context:

Psalm 51 is one of the many written by David. As is sometimes the case with David's songs, we are given the specific life-context from which the Psalm emerged. David, elevated by God from young shepherd boy to king, having then risen to the peak of his powers by God's grace, commits spiritual and professional suicide by sleeping with the wife of one of his most trusted soldiers while he is away fighting for the king. David manages to break at least 5 of the 10 commandments in one hit – he coveted his neighbour's wife, stole her away from her husband, committed adultery with her, deceived her husband when he called him back from the battle front, and finally committed murder by having him killed on the battle field. It is like he is sleep-walking through the whole sordid episode and it takes his prophet, Nathan, to wake him up. You may find it helpful to read the story in 2 Samuel 11 & 12 before studying this Psalm. Once David's eyes are opened he prays and we are privileged to be able to listen in on his prayer of confession here in Psalm 51.

Observation:

1. What does David ask God to do for him in v 1-2 and on what basis?
2. How is David honest with God in v 3-4?
3. What stunning biblical truth does David admit in v 5?
4. What does God desire according to v 6?
5. What does David ask God *to do* and *not to do* in v 7-12?
6. What does David say he will do in response to God's mercy in v 13-15?
7. What kind of sacrifices does God require from David in v 16-17?
8. How does David turn to look beyond himself at the end of the Psalm in v 18-19?

Meaning:

1. How does the language of '*blot out*', '*wash away*' and '*cleanse me*' v 1-2 help us to understand the damaging effect of sin on us and the power of God's mercy?
2. David appeals to God's unfailing love and great compassion (v 1). How had he experienced these before in his life and why is it important for us to appeal to God in this way?
3. David doesn't try to justify his sin (v 3-4). Are we ever tempted to wriggle out of our sin by trying to legitimise or excuse what we have done? Why is it important to be honest with God, as David was?
4. What do you think and feel about the biblical truth, referred to by David in v 5, that we are all born sinful (known as the doctrine of original sin)?
5. How are the requests David makes in v 7-12 fulfilled for us in and by Jesus?
6. David pledges to help other sinners to come back to God (v 13) and to praise God for His mercy (v 14-15) in response to what God has done for him. What impact does God's forgiveness and grace have in our lives?
7. Why does David seem negative about animal sacrifices and burnt offerings in v 16, but positive about them in v 19?
8. Why does God not despise a broken spirit and contrite heart (v 17)?
9. Why does David turn his attention away from himself in v 18-19?

Application:

1. How do we think and feel about ourselves when we have sinned? How might this Psalm both challenge and encourage us?
2. How can we avoid the temptation to justify ourselves before God?
3. How do we strike the balance between being deeply sorrowful for our sins (v 17) and yet not remaining so wrapped up in ourselves that we fail to look outwards again (v 18-19)?

Pray:

- For God's grace to identify our sins and bring them to God in honest confession.
- For godly sorrow for our sin, but also grace not to turn inwards on ourselves permanently.
- For God's help to be able to show the effect of his grace in our lives by helping others to seek God's forgiveness and by praising him.

Sermon Notes:

Study 4: Calm

Psalm 131

Context:

Psalm 131 is one of fifteen psalms designated as a Song of Ascent (Psalms 120-134). Three times a year the head of every Israelite family was obligated to travel to Jerusalem to join in the major festivals of the Jewish Calendar – Passover in the Spring, Shavuot (Pentecost) in Summer, and Succot (Tabernacles) in the Autumn. Jerusalem is located up in the Judean hills, so, wherever you travelled from in Israel, you had to *ascend*. The roads would be packed with groups of pilgrims making their way up to the capital and, as they walked, they would sing. The Songs of Ascent were written specifically for these occasions, hence their title. Psalm 131 was written by David. Perhaps, as you read this psalm, you can imagine yourself on route to Jerusalem, travelling with your companions, singing your heart out as you anticipate all that you will see and experience when you arrive.

Observation:

1. What does David say about his heart and eyes in the first half of v 1?
2. What does this mean according to the second half of v 1?
3. In contrast, what has he done in the first part of v 2?
4. What image does he use to describe this experience in the second half of v 2?
5. Where does he turn his attention in v 3?

Meaning:

1. Why would it be wrong to come before God with a proud heart or haughty eyes?
2. What do you think David means by concerning himself with great matters or things to wonderful for him (v 1) and how does this relate to a proud heart and haughty eyes?
3. How can we still and quieten our soul (v 2)?
4. How does the image of a weaned child with its mother make you feel about your relationship with God in prayer?
5. God is almost always referred to in father-like terms in the Bible. Psalm 131 v 2 is one of just a few examples of mother-like language used for God (see also Isaiah 49 v 15 & Luke 13 v 34). Do you find such imagery helpful? Why/Why not?
6. Why does David turn outwards to think of others in v 3?

Application:

1. Can you think of a time when you experienced this intimate sense of calm in prayer?
2. What kinds of things get in the way of us being able to experience this more?
3. How can we overcome these obstacles?
4. In our previous study of Psalm 51, David turned at the end from his own experience in prayer to think of others, so he does the same again here in v 3. How can we avoid making prayer a purely inward, personal, even selfish experience that doesn't turn outwards to think of others?

Pray:

- For a deeper, more intimate prayer life.

- For God's peace in the various stressful situations you are facing.
- For others to experience the mother-like care of God in their lives.
- For forgiveness for the times we come to God with proud hearts and haughty eyes.

Sermon Notes:

Study 5: Creation

Psalm 104

Context:

Psalm 104 is one of many which celebrate the goodness of God in creating and sustaining all life. It is an appropriate Psalm, therefore, for our annual Harvest Festival, which we celebrate on 4th October.

Observation:

1. What are the 'bookends' of this Psalm – the beginning of v 1 and the end of v 35?
2. How is God described in v 1 and the beginning of v 2?
3. What does God create in v 2-4?
4. What does God then create in v 5-9?
5. What are the results of God's provision of water in v 10-18?
6. For what purpose did God make the sun and moon and what are the various activities that take place in day and night (v 19-23)?
7. What was God's guiding principle in creating all things according to v 24?
8. In what ways are all creatures dependant on God (v 27-30)?
9. What does the Psalmist pray will endure forever in v 31 and who does he pray will rejoice in God's creation?
10. How does the writer contrast his fate with that of sinners in v 33-35?

Meaning:

1. The Psalmist begins and ends (v 1 & 35) by speaking to himself, his own soul. Why do you think he does this? Do you ever speak to yourself like this and is it helpful?
2. God is described in v 1-2 as being clothed in splendour, majesty and light. Can you think of any other biblical passages that describe God in this way and what does this description tell us about God?
3. How does the language of v 2-4 help us to imagine the way in which God created the heavens and the skies?
4. There is lots of mention of water in v 6-18, both God's control of it and its benefits to creation. Why is water both a threat to the life of God's creation and essential to its flourishing?
5. What three staples are mentioned in v 15 and why are they celebrated?
6. What does the mention of human work in v 23 tell us about the importance God gives to work in his good creation?
7. How should realising our utter dependence on God (v 27-30) affect the way we live and relate to Him?
8. How does v 24 help to explain the first part of v 31?
9. Do you find it surprising that *God* rejoices in his creation (v 31)?
10. Whilst this Psalm clearly encourages us to join God in rejoicing *in his creation*, what do v 33-34 tell us we should *specifically* rejoice in?

Application:

1. In what kind of situations would we find it helpful to speak to our own soul as the Psalmist does in v 1 & 35?

2. How can we rejoice in God's creation whilst avoiding the temptation of committing idolatry by enjoying *it* rather than *Him*?
3. It is clear from Genesis 2 and from v 23 of this Psalm, that work is a gift of God in creation, something we can do for His glory. Work may be paid employment or voluntary service or the responsibilities of parenting or caring for a loved one. Do you see your 'work' as a good thing, a gift of God, and a means to glorify him and cause him to rejoice? Why/Why not?

Pray:

- Thank God for the goodness of His creation.
- For those who lack sufficient food and clean water to thrive.
- For your work, whatever it may be.
- For eyes to see God's glory more clearly.

Sermon Notes:

Study 6: Complaint

Psalm 39

Context:

Psalm 39 is one of three dedicated to a man named Jeduthun. He was appointed by David, the writer of this Psalm, to a position of responsibility in the Temple. His job was to help lead the worship in the Temple, by playing musical instruments and prophesying (which probably refers to the singing of the word of God, the Psalms). In fact, he also supervised six of his sons who worked alongside him (see 1 Chronicles 16:39-42 & 25:1-3). This is one of the few Psalms of complaint in the Bible and, along with Psalm 88, is one of only two which end in a dark place.

Observation:

1. What does David resolve to do in v 1?
2. What effect did this have in him in v 2-3?
3. When the dam finally bursts and he speaks in v 4-6, what does he ask God to do and what does he say about what God has already done?
4. David is clearly suffering in v 7-11. Who does he blame for his suffering and why? Where does he put his hope and what does he ask for?
5. In v 12-13 what four things does David ask God to do and why? How does he feel about his relationship with God?
6. Does the Psalm end on a positive or a negative note?

Meaning:

1. Though we don't know exactly what form David's suffering takes, we *do* know the direct cause of the suffering is God (see v 7-11). Yet, he resolves at first not to complain about God in the presence of the wicked (v 1). Why do you think he does this?
2. Why do you think this silent stance had such a powerful effect in him (v 2-3)?
3. Why do you think, when he eventually breaks his silence in v 4-6, he speaks the way he does? Is what he says here true or false or a mixture of the two?
4. It is in v 7-11 that David blames God for his suffering, but how does he begin this section in v 7 and how is he able to pray this way when his current experience of God is so negative?
5. What does he ask God to do in v 8 and why? How does this link to v 1?
6. How does David describe the effect of what God has done to him in v 10-11?
7. What does David mean when he says he is an 'alien' and a 'stranger' in v 12? Why does he feel this way?
8. Usually we ask God to look towards us so we may rejoice, but David does the opposite in v 13 – does that surprise you?

Application:

1. The New Testament teaches that, because on the cross Jesus took God's judgement on himself for the sins of all who love him, he never *punishes* Christians for their sin. That would be double jeopardy. However, the New Testament also teaches that God does sometimes *discipline* Christians and may use suffering to do this (see Hebrews 12:7-11). So, what is the difference between *punishment* and *discipline* and what difference should that make to how we respond to suffering in our lives?
2. Have you ever felt like David did in v 2-3? What happened and how did it work out?

3. David is very honest with God in this Psalm. How easy do you find it to be honest with God about your thoughts and feelings?
4. Read Psalm 40:1-3. What do you think is the significance of this being the very next Psalm after David's complaint in Psalm 39? How might this encourage you when you feel like an alien to God, when his hand seems heavy upon you and his discipline overwhelming?

Pray:

- For eyes to see God's disciplinary purpose in our sufferings.
- For a heart to hope in God in the midst of pain and suffering.
- For grace to admit your sin to God.
- For courage to be honest with God in prayer.

Sermon Notes:

Study 7: Closeness

Psalm 63

Context:

We follow a Psalm of bitter complaint (Psalm 39) with one of intimate closeness in Psalm 63. Both were written by David and give us a sense of the whole range of experiences he went through. Like Psalm 39, this one comes out of a situation of trouble, but his response is very different. We are told that he wrote it when he was in the Desert of Judah. This probably refers to a period of time when David was being hunted down by King Saul who was insanely jealous of David and wanted to kill him. David ran to the desert where he found refuge in a cave and here he seeks God with this beautiful song.

Observation:

1. Identify the words in v 1 that express David's feelings and actions with regard to God?
2. What experience does he recall in v 2?
3. How and why does David worship God in v 3-5?
4. How does he spend the night (v 6)?
5. Where does David seek refuge in v 7-8?
6. What is David confident will happen to his enemies in v 9-10?
7. How does this contrast to the fate of David and all who trust in God (v 11)?

Meaning:

1. How does David's physical environment reflect his spiritual feelings in v 1?
2. Have you ever felt this way about God? Describe what happened?
3. The 'sanctuary' in v 2 refers to the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle/Temple, where God promised he would show his glory and meet with his people. How would remembering this powerful spiritual experience have helped David in his time of need?
4. What does David mean when he says that God's love is better than life in v 3?
5. David refers to worshipping God with his voice and his body in v 4-5. What do you think the lifting up of his hands signified and in what ways can we use our body as well as our voice in worship?
6. In what way is our relationship with God and our experience of God like eating a sumptuous banquet (v 5)?
7. What image of God is evoked in v 6-8? – see also Psalm 17:8, 36:5-9, 57:1, 91:4.
8. How does knowing the final fate of his enemies help David in v 9-10?
9. What note does the Psalm end on?

Application:

1. When you are going through a dry time spiritually, does it help you to recall times you felt closer to God?
2. Can you honestly say that you value God's love more than life itself? What would it mean to be able to say this and how would it affect your daily life?
3. How can we encourage members of St James to enjoy a fuller, more expressive form of worship (voice and body), both when we are together in worship and alone?
4. When have you felt as if you have been sheltering under God's wings? How did it feel? What was the outcome?

5. Psalm 63 is one of a number of Psalms that use very strong language to describe a very personal and intimate relationship with God – see also Psalm 42:1-2, 84:1-2. Does this kind of language reflect your own relationship with God? If not, what can you do about it?

Pray:

- For a closer, more personal relationship with God.
- For God's help to value his love more than life itself.
- For freedom to worship him with your whole self.

Sermon Notes:

Study 8: Confusion

Psalm 73

Context:

Psalm 73, the first in Book III, was written by Asaph, who was a prophet and leading temple musician in Jerusalem. This Psalm marks the halfway point of the Book of Psalms and serves as a kind of hinge on which the whole book turns (see Introduction to the Series on page 4). Here Asaph expresses his confusion in the way God seems to treat people and he learns some valuable lessons which he passes on to us.

Observation:

1. How does Asaph express his confidence in God at the beginning of the Psalm (v 1)?
2. What does he say happened to him and why in v 2-3?
3. How does he describe the lot of the arrogant and wicked in v 4-5?
4. What is the result of this in their lives (v 6-12)?
5. How does Asaph describe his own life in contrast to them in v 13-14?
6. What does he say prevented him from speaking like the wicked and arrogant (v 15)?
7. How did he feel in trying to make sense of his experience (v 16)?
8. What was the turning point for him (v 17)?
9. How does he now see the fate of the wicked and arrogant in v 18-20?
10. How does he describe himself before this turning point (v 21-22)?
11. How has his perspective changed in v 23-26?
12. What is the contrast he describes in v 27-28?

Meaning:

1. The Book of Psalms began with a song describing God's goodness to the righteous. How would Psalm 1 encourage Asaph to say what he does in v 1 of this Psalm?
2. How do v 2-12 seem to contradict Psalm 1 and Asaph's confident statement in v 1 of this Psalm?
3. Can you understand his confusion?
4. Why does he think that his attempt to live a righteous and faithful life has been a waste of time (v 13-14)?
5. Why didn't he just turn his back on God and join the wicked (v 15)?
6. Why did he feel so oppressed as he tried to make sense of it all (v 16)?
7. Have you ever felt like this as you have struggled to understand some aspect of God and how he relates to us and to the world? Can you share your experience?
8. Why did coming into God's presence turn the tide for Asaph (v 17)?
9. Why would seeing *this* life in light of the life to come be helpful in resolving Asaph's struggle to understand God's ways (v 17-20)?
10. Asaph's change of perspective enables him to see that having a relationship with God, both in this life and the life to come, is better than anything else (v 23-26). Do you agree with him? How can having God as your greatest treasure, your portion, sustain you in times of trouble and suffering?

Application:

1. Do you ever feel envious of others, even non-Christians? Do you ever feel like being a Christian is a waste of time? Why/Why not?
2. It was when he came into the presence of God that Asaph's perspective changed. How can we make sure we get God's perspective on things and where do we go to get God's perspective?
3. There can be dangers in, on the one hand, living *this* life as though there is no future life to come, or, on the other hand, detaching yourself from this life and just waiting for the future life to begin. What might those dangers be and how can we strike a healthy balance between living faithfully in the present world whilst setting our hopes fully on the life to come?
4. How can we reach the point of being able to say with Asaph: "*earth has nothing I desire besides you*"? What does that mean and how does 1 Timothy 6:17-19 help us to understand what he may be saying?

Pray:

- For God's help in our struggles to understand his ways.
- For a greater desire to read the Bible and get God's perspective on things.
- For a greater desire for God himself to be our treasure.
- For God's grace to live this life in the light of the life to come.

Sermon Notes:

Study 9: Celebration

Psalm 98

Context:

Psalm 98 is anonymous and is one of many songs of celebration in the Book of Psalms. The word 'Psalm' means 'Praises' and this song certainly hits the mark as the writer invites the entire creation to join in his exuberant worship of the LORD.

Observation:

1. Why does the writer command us to sing to the LORD in the first half of v 1?
2. What specifically has the LORD done according to the second half of v 1?
3. To whom has God shown his love and faithfulness and made his salvation known (v 2-3)?
4. What is the overriding emotion expressed in v 4-6?
5. In what ways does the writer command this emotion to be expressed in v 4-6?
6. How is the LORD described at the end of v 6?
7. Who or what else is commanded to join in the worship of God in v 7-8?
8. What reason does the writer give in v 9 for this command?

Meaning:

1. Why do you think the writer commands us to sing a *new* song in v 1?
2. The writer commands us to worship God because of the marvellous deeds of salvation, righteousness, love and faithfulness he has done (v 2-3). From your knowledge of the Old Testament, what are some of the deeds of salvation the writer may have had in mind?
3. From our perspective as Christians, members of the New Covenant, what are some of the marvellous deeds of salvation for which we should praise God?
4. How has God shown and made known his salvation to both Israel and the nations?
5. There is such a strong note of joy and jubilation in v 4-6. Do you ever feel that kind of joy in God? How do you express it?
6. Shouting, singing and loud music is the order of the day in v 4-6. How do you feel about this kind of worship in church?
7. This call to worship widens out to embrace the whole creation in v 7-8. How can creation – the sea and its creatures, rivers and mountains – worship God?
8. The reason creation worships God is because he comes to judge the world (v 9). Why would seas, rivers and mountains be glad that God is coming as judge? Do we think of God's judgement as something for which we should rejoice?

Application:

1. Do you enjoy learning and singing new songs? Why/Why not?
2. Which new song that you have learned recently is your favourite? Why?
3. How can a church make sure it gets a proper balance between the old and the new, and between exuberant joy and quiet reverence?

Pray:

- For God's help to express our joy in him in biblical ways.
- For our worship as a church to be properly biblical and balanced.

Sermon Notes:

Study 10: Cross

Psalm 22

Context:

Psalm 22 was written by David for the Director of Music to the tune of 'The Doe of the Morning'. It is an extraordinary song, which describes a period of intense personal suffering in David's life. Hundreds of years later it was quoted by Jesus as he died on the cross and it therefore also serves as a prophetic song, describing in accurate detail the suffering of Jesus, the son of David.

Observation:

1. What questions does David ask God in v 1?
2. What accusation does he throw at God in v 2?
3. In contrast, what positive things does David say about God in v 3-5?
4. How does he describe his woes in v 6-8?
5. What does David recall as he looks back in his life in v 9-10?
6. What request does he make of God in v 11 and what reasons does he give for this request in v 12-18?
7. What further requests does David make in v 19-21?
8. Something happens between v 21 and v 22 to change David's attitude – how does v 24 describe what happened to bring about this change?
9. As a result, what does he promise to do in v 22 & v 25?
10. How will what God has done impact Israel (v 23 & 26), the Gentiles (v 27-29a), the dead (v 29b) and those not yet born (v 30-31)?

Meaning:

1. Look at the accounts of Jesus' crucifixion in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and see how many links you can make with Psalm 22.
2. God heard David's plea and saved him from death (v 24), but God didn't save Jesus from death. However, how is the *resurrection* of Jesus and its global effects for the living and the dead prophesied in this song (see particularly v 27-31)?

Application:

1. In what sense was Jesus forsaken by God on the cross?
2. Do you ever feel forsaken by God? How does knowing what happened to Jesus help you?
3. David makes it clear that *God* is the one ultimately responsible both for his suffering (v 1 & end of v 15) and his deliverance (v 24 and end of v 31). In what ways do we know that *God* was also ultimately responsible for both the death and resurrection of Jesus (see Acts 2 v 22-24, Acts 3 v 13-15 & 17-18, Acts 4 v 27-30)?
4. How does seeing the events of the cross prophesied hundreds of years beforehand encourage your faith in Jesus and your confidence in the Bible?
5. In what sense does Psalm 22 encourage and inspire the mission of the church?

Pray:

- For all who feel forsaken by God.
- For faith to trust in Jesus during dark times.
- For joy and courage to share the good news with others.

Sermon Notes:

Study 11: Compassion

Psalm 146

Context:

This anonymous Psalm celebrates the mercy and compassion of God and encourages us to put our trust in Him rather than in human help.

Observation:

1. With what phrase does this Psalm both begin and end?
2. For how long will the writer praise the LORD (v 2) and how does that link to v 10?
3. Why should we not put our trust in human sources of help (v 3-4)?
4. In contrast, why should we put our trust in God (v 5-6)?
5. In what ways does God show his compassion in v 7-9?

Meaning:

1. The writer vows to praise God his whole life. Read Psalm 92 v 12-15. How can we make sure that we are still praising God in our old age?
2. Why should the fact that human beings are mortal discourage us from putting our trust in them for help (v 3-4)?
3. How does the description of God in v 5-6 encourage us to look to Him alone for help?
4. Can you think of any examples in the Old Testament of God showing the kind of compassion described in v 7-9?
5. Why does God have such a compassionate concern for the alien, the fatherless and widows (v 9)? – see Deuteronomy 10 v 18, 14 v 28-29, 24 v 17, 24 v 19-22, 26 v 12, 27 v 19.

Application:

1. Does this Psalm discourage us from *ever* looking for human help? Why/Why not?
2. Read Luke 4 v 16-21 and Matthew 11 v 2-6. What is the link between these verses and Psalm 146 and can you give some specific examples of the ways in which Jesus fulfils Psalm 146 v 7-9?

Pray:

- For God's help to trust Him in time of need.
- For those we know who are in particular need right now.

Sermon Notes:

Study 12: Christ

Psalm 110

Context:

Psalm 110, written by David, is the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament – 26 times the writers of the New Testament refer back to this Psalm as a means of explaining who Jesus is and why He came. It is a messianic song – a song that became associated in Israel with the future coming of God’s promised King. So, let’s explore Psalm 110 with a particular eye on what it has to teach us about Christ.

Observation:

1. Who is speaking to who in v 1 and what is promised?
2. What further promises are made in v 2-3?
3. What does the LORD swear in v 4?
4. What will the Lord do in v 5-6?
5. How will he be sustained in v 7?

Meaning:

NOTE: Whenever the word LORD appears in the Bible in this capitalised form, as in v 1, 2 and 4, it is the personal name for God – Yahweh or I AM. On the other hand, the Lord, where only the first letter is capitalised, as in v 1 and 5, means the Messiah or Christ. So, the key to understanding this Psalm is to see it is a conversation between the LORD (Yahweh God) and the Lord (the Messiah, Jesus).

1. In which verses is the Lord referred to as a King or in ‘kingly’ terms?
2. What will the LORD do for the promised King and how will the King exercise his rule?
3. What other role is the Lord given by the LORD (v 4)?
4. In the Old Testament, to be a priest you had to be of the clan of Levi and specifically of the line descended from Aaron, the first Israelite priest. But in whose line does the Lord obtain the role of priest according to v 4?
5. Melchizedek means King (Melchi) of Righteousness (Zedek). So, read Genesis 14 v 18-20 and find as many parallels between Melchizedek and Jesus as you can.

Application:

The best way to understand Psalm 110 is to explore the references to it in the New Testament. So, look up the following references and discuss how Jesus fulfils the Psalm as King & Priest.

- Matthew 22 v 41-46
- Matthew 26 v 64-68
- Acts 2 v 29-36
- 1 Corinthians 15 v 24-27
- Ephesians 1 v 18-23
- Hebrews 1 v 3 & v 13
- Hebrews 5 v 1-6
- Hebrews 6 v 18-20
- Hebrews 7 v 1 – 8 v 2
- Hebrews 10 v 12-14
- Revelation 19 v 11-21

1. What difference does this Psalm and its fulfilment in Jesus make to your life?
2. What does it mean for you that Jesus is God's promised King and perfect Priest?

Pray:

- For God's grace to gladly bow the knee to Jesus the King.
- For God's grace to trust in Jesus the Priest for the forgiveness of sins.
- For God's grace to persevere in faith until Jesus comes again.

Sermon Notes:

Study 13: Advent

2 Peter 3 v 1-18

Context:

These days, Advent tends to mark the beginning of the countdown to Christmas, with Advent calendars even allowing us to tick off the days throughout December until finally we can celebrate the birth of Jesus. However, traditionally Advent was much more about preparing for the *second* coming of Jesus rather than His first coming. This is the one time in the church year when we focus specifically on the biblical teaching regarding the return of Jesus, the end of the age and all that follows. The apostle Peter, writing his second letter in the New Testament, has already had much to say about the return of Jesus by the time he gets to chapter 3. In fact, it is fair to say that it is the main subject of this letter. He is keen to make sure his Christian readers are well prepared for Jesus' coming which could happen any time! So, let's see what he has to say.

Observation:

1. What reason does Peter give in v 1 for writing his letters?
2. What specifically does he want them to recall in v 2?
3. Who does Peter warn his readers about in v 3?
4. What kind of things will they say according to v 4?
5. What two events from the Old Testament do these people deliberately forget according to v 5-6?
6. What are the heavens and earth reserved for, according to v 7?
7. How does Peter describe God's relationship to time in v 8?
8. Why has God not yet brought about the end of the world according to v 9?
9. How does Peter describe the coming of the day of the Lord in v 10?
10. What question does Peter ask in v 11 and how does he answer the question in v 11 and the first part of v 12?
11. What will be the negative and the positive outcomes of the day of the Lord according to the second half of v 12 and v 13?
12. What impact should looking forward to that day have on our lives (v 14)?
13. Why is the Lord patient according to v 15?
14. Who else wrote about these matters according to v 15-16?
15. What do some people do with his writings and why (v 16)?
16. What does Peter warn his readers *not to do* in v 17 and what does he command them *to do* in v 18?
17. What is the ultimate aim and goal of all this according to the final words of v 18?

Meaning:

1. What do you think Peter means by 'wholesome thinking' in v 1?
2. How does v 2 show the value of both Old and New Testaments?
3. Why do you think the scoffers are pouring scorn on the idea of the second coming of Jesus (v 3-4)?
4. How has Peter already addressed this matter in chapter 1 v 16-21? How do these verses show the value of both Old and New Testaments, as in Q2 above?
5. Why would these people deliberately forget the events of the creation and the flood (v 5-6) and how do these past events compare and contrast with the future fate of the world (v 7)?

6. Why can we not hold God to our concept of time (v 8-9a)?
7. The second half of v 9 is often understood to mean that God wants every single human being to be saved and so he is patiently delaying the end of the world until that happens. However, how do we know Peter is talking here about those who are *already* Christians rather than those who are *not yet* Christians and how is this confirmed by v 11, v 14-15, v 17-18? - see also chapter 1 v 5-11.
8. What is the *dual* motivation for living a holy and godly life according to v 11-14?
9. How does v 16 support the view that Paul's writings were understood by Peter to carry the same authority as the Old Testament?
10. What will be the ultimate fate of anyone who deliberately distorts the Scriptures (v 16)?
11. What principles of discipleship does Peter encourage in v 17-18?

Application:

1. Looking at this passage as a whole, what value does it place on Scripture? How can we ensure that we value Scripture in the same way?
2. Do people today scoff at the idea of Jesus' return and the day of judgement? How does this passage help you to answer those who scoff in this way?
3. How does understanding God's view of time help you in your daily life?
4. How does it make you think and feel knowing that the reason God is delaying the end is because he is patiently waiting for backsliding Christians to get themselves right with God?
5. Why is it important to have both the negative thought of the destruction of the world and the positive thought of the new creation in our minds as motivation to live holy and godly lives?

Pray:

- For faith to believe God's word despite many scoffers.
- For God's grace to stay close to Him and live a holy and godly life.

Sermon Notes:

Study 14: Preparing for Christmas Part 1

John 1 v 1-18

Context:

The Bible begins with the words 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' (Genesis 1 v 1). John's Gospel starts by telling us about the beginning that came *before* the beginning of creation in Genesis. What existed before the universe came into existence? Well, John gives us the answer here in 1 v 1-18 and it is absolutely stunning and mind-boggling.

Observation:

1. What mind boggling truth does John tell us in v 1-2?
2. What did the Word do according to v 3?
3. How is the Word described in v 4-5?
4. Who is introduced in v 6 and what was his role in v 7-8?
5. What was the general reaction to the Word, the true light, when he came into the world (v 9-11)?
6. How do you receive him according to v 12?
7. What right is given to those who receive him (v 12)?
8. How are these children born according to v 13?
9. How did the Word come into the world according to v 14a?
10. What did he show when he came (v 14b)?
11. What did John the Baptist say about him in v 15?
12. What have we received from him according to v 16?
13. John finally reveals the identity of the Word, the true light, who became flesh, in v 17 – who is he?
14. How does he contrast with Moses (v 17)?
15. What has he done according to v 18?

Meaning:

1. The Word ('Logos' in Greek) is the name or title given to Jesus before he took on humanity. How can He both *be* God and yet *be with* God (v 1-2) – see the second half of v 14 and v 18 for further clues.
2. How does it make you feel when you hear that the pre-incarnate Jesus was involved in the creation of the universe (v 3-4)? – see also Colossians 1 v 15-17 & Hebrews 1 v 1-2.
3. What do you know about John the Baptist and his ministry? How did he fulfil his role of testifying to the light (v 6-8)?
4. John tells us the darkness didn't understand Jesus (v 5), the world didn't recognise him (v 10) and His own, i.e. Israel, didn't receive him (v 11). Why do you think this was the case and what examples of this rejection do we see in the life and ministry of Jesus?
5. Can you think of any examples of people who *did* receive Jesus in the Gospels (v 12)?
6. In a sense, we are all children of God due to being created by Him (see Acts 17 v 24-29). However, v 12 – 13 tell us that, in another sense, only *some* people are God's children. What has to happen *to us* and what do we have *to do* to be counted as God's children?
7. The word translated 'made his dwelling among us' in v 14 literally means 'tabernacled among us'. From what you know of the Tabernacle in the Old Testament and from what John says in the rest of v 14, what is John telling us about Jesus? – see also John 2 v 19-22.

8. How do we solve John the Baptist's riddle in v 15?
9. The blessings of v 16 are contrasted with the Law of Moses in v 18. How did Jesus bring the blessings of grace and truth and what examples can you find of this in the Gospels?

Application:

1. The biblical teaching that Jesus is both human and divine is both difficult to understand and absolutely crucial to believe. How can we make sure we hold onto this teaching in an age of scepticism? What is at stake if we reject this teaching?
2. What are some of the blessings you have received from Jesus (v 16)?
3. If Jesus shows God's glory (v 14) and makes God known (v 18), what can we say about the character and ways of God by looking at Jesus' life and ministry?

Pray:

- For God's grace to hold onto biblical truth even when it is difficult to understand.
- With thanksgiving for all the blessings we receive from Jesus.

Sermon Notes:

Study 15: Preparing for Christmas Part 2

Luke 1 v 26-38

Context:

Well, it's almost here, so it is time we turned to a classic Christmas Bible passage! Luke, a medical doctor and travelling companion of the apostle Paul, begins his Gospel by establishing the historical basis for what he is about to write (1 v 1-4). Everything he writes about Jesus he learned from eyewitnesses and then verified by his own research. So, we can be confident of the truth and reliability of what we are about to study in 1 v 26-38. In fact, Luke probably received it from Mary herself.

Observation:

1. When does this event begin according to v 26?
2. Who does God send and where does he send him in v 26?
3. To whom is he sent (v 27)?
4. What greeting does he give on his arrival (v 28)?
5. How did Mary react in v 29?
6. What stunning news does Gabriel give to Mary in v 30-33?
7. What practical problem does Mary come up with in v 34?
8. What solution does Gabriel give in v 35?
9. What example does he give to encourage Mary to believe him in v 36?
10. How does he conclude his speech in v 37?
11. How does Mary respond in v 38?

Meaning:

1. To what does the sixth month refer in v 26? – see v 36 for a clue.
2. Referring back to the Old Testament, why should the fact that Mary was a virgin and Joseph was a descendant of David arouse our interest (v 27)?
3. Why should Gabriel's greeting cause Mary such angst (v 28-29)?
4. What is so significant about the name to be given the child – Jesus (v 31)?
5. Referring to Isaiah 9 v 6-7, why are Gabriel's words in v 32-33 so significant?
6. Gabriel's solution to Mary's practical objection (v 35) sounds simple, but is hugely theologically and scientifically profound! It is the means by which John's words in John 1 v 14 came true (see previous study). So, how do you think it happened – how did the eternal Word unite with Mary in such a way as to produce Jesus, so that he would be both fully human and fully divine?
7. From your knowledge of the rest of the Gospel story, what would Mary's agreement to God's plan (v 38) mean for her life, both positive and negative?

Application:

1. How do we feel when God gives us a difficult task to do for Him? What can we learn from Mary's response?
2. How do we get our minds around the complex teaching about the humanity and divinity of Jesus? Do we find it spiritually inspiring or intellectually embarrassing?

3. If it took God hundreds of years to fulfil his promise to send the Messiah and yet Paul says it happened 'when the time had fully come' (see Galatians 4 v 4), how might this encourage us to trust God for the biblical promises he hasn't yet fulfilled?

Pray:

- For courage to respond to God's call as Mary did.
- For faith to believe the complex teaching about the person of Jesus in spite of scepticism.

Sermon Notes: