

One of the highlights for us this summer was my nephew's wedding in Plymouth, a wonderful event. The couple attend King's Cross Baptist Church in London, and their Pastor conducted the wedding service at the Methodist Hall in Plymouth! His message to the couple was based on the gospel of Matthew, 22:30, where Jesus says, *At the resurrection, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; we're beyond marriage at the resurrection. As with the angels, all our ecstasies and intimacies then will be with God.*

I wondered how the Pastor was going to deal with this passage and I was wonderfully surprised to hear him say, *If you think marriage here and now is wonderful bliss, it is! But wait until the resurrection when there will be no marriage. The emotional highs of marriage today, are nowhere near the emotional high you will experience in the presence of God, which the angels experience in their continuous worship of God.*

Worship is something of which we know very little, and understand even less. In the next few months, until the start of Advent, we will take a look at the Psalms, a request made by several in the congregation, **AND** those in the Thursday Bible Study group at Seacourt Bungalows.

The Psalms are appreciated as a wonderful collection of worship liturgy. Turn to any page in the collection of 150 Psalms, and you will find words, phrases, sentences and expressions to use in your own prayers. God will not penalise you for plagiarising the Psalms to worship Him; He has given us the collection of Psalms, which covers every known human emotion, to **use** in worship!

I would not be alone in saying, most people turn to the Psalms when they are hurting. In 2014, someone *re*-wrote a popular psalm to reflect our nation's angst:

The politician is my shepherd. I'm in want.
He maketh me lie down on park benches.
He leadeth me beside the still factories and boarded up offices.
He disturbeth my soul.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of depression
and recession,
I anticipate no recovery, for he is with me.
He prepareth a reduction in my income in the presence of my
enemies.
He anointeth my meagre income with extra taxes.
My expenses runneth over into savings.
Surely unemployment and poverty shall
follow me all the days of my life,
And I shall dwell in a mortgaged house forever.

We recognise this as a parody of Psalm 23, and it is not disrespectful to do this, because the Psalms are expressions of human joy and pain, expressed before a righteous God, who is able and willing to carry us through.

The first thing we learn about the Psalms is that they reveal the character of God! The writers and composers of the Psalms experienced God through the joys, pains and sorrows of their own lives; they reached out to Him because they **KNEW** His character, that there is none more righteous, more loving, none who can forgive and no one more wanting to lift us up and rescue us from the corruption that is this world.

We relate to Psalm 23 as one which is very comforting. It has been called *The Pearl of Psalms*. Of the 118 words comprising the Psalm, 116 are devoted to explaining the first two - THE LORD.

The Psalm is not so much about green pastures, still waters, tables set for a picnic on perfect manicured lawns, and cups over-flowing with God's bounty and goodness.

The Psalm is about **God** who **makes** us to lie down in green pastures, who **leads** us beside still waters. It is about the ONE who prepares the table and fills our cups to overflowing. The whole Psalm describes the character of God, our Shepherd. This Psalm offers us the opportunity to consider and reflect on the many names of God, because each Name describes His character.

The LORD My Shepherd

The LORD Will Provide

The LORD My Peace

The LORD My Healer

The LORD My Righteousness

The LORD Is There

The LORD Our Banner

The LORD My Sanctifier

The LORD Most High

Every Psalm is rich in its description of God. Every Psalm draws us in, to worship this marvellous God; Every Psalm invites us into a deeper relationship with Him.

Many years ago, I remember reading Psalm 25 to a businessman about to lose a sum of money which started with a number close to 10 and followed by six zeroes. He was nervous, because he knew it was beyond his control to stop the instant loss about to happen, but as we started to read the Psalm, slowly and meaningfully, his breathing relaxed. Let me

read Psalm 25 and you will appreciate the impact it has on someone who was facing the biggest crisis in his life.

The man knew exactly where the deal had gone wrong and he did lose the sum of money shortly after we read Psalm 25 and prayed, but he understood that things can go wrong, that God is not here to turn things around at our beck-and-call. All he wanted was the assurance that God would see him through the disaster, that his family would not suffer, that he not be put to shame before those who would gloat over his misfortune.

Psalms are a powerful therapy to redirect our thoughts and prayers to Him who can and will make a difference.

Reading a Psalm can often be like listening to a favourite song on the radio, realising the words reflect our own mood and emotions, and saying, *Listen, They are playing my song!*

But therein **ALSO** lies the danger: we begin to think the Psalms are for our emotional benefit and well-being. This is a very distorted view of worship. Worship is not about us feeling good in the presence of God. Worship of God is not like Mummy kissing the boo-boo and making it well.

Let me leave you with three thoughts to keep in mind as we journey through the next 12 weeks, exploring the Psalms.

1. We have already noted, the Psalms reveal the character of God! Writers and composers of the Psalms encountered and experienced God through the joys, pains and sorrows of their own lives, and they approached Him because they **KNEW** His character. In Psalm 25 we just read, *The Lord confides in those who fear Him; He makes His covenant known to them.* To anyone experiencing emotional distress,

God reveals Himself as the One who will confide His plans to them, only if they would hold Him in awe and revere Him. The character of God is not to abandon us, or leave us to our mistakes and misdemeanours, rather to pour out His love on us, because He has compassion for us.

If you ever want to know who God is, read the Psalms and discover God's faithfulness, his justice, how he feels about sin, and the character of his Messiah.

2. The Psalms offer us a framework, a foundation, a supporting structure to live life. The very first Psalm tells us, *Blessed is the person who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers. But their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law they meditate day and night. Such a person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever they do, prospers.*

The last Psalm (150) tells us, *Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.*

The first and last Psalms are like bookends to the whole collection: Live life with the law of God in your heart and mind, and praise God with your every breath!

3. The Psalms are an answer to real life situations. Not only do the Psalms provide a framework for living life, but the Psalms were written and composed by real people, in response to real feelings and actual situations; they are powerful expressions of human emotion, before a Holy and caring God, who is ready to forgive mistakes and restore us into a proper relationship with Him, **AND** who is ready to see us through unfavourable circumstances over which we have no control.

Over the next 12 weeks, we shall let the Psalms help us grapple with something of which we know very little and understand even less, a single question which has bothered the human race since creation, which is, *How then **DO** we worship God?*

The worship of God is not about what we do or don't do; the worship God is not about us feeling good about ourselves. True worship is to allow God to meet us, to offer Him our confession that we cannot make our lives perfect and we cannot set the world right, to accept His forgiveness and let Him change our hearts and minds to accept His ways. This confession is important, not to God, but for us, to accept our limitations, turn from our self-defined ways, and accept God's plan for us. *The Lord confides in those who fear Him; He makes **His covenant** known to them!*

As we embark on this journey into the Psalms, I urge you to leave aside any preconceived ideas about God and about worship, and let the Psalms give you a new framework of life to make your own. **AMEN**