

Weekly Devotional



August 1-5, 2011

Prayers

This week in preparation for our sermon on Sunday we are looking at some of the Psalms that speak of God's greatness. As with most poetry and music, these Psalms are meant to be felt more than dissected. Allow your heart to soar in praise as you read them. I am indebted to John Stott and his book, *Favorite Psalms*, for many of the thoughts this week.

Be sure to pray for the children and counselors at Indian Village each day this week.

Monday: Pray for those who suffer because of the actions of others. Pray for the ability to forgive.

Tuesday: Pray for provision and jobs for those out of work.

Wednesday: Pray for government leaders, for wisdom, and for the ability to do what is right over what is expedient.

Thursday: Pray for those who serve others, those in our military, those who are missionaries, those who work for mission organizations (Cargo of Dreams, World Vision, International Justice mission, Compassion).

Friday: Pray for those suffering from starvation, war, AIDS, and extreme poverty around the world.



Monday

Psalm 19



We are in a series titled “Truth.” How do we know that there is a God? Psalm 19 gives three answers. It proclaims that God has made Himself known as Creator, Lawgiver, and Redeemer.

The Psalm begins by celebrating God as Creator. It is hard to be away from civilization at night, looking up at all the stars, and question the reality of God. Or stand on the rim of the Grand Canyon, walk on the shores of Lake Louise, or watch a beautiful sunset and try to say that there is no God. Look at the hands, feet, and tiny nails of a newborn. How can one say that there is no God? When one contemplates the details of the human body, or realizes that a chair is not solid at all but made up of lots of tiny cells with atoms and electrons constantly in motion, one needs to ask, “How could all of this happen by chance?” I do have to admit that some days I question God. But when that happens, all I need to do is get out in nature and my questions are cut down to size. Today get filled up on God—take a few minutes to sit outside and enjoy His creation.

Psalm 19 not only looks to the heavens, but the Psalmist also reminds us that the very law of God gives us proof of His existence. The first six verses talk about God the Creator (El in Hebrew), but in the next four verses (v. 7-10) God is referred to as Lord, Yahweh, the covenant-making God of Israel who has revealed His will to His people. How do I know that God is real? His laws are trustworthy, right, radiant, pure, sure and righteous. His law works. Test it out for yourself. Does not life go better when one is obedient to God’s Word? I find it hard to forgive, and yet forgiving brings freedom from hate, anger and hurt. I do not like giving a tithe, but giving frees me up from feeling like I need to “clutch” onto things.

Finally, the Psalmist celebrates that God has revealed Himself as Redeemer. We all need help, and God stands ready to step in where we fall short. Today take comfort in His power, majesty and ability to create out of nothing. Find a sure foundation in the boundaries He sets for us. Find peace in knowing that He stands ready to step in when we fall short.

Tuesday

Psalm 104



Today I suggest you read Psalm 103 and 104. In a sense they belong together, both beginning and ending with the same words. Psalm 103 tells of the goodness of God in salvation; Psalm 104 tells of the greatness of God in creation. Psalm 103 depicts God as a Father with His children; Psalm 104 depicts God as the Creator with His creatures. Psalm 103 talks of God's benefits; Psalm 104 talks of His works. Psalm 104 follows approximately the same order of events written in Genesis 1.

As I read about God's care for His creatures, I am reminded of Matthew 6:25-34. If God cares and provides for flowers and animals, how much more will He look after me? And in Romans 8:31-32, Paul tells us that God would rather allow His Son to die on a cross than spend eternity without us. Wow! If this is the God we worship, why worry? Instead go into today with confidence.

The problem is that we have focused our lives on things that pass away. As Psalm 104 laments about sinners who spoil creation, so today we lament over the mess civilization has made of life. Rather than community we have war. Rather than peace we have worry. Rather than beauty we have trash. While we are driving to work in rush-hour traffic, it is hard to have our hearts soar in praise as the Psalmist does. As in the Garden of Eden, Satan wants to redirect our gaze from the goodness of God to an attitude of doubt and question concerning His provision. Today don't let Satan have the upper hand. Read these Psalms and rejoice. Our God is good—all the time.

If this is true, why do people question the existence of God? Simply because having the view of God that the Psalmist has takes us out of the center of the universe and puts God in that place. Such a view of God brings humility. Such an understanding of God requires trust, obedience, and a little bit of healthy fear. And we would rather be lord over our own lives than living in the posture of humble obedience. But when I read these Psalms, I realize how small I am and yet how greatly loved I am. I am freed up to live rather than strive.

What brings you down? Why not let God lift you up? Turn off the news or that life-depleting computer game and turn on some praise music.



Wednesday

Psalm 139

Psalm 139 has been called “the crown of all Psalms.” It speaks of God’s omniscience (God is all knowing—v. 1-6), His omnipresence (God is present everywhere—v. 7-12), His omnipotence (God is all powerful—v. 13-18) and His judgments (His righteous judgments rightly combine love and justice—v. 19-24).

The verbs in this Psalm paint a picture of God’s perfect knowledge. He searches, knows, perceives, discerns and is familiar with everything about us—our thoughts, deeds, and words. He is able to do this because He not only created us but is present with us. In fact, He “hems” us in. I love the picture of God surrounding me with His presence, almost like a coat of arms, or placing me in the cleft of a rock for protection. It is a picture of God holding me, protecting me, loving me, guiding me, and taking any blows towards me onto Himself. Even in the midst of the darkest days of my life, God is present as a light in the darkness. And when I try to run from God, He runs with me, protecting me even from myself.

God is able to do this because He is all-powerful; He is the one who made me perfectly and with a particular significance. Whether this Psalm celebrates predestination or foreknowledge will be an argument for the centuries. Scripture constantly supports both the idea of predestination and free will. Humanly, we cannot put these opposite ideas together, and thus we sometimes compromise with the idea of foreknowledge. No matter which side of the argument one falls on, we can find comfort and strength during the darkest of times in the knowledge that God is one step ahead of every event that occurs in my life, that nothing catches Him off guard or unprepared, and that nothing outside of His will can befall me.

The final set of verses (v. 19-24) almost feels jarring. At times I love the fact that God will take care of my enemies; thus, I do not have to. But these verses are actually more like a prayer: God, may I be as upset with sin as You are. May my heart be broken by the things that break Your heart. But may I act with the same love that You have—the love that does not want to judge but wants to save even the worst of sinners.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to you today through this Psalm?

Thursday

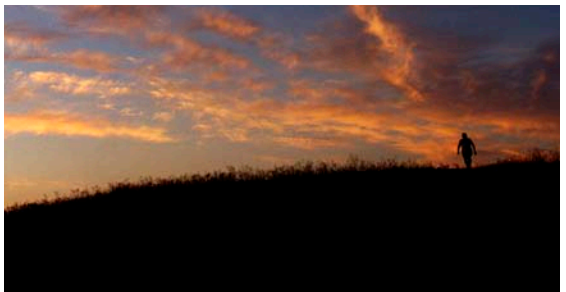
Genesis 1

“In the beginning”...God. God existed before all things. He is over all things, and according to John 1 nothing exists without God having made it. For centuries these verses brought a sense of order, foundation, comfort, accountability and direction. But with our modern world’s reliance on science, rather than providing a foundation upon which we can build a belief system that makes sense of our lives, we are left defending God against the questions of non-believers. Our response too often is to skip over these first chapters of Genesis and turn instead to the New Testament. It is as if God and science are mutually exclusive.

Much of our discussions goes back to questions about how old the earth really is. Is a “day” in Genesis 1 a literal 24-hour day? Is the order of creation noted in Genesis 1 completely accurate? In seeking to defend Genesis 1, we end up not being able to see the forest from the trees, and we argue over matters that God never intended to stress. Or we defend scientific theory as if it is scientific law. I believe that some day when we fully understand both science and God we will discover they are not in conflict at all. In the meantime, both sides (scientists and theologians) often argue for positions I do not believe are totally accurate.

For example, I do not believe that the vast majority of biologists today are strict Darwinists. And most theologians would not argue for a literal 24-hour day. Personally, I use to be more of a 24-hour, young earth person until I began to travel. As I looked at God’s magnificent creation, one day I asked, “What fun is it to snap your fingers and create a great work of art? Half the fun is in the creating...maybe it is the same with God.” I don’t know—just a thought.

What I do know is what Genesis 1 does teach: God created from nothing to something, and it was good. God created with a purpose in mind. God created us with freedom, responsibility, and authority (freedom of choice, responsibility to care for creation, and authority to rule over it as a good steward). It is that last sentence that gives me pause. How am I doing with my place in creation?



Friday

Romans 1:14-32



R. Kent Hughes in his commentary on Romans discusses the downward spiral of unbelief. He says it starts with suppression of truth, leading to perversion of the truth and finally perversion of life. The result is sensual depravity, mental depravity and finally the approval of depravity, which is the ultimate dimension of depravity. It is all too easy to trace this spiral decline in our world today.

When a child does something wrong, the excuse often comes, “But I didn’t know.” How often do we look back on our lives saying, “If I only knew then what I know now”? Such an excuse does not stand in a court of law and neither does it stand ultimately with God. At the end of my life, my issues are not the responsibility of my upbringing, my parents, my spouse, my employer, the economy, my luck. Ultimately the issues of my life are my responsibility. The question is: Am I taking responsibility or trying to suppress it or deny the truth?

Paul here is painting a picture of why people fall into sin. He will eventually conclude that all have sinned and fall short of God and need a savior. (Thanks be to God; He provided one.) The reason why people today do not believe in God is not because He is hard to know but because they do not want to admit their need of Him (thus suppression, denial, and depravity).

Often I find people who say the Scripture is hard to understand. But we are not called to fully understand; just act on what we do understand. But that is the problem. There are things God asks me to do that I childishly say “no” to and the downward spiral begins. However, when I say “yes” and respond in obedience, I find that my understanding of God—along with my sense of His presence, love, and grace—is growing.

The problem of unbelief is not just with those who down and outright deny the existence of God. The problem is also with those who believe but do not want to obey. We all too often suppress the still small voice of God. Someone once said, “If we no longer sense God’s presence, He is not the one who moved.”

Are you sensing a distance from God? Is there something He has called you to do that you have said “no” to? When we sense distance from God, maybe it is because we have moved away from Him?



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