

May 27, 2018
Lesson 12: Rejoicing in Restoration
Scripture: Psalm 34:1-10

Context:

Our last lesson on giving praise to God comes from two books. One is the book of the bible known for praising God, the Psalms. Through this collection of writings, one hears both the individual and corporate expressions of praise, intercession, thanksgiving, and lament. Psalms are a form of poetry in which the writer identifies a situation, expresses it through poetry, and is used in a religious community for which it was composed.¹ The composition of psalms began with corporate worship in Israel as they became a part of the canon of Israelites.² Psalms were a way of connecting God to both individuals and communities.

The psalm for today's reading is one attributed to King David as the first line suggests. Much like other psalms, like Psalm 25, Psalm 34 has an instructional function to teach about the cry for help and the thankful praise for when help comes.³ The text is a reference to 1 Samuel 21:13 in which David flees from Saul to the land of Abimelech. He pretends to be mad so that the king will not see him as a threat and eventually escapes home.

The psalm is instructional as it narrates what David would have felt in his situation. The main focus in the first part of the psalm is faith in constant prayer and faith in God who hears prayer.⁴ The psalm is an affirmation of those who seek God especially when they are in times of distress or peril. It is not a plea for rewards, but instead a plea for the faithful to remember that in the midst of a broken heart, the Lord is near.⁵ Thus, while functioning as a prayer of intercession, it is also a prayer of thanksgiving for God who never abandons people.

As the psalmist praises God, there is deliverance from fears and there is salvation from God who listens and saves the psalmist. God knows the suffering people and sits with them in the distress. The closing lines of the message speak of the Israelites as being God's holy people who will be equipped for the world and will lack nothing.

Perhaps the line that always draws the most attention is verse eight: "Taste and see that the Lord is good." The word "taste" is presented as an experience to come and discover what the psalmist seeks to explain. While there are different interpretations, the

¹ James L. Mayes, "Psalms," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY 2011), 7.

² *Ibid.*, 9.

³ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

basic gist is that one should try the pursuit of peace and the practice of prayer as the means to experience God's gift of life through reward and salvation.⁶ Experiencing God is something that takes time and intentionality. It is a constant daily activity where one is renewed by God.

The second text used in today's lesson is the book of Hebrews, written to the early church. The book has a high understanding of Christology. The two verses selected from chapter two state how Jesus came to earth to be human as the high priest and connects humanity to the Triune God. Jesus is seen as a gift; one that reconciles humanity to God.

Application:

For food lovers, the psalm is a big hit. To "taste" and see that the Lord is good sounds like a wonderful dish full of flavor and fulfilling. I have even seen this verse used with Hershey's kisses as a way to remember that God has given us good things to experience and enjoy.

We all have our favorite things that give us joy. We can name our families, our friends, our hobbies, our jobs, and even food as things that give us pleasure and satisfaction. We know that they are good things because we experience the joy they bring us. Families nurture us, friends give us companionship, hobbies allow us to discover our inner creative spark, jobs give life meaning, and food gives us sustenance. Yet all those things are but a part of the larger picture.

For Christianity, the greatest gift that we "taste" and receive is the reconciliation and healing that God offers us through Jesus Christ. Even though we have those other things that give us pleasure or security, the more transformative gift comes from Jesus Christ. Often those other things give momentary pleasure, something fleeting. But when the going gets tough, there is the need for someone else to hold you. At times families will be at odds with one another, friendships will either fall apart or become disconnected, jobs may change, and even food will lose favor. But faith will give direction and will give hope. Everyone else may abandon you, but Jesus will not. Jesus will stand by your side.

Scripture is replete with examples of where Jesus felt all the feelings we feel. He felt the joy of companionship as he traveled with the disciples. He felt the satisfaction of teaching and healing people. He felt the need for renewal and Sabbath when too much was going on. He felt the pain of loss as he cried when Lazarus was dead. He knew anger at injustice as he overturned the tables in the marketplace. He knew the feeling of being betrayed as his disciples fell asleep in the garden and Judas Iscariot gave him to the chief priests and scribes. He knew the sadness of leaving people behind as he handed his mother over to the disciple he loved while on the cross. He felt pain as he was whipped, beaten, and then struggled to breathe upon the cross. He even experienced the rattle of his last breath just as we will all do one day.

Whatever we face, our Lord has been there and known that life is not easy. But it is worth living as we get a "taste" of all that our Lord experienced in his own life. We are reminded that to "taste and see that the Lord is good," brings us to experience the peace and reassurance that God is with us in all moments, both good and bad. God is in the

⁶ Ibid., 154.

midst of it all, holding our hand and reminding us that to lean on him will carry us even when we cannot see.

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