

A Jet Tour Through the Psalms

Psalms Series

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Bible Text: Psalms

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Life sometimes turns on decisions that seemed trivial at the time. Many years ago, I went to a Denny's restaurant with people I barely knew. I met Nancy that night and history has told the story since then, you might say. I had no idea what was going to happen that night and it didn't seem like a big deal to go or not to go but I went and the trajectory of my life was changed. Other times, you're aware of the great moment and you feel the excitement even though you don't know all the implications of what it will eventually mean. You take a new job. The moving truck pulls out of the driveway to the new destination. The boy shows the ring. The mom goes into labor for the first time. And you know that the implications of that day, that time, are great and significant even though you don't know how all of the details will flesh out. You're conscious of the fact that life is changing today. Well, today is one of those days in the life of our church. As we start a new study that is going to transform our church, that is going to transform our lives, that is going to change me and is going to change you and we will look back on this day months, years from now and say, "It all started right then." And that is incredibly exciting to me. I have been looking forward to this moment over the past many, many months to start this series today with a great sense of anticipation. I don't know when I've last been this excited to be in the pulpit before you.

Today we are starting a series today in the book of Psalms and I invite you to turn to the Psalms with me this morning. Today and next week on Sunday morning, we're going to introduce the Psalms as an introduction to the summer series that we're going to do on Tuesday evenings and you have information about that in your bulletin. So this Sunday and next Sunday are a means of inviting you, as it were, to the transformation that the Psalms are going to make on our lives first of all, and secondarily to invite you and hopefully to entice you to whet your appetite for what's going to happen on Tuesday evenings. If you are a Christian who wants to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, I'm telling you, you don't want to miss it because it is going to be a transforming, great moment that plays itself out for the rest of life to come. I am incredibly grateful to God to have the opportunity to open this this morning.

The Psalms are the life worship book of the Bible and one of the things that makes it so wonderful to study the Psalms is that we see ourselves in them. We see ourselves in our

joy and in our sorrow, in our sin and in our repentance, in our trust and in our doubts. The Psalms give inspired voice to our life experience as we seek to walk with Christ. We see ourselves reflected back. We see God having given to us a book that speaks and expresses the deepest things of our heart. And not only expresses it, but tells us how to get from point A to point B; to move from sorrow and discouragement to joy and triumph; to move from sin to repentance; to move from an earthly perspective to a heavenly perspective. Beloved, if you are a born again Christian, that is what you want out of life. You want to see Christ. You want to have your attention, as it were, someone to take your chin and lift it up, to look up, to see Christ, to see God, to see him in his glory and to transcend this fallen world in which we live. Well, today is an introduction to the Psalms. You can think about this as a jet tour through the Psalms. We're going to go through them from Psalm 1 to Psalm 150 today and I am just delighted to be able to do that with you. I know you're saying, "How can that possibly be? You know, this is Mother's Day, right? And we've got things to do." Trust me.

The book of Psalms, as you know, is comprised of 150 individual Psalms and the purpose of the Psalms is to call us to a life of righteousness, of praising and trusting God. That is the purpose of the Psalms. They call us to praise the Lord. And what you may not be as familiar with in terms of numbers, is that the 150 Psalms are divided into five different books of Psalms that were written over a period of 900 years and then compiled into a final form in which we receive them today. Moses wrote Psalm 90 about 1,400 years before the time of Christ. 400 years later, King David came on the scene and wrote Psalms, about 73, almost half of the Psalms are ascribed to David in one manner or another. 400 years later after Moses wrote his Psalm. 4-500 years after David, in the Babylonian exile, a Psalm is penned, Psalm 137, and expressed the sorrow of the exile. Moses in 1400, in exile in the sixth century, all through the course of 900 years, the Psalms were written. And as you read the Psalms, as you study the Psalms, there is something striking. There is something very interesting when you step back and look at that fact. The Psalms as we have them today, are not arranged in a chronological fashion. Psalm 1 is not the oldest Psalm, Psalm 150 is not the newest Psalm. They have been arranged somehow and at the same time as we're going to see this morning, these Psalms are not just thrown together either. It's not a haphazard collection like somebody shuffled a deck of cards and then what ever came up they said, "Here, pick your card. We'll start with this first one." It's not like that at all. What we're going to see today, what I want you to learn today, is that the very way that the entire book of Psalms is constructed is to teach us. It's more than just what one individual Psalms says to us as important and as inspired as that is, the very way that they are arranged probably by Ezra, is designed to communicate, to teach and to instruct us and that is what I want to show you here today.

Psalms is a big, big book and there is a movement, there is a broad structure there to that book and that structure is designed to teach us. Beloved, what I want you to see more than anything this morning, is that the very way that the Psalms are structured is designed to frame your entire disposition toward life. It is designed to bring you to a point where you consciously enter into, you consciously enter into a mindset that says, "This is the kind of life I'm going to pursue." It consciously teaches you about the nature, the ebb and flow of spiritual life and then it brings you to a climax which is designed to be the

defining emphasis of everything that you do. From beginning to end, the Psalms are designed to teach us. What are they designed to teach us? Well, there are five books and so what we're going to do is we're going to have five points to this message. What do the Psalms teach us to do? Where are the Psalms designed to lead us? First of all, in a most profound way that has eternal ramifications for every one of us, the Psalms tell us: 1. Pursue the righteous life. Pursue the righteous life. Psalm 1 is the opening Psalm and that is exactly what it teaches us to do. In fact, Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 stand like pillars that guard the entrance to the entire 150 Psalms and they say, "You must enter through this gate. You must come to the Psalms through here." The very way that they are structured frame the way that we are to approach life. Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 contrast the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked and then they exhort us to pursue the life that leads to blessing.

We're going to read the text of Psalm 1 in just a moment. You see, beloved, this is really hard for most people to do, is to step back from life, to disengage from the circumstances that engage your attention right at the moment, to disengage and say, "What's the big purpose of being here? What is the purpose of life? What am I supposed to do during my time on earth?" Well look, that question is not answered by the kind of job that you have; it's not answered by whether you are happy or sad today; it's not answered by the kind of family you have or don't have today. There is a more fundamental proposition that confronts us as we enter into the Psalms and that is: what kind of person are you going to be? What is going to be the center, defining focus. The center defining allegiance and affection of your heart no matter what those other things might be? Psalm 1 calls you to think at that transcendent level and says, "You're not righteous if you don't." Righteous not in the sense of being saved, but righteous in the sense of pursuing the life that God blesses. That's what we see when we come to Psalm 1. It is profound.

Psalm 1:1

1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! 2 But his
delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and
night. 3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which
yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever
he does, he prospers. 4 The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff
which the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the
judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. 6 For the LORD
knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.

Next Sunday we're going to go through that Psalm verse-by-verse. For now we're simply introducing the entire Psalter but what this Psalms says, what it calls us to, what it grabs you, as it were, by the lapel of your coat and calls you to attention and says, "Wake up! Pay attention! This is of most profound importance!" It calls us to love the word of God. It says the distinguishing mark between those who are righteous and those who are wicked, those who will be blessed and those who will not be blessed, the distinguishing mark of those who will stand with the assembly of the righteous forever and those who

will be judged forever, the distinguishing mark of all of that in all cultures over all time, over every circumstance of life, the distinguishing mark is: what do you say in response to the word of God? Do you orient your life to God's word or not? That is the simple and yet profound defining mark of what distinguishes who receives the blessing of God and who is blown away in judgment. It's profound. Striking.

It's arresting to realize that this book that you hold on your lap or perhaps view on your iPad screen, this book is the distinguishing mark that is going to separate humanity into one of two classes. The righteous delight in this book. Everyone else doesn't and is labeled as wicked and destined for judgment. And it says, that Psalm, Psalm 1, the entire Psalm beckons you and says, "Be wise and devote yourself to this book." The righteous are blessed because they love the word and God will protect the righteous because he knows their way intimately. He protects, he provides for his people who love his word and he will judge everyone who turns away and spits upon his word and says, "I want nothing to do with it. I'm not interested. I've got other things to do." From the very get-go, the book of Psalms helps us realize that we are at a crossroads, we're at a fork in the road. Will you love this book day and night or not? And understand that there are consequences to your answer. Oh you young people, starting right at the start of life, this is your opportunity. This is your opportunity to say, "I'm going to devote my life, I'm going to pursue that book. I'm going to read it. I'm going to love it. I'm going to know it day and night. It's going to be the focus of my mind and my affections because I want that blessing from God and I fear him enough not to trivialize with his warning that says that the wicked are going to be like chaff that the wind drives away, that the wicked will not stand in judgment, sinners won't stand in the assembly of the righteous because behind the authority of this word is the Lord who wrote it and he intends his word to be taken seriously." So brothers and sisters, young and old, moms and dads, boys and girls, all of us under the umbrella of the call of this Psalm that says, "Pursue blessing. Pursue a serious mindful love of the word of God and recognize that there are eternal, dark consequences if you don't." This blessed book of Psalms right from the very beginning tells us that, "Here is how you must define your life," and warns you that, "Here are the consequences if you don't." Anyone who reads Psalm 1 has no excuse. It's profound. It tells us to pursue the righteous life.

Now, what is the defining attribute of that life? Well, Psalm 2. Look at the end of Psalm 2, verse 11. What are we to do with this? How are we to respond? "Worship the LORD with reverence And rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!" You see, this word of God leads you to a person. It leads you to the Son and calls you to love him, to take your refuge in him. Not only your refuge in the storms of life but take your spiritual refuge in him. Turn to the Son that you might be saved. Find your refuge, your all, your rock, your fortress in this one of whom this book speaks. You see, the Bible is a living book. Living and active. Sharper than any two-edged sword and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. It's a living book in that not only as you read it, it exposes the thoughts and directions of your mind and your motivations and all of that and humbles you under the weight of sin, it goes beyond that and points you to a living person and it takes you as a man, it takes you

as a woman, and says, "Honor this book. Read and meditate on this book and realize that this book takes you to a person to whom you are to bend the knee." Pursue the righteous life. Meditate on this book and you'll find it leading you to a person.

So notice this, look up at Psalm 1:1 again. Notice the way that these two Psalms frame the proclamation of blessing upon a man who embraces this. Psalm 1:1, "How blessed is the man." Look at how it ends in Psalm 2:12, "How blessed are all who take refuge in him." My friends, the invitation goes out to every one of you to receive this kind of blessing. This life is available to anyone. Not to a spiritual elite, it's not reserved for pastors or to theologians, this is open to you in your daily life. It is open to you. God invites you. God calls you to this kind of life where you can know for certain that your life will not be wasted whether your life goes long or your life goes short, you can know for certain that you are pursuing the path of meaning, of blessing, of purpose, as defined by your Creator himself. That's a gracious gift. That's a gracious invitation, isn't it? Why would you turn away from that? What possible excuse could there be for a man to decline that? Pursue the righteous life.

What's the outcome? Well, go to the end of book one of the Psalms which is at the end of Psalm 41 and as you look in your Bibles, maybe you have, maybe you haven't noticed these book divisions. Most of your printed Bibles are going to show this. Some of the electronic applications don't show the book divisions but as you flash forward to the end of book one, Psalm 41, notice the way that it ends. Psalm 41:13, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, From everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen." Blessed be the Lord who is the God of his people. Blessed be the Lord who blesses those who pursue righteousness. And if you think about it as hinges maybe, between these books, book one, book two, book three, book four, book five, what you're going to find and I'm going to show you is that every book ends with a doxology, a statement of praise to God and that is not by accident. This was the deliberate design of the final compiler of the Psalms that as he walks you through each section of thought, each section of meditation that you would come full circle, that you would conclude that this meditation ends on the thought that, "I give praise and worship to God."

So, as you pursue the righteous life, as you make a conscious decision in your mind either to reinforce, to recommit yourself to a prior commitment to the word of God that you've already made and you say, "Yes, that is what I've chosen but I'm going to be fresh on this now. I'm going to renew my allegiance. I'm going to reestablish my appreciation for the word of God and pursue that as I pursue the righteous life," Scripture promises you the blessing of God that you will stand like a tree, you will stand like a long established oak. Side-by-side with that it says that if you turn away from this kind of invitation, you're going to be like dust that's just tossed up in the air pfft, the wind blows it away and there's not going to be anything left to show of you at the end. Great blessing, great ruin. How will you respond? The Psalmist says when you pursue the righteous life, your conclusion is going to be what's expressed in Psalm 41:13, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, From everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen."

Now, watch this: you might be tempted and we'll call it a temptation because this view of spiritual life comes from the devil himself and it is reinforced all too often by perhaps well-meaning but certainly uninformed people that would say, "Well, if you're going to pursue that, then your spiritual life should be a constant high." You know the mindset. Some of you have come out of that kind of teaching that says, "If only you have enough faith, your life will go well. You'll experience good health. Your family will go the way that you want. You will have everything that you could possibly want in this earthly life," and the perversion of spiritual life that that represents is that if you just put in your nickel of faith, God will spit out the blessings that you want. That's not true. That's a lie from hell. Let's just be real clear and distinct about that particularly on a day like today where I know some of you come into this room distracted and burdened by really heavy issues in your life. You feel the weight of sorrow because of past conditioning from silly teaching that doesn't understand the Bible. You feel a little bit ashamed, embarrassed by the fact that you are discouraged. You feel like something is wrong; you somehow missed the boat. That God is punishing you because of your lack of faith. Well, beloved, when you study the Psalms, you realize that that's not true at all. That is not true at all. You see, when you enter into book two of the Psalms, the Psalmist is down, he is discouraged, he has a heavy heart. Imagine that. A guy with a heavy heart, God used to write inspired Scripture that he intended to stand the test of the ages. Heaven and earth will pass away, God's word will not pass away and as you read the Psalms, you find discouraged, heavy hearted men expressing their hearts to God. You see God pronouncing blessing even on them. You see them modeling for us how we walk through our own heavy times in a way that God not only finds acceptable but he ordained to be the way that his people would go. This turns the prevailing silliness of so much modern teaching that passes for Christianity, I won't give it the adjective Christian because it's not, it just gives the lie to it.

What are you supposed to do in those times? 2. You persevere through sorrow. You persevere through sorrow. As you turn from the end of book one that ends with, "Blessing God from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen." You go to book two and it's different than what you might expect. You find a thirsty, discouraged, weeping man opening book two in the Psalms. Psalm 42:1, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, While they say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'" "God, I am weeping. I thirst for you but I'm not finding satisfaction in my soul. When, O God, will your presence be restored? Will the sense of blessing be restored? Because it's not my present experience right now?" Look at verse 4, "These things I remember and I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go along with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God, With the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival." This man used to lead the people of God and now he's separated from them. This man used to be the voice of joy and thanksgiving to the people of God and now things have changed. He eats his tears. His past life of joy and leadership is but a memory.

That Psalm goes on and shows how that he came out of that discouragement. But here's what I want you to see for today in this big overview that we're doing, this jet tour

through the Psalms: the righteous life will sometimes lead you through discouragement. The righteous life is not a continual road leading up to the peak of Mount Everest where you just breathe in that rarefied air and you have the glory of vistas that are glorious and everything you are on top of. It's not true. Psalms put the lie to that. Sometimes the righteous life is going to take you down into the valley where it's dry and where there's dirt and sand and there is not much sign of life. Sometimes that sorrow will be over our own sin like in Psalm 51 which is tucked in the middle of this book two. But remember, beloved, remember how the Psalms opened and said the righteous man is like a tree. As a plant pushes its roots deeper in times of drought to get to life-sustaining water, that is what is supposed to happen in your spiritual life as well when it seems to go dry. It's not a sign that somehow you are off the path, rather it is an opportunity to sink your roots deeper in the midst of those trials and temptations. You are supposed to persevere through that kind of sorrow. It is not the condemnation of God on that sorrow, it is part of the training that he takes righteous people through. You display the glory of God when you persevere through sorrow, when you show forth the worth of God by being faithful to his word, by continuing to pursue that righteous life when there is no outward sign or encouragement that you should do so. When people stand on the sidelines and mock you and say, "Where is your God now? A lot of good it has done you to follow Christ. Look at your miserable life," and they mock you in the tears, they mock you, as it were, on the hospital bed and say, "If you only had faith, you would get up and walk away from here rejoicing." Psalms teach us to recognize the terrain, the spiritual terrain that says, "There will be sorrow but as you go through the sorrow, as you go through these Psalms, here's the promise. Not the immediate relief from the difficulty. That's not it." If I could do one thing in my pastorate, well, there's a lot of things I'd want to do in my pastorate as I think about it, I couldn't narrow it down to one thing. But if I could do this one thing for you this morning, it's to change your perspective on the fact that what we seek in our trials is not relief from the circumstances. That's not what we're supposed to be seeking. Prayer is not an end to manipulate our circumstances so we have a pretty smooth road to walk on. The purpose of prayer, the purpose of the pursuit of the righteous life is not about our circumstances, it's that we would show forth the magnitude of the greatness of God by praising him when everyone else would fall silent. That in the midst of this sorrow, in the midst of a parched spiritual throat that says, "O God, I'm so thirsty. O God, my tears are what I eat day and night," that in those kind of circumstances that we're all going to go through sooner or later, that there would be that little green sprig poking up through the stump, as it were, the heart that says, "I still love my Lord. I will still praise him even though there doesn't seem to be much external reason to do so."

Go to the end of book two which is found at Psalm 72. My suffering, discouraged brother or sister in Christ, your discouragement is not a sign of God's abandonment. Your discouragement, your sad soul is not a sign that you've done something wrong. This is part of the righteous life and Psalms teach us that. Your hope is not that it's going to change today or tomorrow or some kind of silly breakthrough that false teachers promise that you'll get if you'll just send them one more check, those despicable men of the devil, your hope is that at the end of this trial, at the end of the pursuit of this righteous life is certain guaranteed blessing. It's not about today. It's about what the

certain outcome is that God has guaranteed to those who delight in his word. Psalm 72:18. Notice at the end of book two, it ends like book one ended with praise, the praise of God on his lips. "Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, Who alone works wonders. And blessed be His glorious name forever; And may the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and Amen."

The echo, the cornerstone, the defining aspiration of the righteous heart is that surpassing desire that, "Whatever happens to me be it in blessing or in sorrow, I recognize the great inherent worth of God and my desire is not for temporal circumstances. What thrills my heart," the righteous man, the righteous woman says as they look in the mirror is, "My God is blessed forever. My God is the one who alone works wonders. Blessed be his glorious name forever. Let the whole earth be full of his glory." And there is pulsating in the redeemed heart, this incessant pursuit of the glory of God, this pulsating desire, this throbbing affection for the glory of God and knowing who he is, knowing what he has promised. When those sorrows come, we say we find the spiritual courage and strength to persevere. We say, "I'm going to walk right through this confident that what God has promised to me, he will deliver. Confident that I don't want to go anywhere else. Where would I go? Oh Christ, you have the words of eternal life. Where would I go if I turned away?" Do you know where you'd go? You'd go to the wind with the rest of the chaff. There is no alternative. There is no option and even if there were, you wouldn't want it because your heart is fixed on the glory of this word and the glory of the person that it reveals. So you persevere through sorrow. You pursue the righteous life and you realize, "Okay, this may come with sorrow attached to it but I am undeterred. I will walk right through it and my commitment to my God and to his word will remain undiminished."

Now, even with all of that said, the opening of book three in Psalm 73 reinforces this theme of perseverance. It introduces a new element that we may sometimes have to face. What do you do? Well, you pursue the righteous life; you persevere through sorrow. 3. You prevail over confusion. You prevail over confusion. Life will sometimes seem, it will seem, it will look like the righteous path is being contradicted. It will look like this has been a huge mistake when you look out on the world around you. You're going to look out and you're going to see wicked people in their prosperity while you're over here weeping in the corner of the house of God. That's the dilemma that the Psalmist in Psalm 73 faced. It's the hinge, it's what introduces the third book of the Psalms and it's teaching us again another perspective to realize that things are not always going to seem to line up with what you thought were the expectations. Sometimes everything is going to seem to contradict what you've committed your heart to pursue and you're going to look like a fool. And you have to prevail over the confusion when that time happens.

Psalm 73:1, he opens with the conclusion that he wants to teach in Psalm 73, "Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart! But," he's going to teach you his life lesson here, "but as for me, my feet came close to stumbling, My steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant As I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pains in their death, And their body is fat. They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like mankind." Verse 10, "And waters of abundance are

drunk by them. They say, 'How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?'" He's looking out on life, he's seeing the mindset of the world on full display and in their seeming time of apparent prevalence, prominence, success, they have the goods and he's off to the side envious, "Why can't my life be like their life? Why can't I have the good health of that wicked man who never darkens the door of the church? Do you realize how much I've pursued my career and it's just ended in virtual ruin? I've been ripped off again and again and I'm left with nothing and the people who cheated me are over there in the Caribbean on their 15th cruise in the past four years. What kind of fool have I been? Why don't I do it like they do? They are getting the better end of it." It's confusing. Life seems to contradict the righteous path. The true people of God could feel that right now looking at the just repeated news stories again and again and again in our day of another homosexual victory in the courts, another homosexual finding prominent place in society. Why am I doing this? They are winning, so it would seem. The Psalms teach us the way through that path so that we don't get confused, that we prevail over it, that we understand how to respond.

Look at Psalm 73:16. The Psalmist is contemplating the prosperity of the wicked while he's been sidelined with sorrow and difficulty. Verse 16, he says, "When I pondered to understand this, It was troublesome in my sight Until," it wasn't a permanent condition of my mind. It was troublesome, yes. It was a difficult issue, yes, but it only lasted until I did something. Verse 17, "I came into the sanctuary of God; Then I perceived their end." He's echoing the same theme that opened the entire psalm in Psalm 1, the way of the wicked will perish. They will be blown away like chaff in the wind, carried away like dust in a whirlwind. Their place will not be seen and in the midst of his confusion, he looks beyond the present circumstances and says, "No, no, no, no. I know how to interpret this. Their prosperity is temporary. The blessing of God could never ultimately escape and pass by his people. The wicked, the sinners, could never rise up successfully against God so that they prevail in the end. Never. That can't happen." And so he says in verse 18, "Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form."

The Psalms teach us to look at what is happening around us and to interpret it properly. God's righteousness will certainly prevail no matter how that may seem to be in jeopardy at the time, no matter what the momentum of news reports and prosperity of bad people may be. Listen, please listen to me: it cannot possibly end the way that it appears that it is going. As we read in 2 Peter 3 earlier, God will intervene. God will vindicate his righteousness. As we saw at the beginning from Psalm 1, God will bless the righteous and the wicked will be carried away in judgment therefore, the whole point of this is: when you find yourself confused about what's going on, go back to these fundamentals, these very basic principles that shape the direction of the universe. Go back to them. Plant your roots there again. Go deeper into that and rightly interpret the world around you so that you are not tempted to go with wicked people and that you understand what is happening so that you will stand firm as a righteous man pursuing the will of God in the word of God to the worship of God. And don't get blown off course. That's how you prevail over the confusion.

Watch this. Go back to verse 16 of Psalm 73. He said, "It was troublesome in my sight Until I came into the sanctuary of God; Then I perceived their end." What do you do when you see a wicked world succeeding? What do you do in your private life when you see things collapsing about you? How do you get through that with your spiritual course intact? You direct your mind to worship. You think. You stop. You step back and you make a deliberate direction of your mind to go to the worship of God, to go to the praise of God, to get with the people of God and the word of God and that perspective is going to clarify things. He said, "I was confused but then I went to the sanctuary of God and then it all became clear." You go back. You go back to the realm of Psalm 1. Blessed are the righteous, not so the wicked. It's going to be okay. "I'll just ride this storm out until the certain conclusion comes to pass and I will be undeterred. I will not shrink back in fear. I will not collapse in discouragement. I will stay the course." Remember we said, you make a deliberate, conscious determination, "I am going to pursue the righteous path." And when there are all kinds of easy exit ramps bidding me to go off of this path, "not me. No," you say, "not me. Everyone else can do that. Everyone else can go away. Not me. I'm going to stay right here because I believe that God blesses the righteous and he will judge the wicked. I love his word too much to turn away from it. I love the person the word reveals too much to be disloyal."

You see, beloved, what I want you to see as we go through this jet tour of the Psalms is when you see the great big picture, when you see the landscape from a big perspective, you've got to see that big perspective for it to inform the way that you approach day-to-day life. Don't interpret the big picture through what happens up and down day-to-day, hour-to-hour. That's going to throw you into a tailspin that's really hard to get out of. When you step back and see these great principles that Psalms are pointing us to, you have the strength, the perspective you need to persevere, to be strong, to persevere through sorrow, to prevail over confusion. What's the outcome of that going to be? Psalm 89, the end of book three. Look at verse 52. As you prevail over confusion, what's the outcome? What's the hinge of book three to book four? "Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen."

So what you need to be seeing is that there is a pattern going on here. When I read the Psalms from start to finish and don't simply pick out one or two, Psalm 23 and Psalm 100 as my favorites. You know, they are short and I can kind of remember them and you neglect the rest of them. When you approach the word of God in a serious way and you look through the sweep of what it's saying, it is pointing you, bringing you back, circling back again and again, the righteous one is one that causes you to praise God. Your personal loyalties, your heart affections are reinforced again and again, "Blessed be this God. Praise God. Oh he's so good." And as we stand here at the end of book three about to step into book four, what should be impressed on your mind is this: all of life is a worshipful response to our Redeemer. The Psalms, the entirety of the Bible, calls you to worship God, to be faithful to him through every aspect, every dimension of the human experience. Death and life, sickness and health, faithful friends and your personal Judas, nothing, nothing, nothing distracts the man or the woman of God from that single-minded focus that says, "My life exists to pursue, to worship this great God who has

revealed himself in this great book wherein I find my delight day and night." And the more that the heavy waves pound against the lighthouse in the storm, the stronger, the more certain, the more stable that lighthouse looks when the storm is over. The fog of confusion is cleared away and the light was still shining. That's what you want your life to be as a believer in Christ. That's what your life must be as a believer in Christ. That's what Christ is worthy of.

We see it even clearer on this side of the cross than the Psalmist had. We can look back, as it were, and we see nails in the hands of our Redeemer. We see our sins placed on his shoulders and the stroke of God coming down on him, interceding on behalf of sinners so that we might be forgiven. Our substitute punished, the weight of eternal punishment collapsed in time on his infinite soul and we look at that and say, "Where else would I go? Of course my loyalty is to him and to his word."

The other thing that I just want to say, beloved: every manner of Christian, every one of you, not just an elder, not just a pastor, you're meant to drink in these things deeply. You are intended to meditate on these things day and night. These things are to become precious to your soul. It's not just the one who stands on the platform and opens the word, this is to be the shared common experience of the people of God. The Psalms are not the worship book for the pastor. It's the worship book for the people. This is your inheritance. This is your birthright, the spiritual experience that is described in the book of Psalms. Hallelujah! It's not for a priestly caste. It's not reserved for a group with silly hats on their heads. It's for the people of God who know his Son. The outcome, beloved, is certain. You should feel an ever growing sense of confidence and serenity as these things from Psalms dawn on your mind. God is great. God is good.

So how do we keep on track? Well, let's go to the opening of book four. The opening of book four, 4. How do you keep on that track? On that righteous path? 4. Ponder your God. Ponder your God. Book four opens with Psalm 90, a prayer of Moses, the man of God. I think we've studied Psalm 90 here from this pulpit. I've taught it in the past. Moses wrote Psalm 90 near the end of the 40 years of wilderness wandering with the people of God. It had been a dry, dark time and yet here he is, still standing as a man of God. Chastened, yes. Still standing, yes. What is it that enables us to prevail over the confusion? Psalm 90:1, "Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." The Psalms are put together in a way that drives your focus to the eternal character of God. You can transcend confusion. You can transcend, persevere through sorrow when you no longer view it from a present, earthly dimension but you're anchored in the eternal, vertical perspective of the fact that the God that you are pursuing, the God who gave his word is over time. He transcends time. He knows the end from the beginning because he declared it to be. You anchor in the greatness, the superlative surpassing magnitude of God and you dwell there. You sink your mind into his character. And Moses found strength in bleakness and you can too. Just look up. Just look up.

Where does that come out? Where does it leave us? Turn to the end of book four in Psalm 106:47. Again, the way that these books are stitched together are meant to instruct us. The end of every book comes back to the praise of God. That is not an accident. There was a divine and human intention in that structure. "Save us, O LORD our God, And gather us from among the nations, To give thanks to Your holy name And glory in Your praise. Blessed be the LORD," there it is again. Can you believe it? Verse 48, "Blessed be the LORD," Yahweh, "Blessed be the God of Israel, From everlasting even to everlasting. And let all the people say, 'Amen.' Praise the LORD!" Every one of these books ends on that triumphant note of praise. Every one of them so that as you go through you're brought back again and again. You circle back, "Praise the Lord." Psalm 31, "Praise the Lord." Psalm 72, "Praise the Lord." Psalm 89, "Praise the Lord." Psalm 106, "Praise the Lord."

Now book five brings us full circle. Book five opening with Psalm 107. Let me review the points for you: 1. Pursue the righteous life and then it unfolds what that is going to look like. 2. Persevere through sorrow. 3. Prevail over confusion. 4. Ponder your God. And where does that leave us? Where is the outcome of that? 5. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Focused on this God that Psalms walks us to and through, as it were, Psalm 107:1, it's the start of book five, it's establishing a theme for what's left to come. "Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, For His lovingkindness is everlasting. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary And gathered from the lands, From the east and from the west, From the north and from the south." Every point of the compass. The people of God, the redeemed of the Lord say, "Amen." Say, "Thank you God." Say, "Praise be to your name." God delivers his people. God is great and God is good. Therefore we will thank him. Therefore we will praise him. Not simply in response to favorable circumstances. Can I get a moment of eye contact with all of you right now? Thank you. You don't even need to be a Christian to like favorable circumstances. Everybody wants favorable circumstances. When God gives them to us that's great, but when he withdraws them for a time, our commitment to love and praise him does not change because his character and his word has not changed. I will praise him in prosperity. I will praise him in adversity. The commitment of everyone in this room who knows Christ should be, "Wherever you find me in my station of life, in the joy of the delivery room, in the stench of the deathbed, you will find me praising the Lord for he is good. For he is great. For he delivers his people. He has been faithful to me from the beginning and he will be faithful to me in the end and when my eyes open up in heaven, the multi-splendored infinite magnitude of how good he is is only going to be beginning. Of course you'll find me praising the Lord." That's not just what the pastor should be saying, beloved. You get this, right? This is what should be in your heart too. Focused on God, we give him thanks.

Now, the way the book of Psalms ends is incredible. It's utterly incredible. We've seen that theme of praise woven through the way this book has been collected and presented to us and preserved for us through the ages. By the way, I want to step back. Do you know what's cool? What's cool is not having good coffee on Sunday morning. That's not cool. That's stupid. Not that good coffee is stupid but making that the focus of your Sunday morning, that's really silly. What's cool is the fact that as we go through this

word, that we are connecting with God's people from 3,500 years ago. We're talking about the same things that animated the greatest men of God millennia ago. They are the same things enduring today. That's what's awesome. Not the fact that somebody put Starbucks in the budget. Why would you do that? Why? What kind of earth-centered silliness makes that the focus of the way you promote your church? Compared to the grandeur of what we've seen from Psalms today? I reject all of that. I condemn it all. Shame on then for trivializing this great God to that superficial level. It makes me want to get sick.

But I'm not going to get sick, do you know why? Because of the way the Psalms end. The Psalms end in an explosion of praise. Picture the best fireworks display that you've ever been to, the grand finale where it's just exploding, one colorful explosion after another simultaneously, Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! And you're just overwhelmed by the sight and the sound of the glory of this majestic explosion of fireworks on the night sky. That pales in comparison to what happens at the end of the book of Psalms. Psalms ends in a climactic crescendo of praise and the praise of God is so magnificent that one Psalm isn't enough. Two, three, four Psalms aren't enough. Look at Psalm 146 and we're going to go through this really quickly. Just so that you get the feel of it. Be ready to strap in and we are going to take off here, okay? Psalm 146:1, "Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! I will praise the LORD while I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being." Verse 10, "The LORD will reign forever, Your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the LORD!" Psalm 147:1, "Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant and praise is becoming." Verse 20, "He has not dealt thus with any nation; And as for His ordinances, they have not known them. Praise the LORD!" Psalm 148:1, "Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights! Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts! Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all stars of light! Praise Him, highest heavens, And the waters that are above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the LORD." Verse 13, "Let them praise the name of the LORD, For His name alone is exalted; His glory is above earth and heaven. Praise for all His godly ones; Even for the sons of Israel, a people near to Him. Praise the LORD!" Psalm 149, "Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, And His praise in the congregation of the godly ones. Let Israel be glad in his Maker; Let the sons of Zion rejoice in their King. Let them praise His name with dancing; Let them sing praises to Him with timbrel and lyre." Verse 9, "This is an honor for all His godly ones. Praise the LORD!" Psalm 150,

"1 Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty expanse. 2 Praise Him for His mighty deeds; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness. 3 Praise Him with trumpet sound; Praise Him with harp and lyre. 4 Praise Him with timbrel and dancing; Praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe. 5 Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with resounding cymbals. 6 Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!"

Praise the Lord! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Everywhere. The whole spiritual sky explodes with the fireworks of praising this great God. Nature joins

with the nation's. Trumpets sound. Cymbals ring. A chariot of fire carries us to heaven. God is great! God is good! He will bless us and we will praise him.

The goal of the Psalms is seen in its climax: Praise the Lord. The goal of the righteous life is seen in that same climax: Praise the Lord. The blessing is certain. The praise is eternal. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise God.

Let's pray.

If you are still on the path of the wicked, come to Christ right now and if you are a staggering pilgrim, take heart. The way of the righteous always ends in blessing.

Lord, make us a people who pursue the righteous life, who persevere through sorrow, who prevail over confusion, who ponder our God and who praise the Lord. We honor you and we worship you this morning in Christ's name. Amen

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