

Psalm 101 “Make Straight the Way of the LORD”
Psalm 100/101
John 1:19-28

December 17, 2017

Advent reminds us of the time *before* Jesus came.

A time when the people of God were exiles –
and even though they had returned to the Land,
there was no Son of David on the throne.

In 1 Peter 1, the apostle Peter addresses us as “elect exiles of the dispersion.”

It is true that Jesus has come – the Son of David now sits on the throne
at the right hand of the Father!

But we do not yet see everything under his feet.

And so in that way we live in Book 4 of the Psalms.

The return from Exile has begun –
but it is not yet complete.

Advent not only reminds us of Christ’s first coming,
but it also reminds us that he is coming again!

And that is why we can sing Psalm 100 –

A Psalm for Giving Thanks.

We can shout to the LORD and serve him with gladness.

We can come into his presence with singing,
because the LORD is our God –
he is our Creator, he is our Shepherd –
and so we enter his gates with thanksgiving –
we give thanks to him and bless his name –
because the LORD is *good* –
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations!

So let us stand and sing Psalm 100!

Sing Psalm 100

Read John 1:14-28

When John shows up and starts baptizing,
the priests and Levites ask him, “Who are you?”

Notice that they do not ask, “what are you doing?”!

Ezekiel 36 had said that when God restored his people,
he would wash them with water –
and baptizing in the Jordan is especially clear

(after all, Israel had entered the Promised Land through the Jordan River, and Elijah and Elisha had both used the Jordan River in important symbolic ways).

So the real question is *who are you?*

And John is very clear: “I am not the Christ.”

I am not Elijah.

I am not the Prophet. (In some sense, John the Baptist *was* Elijah – but not in the way that the priests and Levites expected Elijah!)

Who are you?

“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’”

I am the one who prepares for the coming of the King –
the restoration of the Kingdom of David!

John, in this way, sets up beautifully Psalm 101.

Introduction: “A Psalm of David”

A Psalm of David.

Because Psalm 101 is the only song in Book 4 that is said to be a psalm of David.

This makes it *really clear* that the first person singular voice should be heard as the voice of David – and particularly, the voice of the Davidic King – the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have been seeing throughout Book 4, an emphasis on the *kingdom* of God – the righteousness and justice of God’s kingdom.

And Psalm 101 opens:

1. A Song of Steadfast Love and Justice (1-2a)

101 I will sing of steadfast love and justice;

Steadfast love – *hesed* – has been a major theme in book 4.

Justice has also been a major theme.

Now they come together.

Steadfast love – *hesed* – has been translated a lot of different ways:
mercy, kindness, goodness, covenant loyalty...

The King James translators even made up a new word to try to capture the meaning:
“lovingkindness”!

The one who shows *hesed* is one who is faithful and committed to his word or to his people.

You can count on someone who shows *hesed* – someone who regularly does *good* shows mercy, and is steadfast in love.

And so our Lord Jesus says, “I will sing of *hesed* – steadfast love.”

But steadfast love – by itself – is not enough.

You will find steadfast love – covenant loyalty – in the Mafia!

A band of thieves may show great *hesed* to one another!

The spouse who is trapped in an abusive marriage may show *hesed* – covenant loyalty – to her husband –

but the result is *not* a righteous community!

So the Davidic King says “I will sing of steadfast love *and justice*.”

As we’ve seen throughout the OT,

the idea of righteousness is how to order your community;

the idea of justice is how you deal with particular cases.

Here in Psalm 101, the Psalmist pairs *steadfast love* and *justice* – in order to connect God’s covenant faithfulness with the covenant faithfulness of the community.

This is why verse 1 concludes by focusing on the LORD:

to you, O LORD, I will make music.

I will sing of steadfast love and justice –

but where do you find steadfast love and justice?

“to you, O LORD, I will make music” –

because I can only find steadfast love and justice *together* in the way of God.

Because in this song to steadfast love and justice, the King says:

²*I will ponder the way that is blameless.*

Oh when will you come to me?

The King seeks to know the way that is blameless.

The King is intent on expounding the way of *wisdom*.

And in his pursuit of the blameless way

he recognizes that his only hope to find that way

is if God himself *comes*.

Only when the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us –

only when God comes to us – “Immanuel” (God with us) –

only then do we find the way that is blameless!

And thus the King seeks to *walk* a blameless life.

2. Integrity of Heart – Steadfast Love Begins in the Heart and in the House (v2b-4)

*I will walk with integrity of heart
within my house;*

The phrase “integrity of heart” uses an adjective based on the same noun in the first half of v2.
So the way that is blameless is rooted in the blameless heart.

And that is the heart of our second section in verses 2-4 –
“Steadfast love and justice begin in the heart and in the house.”

In English we think of the *heart* as having to do with the affections,
and the *mind* as the mind as having to do with the intellect.
But in Hebrew, the word *heart* covers both.
Both thinking and loving are included.

And when we hear someone say that they will walk with integrity of heart “within my house” –
we tend to think in terms of “home” vs. “work.”
But in the ancient world, there was no such distinction!

“My house” refers not just to a structure –
but also to the people who live and work there.

The household, after all, is where *everyone* worked.

In English we talk about the “economy” when we are thinking of society –
but the word “economy” comes from the Greek word meaning
“law (or rule) of the household.”

So when you think about the *house* – how you live “within your house” –
please include how you live *at work*.

There should be no double life.

How you act on the job – and how you act at home – should be the same.

(And if you act differently at one place or the other,
then there is a serious problem with your *integrity of heart*).

What does it mean to walk with integrity of heart?

Integrity of heart has to do with a *blameless* heart –
with a heart that is *whole*.

“Integrity” is a really good translation.

Integrity has to do with *wholeness*.

When something *dis*-integrates it falls apart.

We talk about the “integration” (wholeness)
of that which was “segregated” (separate).

So integrity of heart means *wholeness* of heart –

that there is a consistency of thought, word, and deed
in every aspect of life.

And that's precisely what verses 3-4 flesh out:

³ *I will not set before my eyes
anything that is worthless.*

The King recognizes that what you watch influences the way you think – and what you love.
And so he says that he will not set before his eyes anything that is worthless.

What does that mean?

What are “worthless things”?

Worthless things are those things that draw us away from love for God and neighbor.

What sorts of “worthless things” are your eyes drawn towards?

There's a difference between seeing things incidentally
and *setting* them before your eyes.

For instance, I was working on this section of my sermon in a doctor's waiting room –
with the TV show “Let's Make a Deal” blaring in my ears.

I couldn't help but think of the way that our society encourages
massive devotion to worthless things!

TV game shows – or TV shows generally! –
movies, sports, social media –
we are inundated with “worthless things.”

Augustine tells the story of his friend Alypius, who lived in Rome.

He was invited to come to the Colosseum with friends to see the games.

He refused – because he thought the whole thing was useless.

But they forced him to go with them –

and Alypius said, “you can drag my body into this place,
but you cannot force my eyes to watch.”

So he shut his eyes tightly – to keep the worthless things out!

But he was not able to shut his ears!

And when the crowd roared – curiosity got the better of him –
and he opened his eyes,

and when he beheld the spectacle, he was hooked!

“No longer was he the man who had joined the crowd;

he was now one of the crowd he had joined,

and a genuine companion of those who had led him there.” (147)

What is it that draws us in?

What is it that attracts us to “worthless things”?

Sometimes it is the roar of the crowd –
the feeling of being part of something that is bigger and grander than us.
When you are in a big cheering crowd,
you can easily get caught up in the enthusiasm!

What is that you love?

Maybe you can identify what you love in contrast to the things that you hate!

The Psalmist says:

*I hate the work of those who fall away;
it shall not cling to me.*

What do you hate?

Because whatever you *love* – you will *hate* all that which detracts from what you love!

Finish the sentence:

“I hate it when...”

“I hate it when someone cuts me off when I’m driving on icy roads...”

“I hate it when my boss calls me to in to work on Saturday”

Good.

That’s fine.

But do you hate it when people walk contrary to God’s law?

One commentator says it well:

“Hatred is an important spiritual and moral virtue,
as Jesus affirms (Luke 14:26).” (Goldingay, 143)

Does that shock you?

Are you used to hearing pastors say that hatred is *wrong*?

I *hate it* when pastors say that!!

But hatred is the proper expression of *love*
when the object of our *love* is endangered.

When a friend discovered that his father was cheating on his mother,
he felt *pure* hatred for his father!

(And I say *pure* hatred, because there is such a thing as *righteous* anger!)

And the King here in Psalm 101 says that he *hates* the work of those who turn aside –
such that it will not cling to me – it will not *stick* to me.

Think about how Jesus says it in Luke 14:26 –

“Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them,
‘If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother

and wife and children and brothers and sisters,
yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

If you love Jesus – then you will hate all that draws you away from Jesus!

If you *love* God, then you will hate the work of those who turn away from him.

If you love God, then you will love all that reminds you of the one you love!

So you will love people – because people are made in the image of God.

And you will love the *good things* that others do,

because those good things remind you of the good God whom you love!

But if you love God,

then you cannot possibly “love it” when people do bad things.

Such things cannot “cling” to me.

And so the King declares:

⁴ *A perverse heart shall be far from me;*

I will know nothing of evil.

In verse 2, the heart of integrity refers to the King’s own heart –
the heart of Jesus.

In verse 4, the “perverse heart” – the “crooked heart” –

refers to the heart of the wicked – the heart of those who turn away.

I say this because the verb in verse 4 has to do with *departing* – *going away*.

The idea is that the one who does wicked things is *crooked* –
they have departed from the straight way.

And the King says that *I* am committed to the *straight* path.

Those who deviate from the path – those who go astray –

shall depart from me –

because I am devoted to the way that is blameless –
the straight way.

Therefore a heart that is walking on the crooked way will be far from me –

because it walking away from me!

And *I hate it* when people depart from the straight way.

Because that means that they do not love my God.

Okay, so we have seen that this is a song of steadfast love and justice.

This is a song of the *straight way* – the blameless path.

And we have seen how the *heart* is central.

Because the heart is the center of what you love and how you think.

Verses 5-8 then deals practically with what this looks like in the home, at work,
and in the community.

3. Justice in the House and in the Land (v5-8)

As we work through these verses,
it is important to see that this is the King speaking –
this is, after all, a Psalm of David.

So this is King Jesus speaking.
How ought we to sing these words?
Well, we are *in Christ* –
we have been joined to the King.
We pray “thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

It is not enough to have personal integrity.
That personal integrity must result in taking action *against*
those of crooked heart.
Because crooked hearts produce crooked actions.

And so we put these words into practice as those who are fellow heirs together with Jesus.

a. Dealing with Slander and Arrogance (v5)

⁵ *Whoever slanders his neighbor secretly*
I will destroy.

In one sense, this might seem impossible for anyone except Jesus!
After all, if they are slandering their neighbor *secretly* –
then how do you know!?
But even secret slander makes it way out.
And what do you do when you find out the source of the slander?

The king says that he will *destroy* the one who slanders his neighbor secretly.
And “slander” here is almost too specific a translation.
In Hebrew it’s simply “He who wags his tongue against his neighbor secretly.”

So we’re not distinguishing between slander, gossip, reviling –
this includes any use of *words* to harm someone else!

We must take action when others use words to destroy and harm.

And it might seem like the King’s response is overboard –
“I will destroy” (him!).
But then again, that is a fitting response
to one who has used words to destroy.

There has been a lot of debate about how to handle all these sexual harassment allegations.
In some cases, the timing of the allegations seems designed to destroy a career.
(Then again, if someone has used their power and influence to destroy someone else,

then perhaps it is only fitting that they be taken down in such a public way!)

In the Mosaic law, if a person brought a *malicious* charge,
in other words, a false accusation – that they *knew* was false –
the malicious accuser would be subject to the penalty
that would have been due to the accused *if the charge was true*.

How would Psalm 101 direct us to handle such allegations?

Well, insofar as someone's safety is at stake – you believe them –
and you take action to *protect* them.

But insofar as such action would *harm* someone else –
you cannot take action without sufficient *evidence* is produced.

Okay, let's use examples:

a woman comes to you claiming that she has been attacked –
you should believe her – help her – protect her.

But if she wants you to join her in destroying the livelihood of the man who attacked her,
then you will need more evidence than just her word.

So what do you do when you don't have sufficient evidence to *act*?

A pastor friend once asked me – what do you do
when you are *convinced* that she is telling the truth,
but you simply don't have the evidence?!

Well, for one, you *don't* tell her to go back!

And you watch him like a hawk –
because while you may never be able to prove *that* allegation –
if it is true, then the same crooked heart
will produce more crooked words and deeds.

And if you are in a position of leadership –

in the church, in the home, at work, in society –

then you are responsible for protecting those under your care.

And so those who use words and deeds to destroy – must themselves be destroyed.

And the second half of verse 5 points out that some people wear this on their faces:

*Whoever has a haughty look and an arrogant heart
I will not endure.*

A person who is arrogant and haughty
will mistreat others.

Therefore, do not give power to arrogant and haughty people!

The King says that he will not endure such people.

Jesus calls his people to be *humble* –

to be *gentle* in heart.

Think of how Jesus says it in Matthew 11:28-29,

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,
for I am gentle and lowly in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.”

He himself came in our flesh – born in weakness, humbling himself to share our humanity.

And he was not born in a palace – but his first bed was a cattle trough.

And he calls us to have the same attitude – the same heart – that he has.

And that’s why verse 6 focuses on the positive side:

b. Rewarding the Faithful and Blameless (v6)

*⁶ I will look with favor on the faithful in the land,
that they may dwell with me;
he who walks in the way that is blameless
shall minister to me.*

King Jesus says that he will look with favor on the faithful in the land,

“that they may dwell with me.”

Arrogant and haughty people have no place in the court of King Jesus.

But the faithful – those who walk in the way that is blameless
(the way of integrity – it’s the same word we saw twice in verse 2) –
they receive the favor of the Lord –
they shall minister in his court.

They shall live with me – they shall work for me –
they shall be members of my household.

The character and qualities of Jesus

will also become the character and qualities of those who follow Jesus,
as Paul says, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh
with its passions and desires.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (Gal 5:24-26).

King Jesus is intent on establishing his household – his kingdom –
in righteousness and justice (or in steadfast love and justice).

And in verse 7 we continue to see the importance of *words* and *truth* in the household of Jesus:

c. Stopping Deceit and Lies (v7)

*⁷ No one who practices deceit
shall dwell in my house;*

*no one who utters lies
shall continue before my eyes.*

Deceit and lies are destructive to community.

A household built on lies is like a house built on sand.
Truth is necessary in order to dwell in the house of God.
And Jesus will not allow one who utters lies to continue in his sight.

As Paul says in Ephesians 4:25,

“Therefore, having put away falsehood,
let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor,
for we are members one of another.”

Because King Jesus will not allow falsehood and deception to continue in his house:

d. Destroying the Wicked and Evildoers from the City of the LORD (v8)

⁸ *Morning by morning I will destroy
all the wicked in the land,
cutting off all the evildoers
from the city of the LORD.*

The city of man has been overrun by falsehood and deception.

Words are used – and abused – as weapons in a battle for power and influence.
But that should not surprise us!
When those in power have “crooked hearts”
we should not be surprised that their words are crooked.
The city of man is disintegrating.

But that’s nothing new!

King Jesus promises that he will destroy all the wicked in the land,
cutting off all evildoers from the city of the LORD.

We are called to participate in that –

think of how Paul talks about the excommunication of the man who has his father’s wife
in 1 Corinthians 5.

If the church refuses to participate in that discipline,
then the church will be overrun by the evildoers!