

The Prophetic Man

Jesus in the Psalms

Psalm 81

Stuart W. Bryan

I. Jesus in the Psalms (cf. Lk 24:44; Heb 2:11, 12; 10:5)

Why study the psalms around Christmas? As we've emphasized each year, *the psalms are Christ's songs*. Paul exhorts the Colossians, "Let the word of _____ dwell in you richly, speaking to one another in psalms..." (Col 3:16). When we sing the Psalms to one another, Christ Himself speaks to us through our brethren. *The psalms are _____ songs*. In addition, because we have been baptized "into Christ", these songs are also _____ songs. So Paul commands us to "speak to one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord" (Eph 5:19).

II. The Prophetic Man (cf. Dt 18:15ff).

A. A Prophetic Call to Worship (1-5)

Our psalm is ascribed to Asaph. Asaph was a descendant of Levi and one of David's chief musicians. Chronicles recounts:

¹Moreover David and the captains of the army separated for the service some of the sons of Asaph, of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals. And the number of the skilled men performing their service was: ²Of the sons of Asaph: Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah, and Asharelah; the sons of Asaph were under the direction of Asaph, who prophesied according to the order of the king. (1 Chr 25:1-2 cf. Neh 7:44)

It is most likely that Psalm 81 was written for the Feast of _____ (cf. Lev 23:33ff). Jesus through Asaph urges us to *sing aloud* and *make a joyful shout* (1) to *God our strength* (our Creator and Sustainer) and to the *God of Jacob* (the covenant keeping God, our Redeemer). Jesus summons us to worship exuberantly, joyfully, loudly, and gloriously. While Tabernacles is no longer obligatory for Christians (cf. Col 2:15-16), the Exodus from Egypt pointed ahead to the far greater salvation accomplished for all nations in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 5:6-8). Hence, the Lord continues to summon us to worship Him and "keep the feast" every Lord's Day.

B. A Prophetic Oracle and Exhortation (6-16)

1. Remember how I saved and tested you (6-7)

In verses 6-16, Asaph the prophet speaks as a type of Jesus, the Eternal Son of God. The Son *delivered* Israel out of Egypt, *answered* them at Mt. Sinai, and *tested* their faithfulness *at the waters of Meribah* where He stood before Moses on the rock – "for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was _____" (1 Cor 10:4).

2. Listen to My voice and worship Me alone for your good (8-10)

So what was the word which Jesus *answered* Israel at Sinai? He urged them to listen to Him and to worship Him for their own good. These verses summarize the Ten Commandments. They remind us that the foundation of God's law is His gracious salvation: "I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex 20:2). Observance of the law has never been a means of earning salvation for fallen sinners – rather, God

saves us and delivers us from sin and bondage in order that we might listen to His voice and worship Him alone. And we are to do this for our own _____ (10b).

¹²“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?” (Dt 10:12–13)

3. Remember how you rebelled against Me and faced My wrath (11-12)

Despite God’s mercy, Israel *fled from God’s word*, and they *fled from God’s presence* – even as our first father Adam had done. So what did God do? He gave Israel over to their sin *to walk in their own counsels*.

4. Listen to My voice and walk in My ways for your good (13-16)

But the Eternal Son of God graciously plead with Israel, His people, to listen to Him and walk in His ways. He reminds us that the pathway of true blessedness is obedience.

III. God Speaks to us by His Son (Heb 1:1-4)

¹God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ²has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; ³who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. (Hebrews 1:1–4)

A. Assemble for worship with great joy!

Matthew Henry remarks, “Praising God is not only a good thing, which we do well to do, but it is our indispensable duty, which we are obliged to do; it is at our peril if we neglect it...” (p. 861). The word “liturgy” comes from the Greek *leitourgia*, which is a combination of two other words: people (*laos*) and work (*ergon*). Literally, a *liturgy* is a “work of the _____.”

B. Listen to the Lord’s voice! (cf. 7,8,11,13)

Matthew Henry reminds us, “The two great intentions of our religious assemblies, and which we ought to have in our eye in our attendance on them, are answered in this psalm, which are, to give glory to God and to receive instruction from God, to ‘behold the beauty of the Lord and to enquire in his temple’ [Ps 27:4] ...” (861). So what are the words Jesus speaks? He speaks [1] reminders of His mercy (6-7,10), [2] commandments and statutes to direct our worship and lives (8-9,13), and [3] threats for disobedience and promises for obedience (10c, 12, 14-16).

C. Trust that the Lord will bless those who worship and serve Him!

Allen Ross writes, “If the people of God live faithfully to their God, then he will defend them against all their adversaries; but if like earlier generations they refuse to obey, then he will leave them to sort out their own problems” (Ross, 711). This is Jesus’ challenge to the church in America; it is His challenge to us.

IV. Conclusion