
Day 274 - October 1

Period of Restoration (535-425 BCE)

The Psalms of a Nation Restored

Readings: *Psalm 126, 128, 129, 132, 147, 149*

Reflections:

- Psalm 126 is a joyful song about the return of the exiles to their homeland. It concludes with a refrain that captures the essence of humility and brokenness going before the blessings and work of God: “He who goes out weeping carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.” Many times our seasons of deep sorrow are times that are filled with the seeds of potential. It is not until you complete the full season of waiting on God does God bring about the harvest and the joy from all those years of sowing in faith.
- Psalm 128 is a song of personal promise and hope. We see again how very personal, intimate and natural is the essence of God’s blessing: fruitful labor and good home life with spouse and kids. Now, there are many who will never experience the dream of this vision. Again this promise was given in a time when all of God’s blessings were wrapped up in a very physical expression. When Jesus appears he redefines the kingdom of God and God’s blessings in more lasting, universal terms. Who are his family? Those who do the will of God (See Matthew 12:46-50). And those who give up family for his sake receive a hundred times as many in the kingdom (See Matthew 19:29). In this way, this very practical blessing becomes re-envisioned in the kingdom as we enter into a spiritual family and find that we now have spiritual parents, brothers and sisters and children. The blessing and prosperity is not on our nation, Israel, or on our city, Jerusalem, but on our community, this new city of people whom God is calling to carry his grace and peace into the world.
- Psalm 129 is a song expressing the long suffering the people had endured, the deliverance of God, their disdain for those who reject their nation, and their desire for God’s blessing to be spoken over their community. Again, this is an expression capturing a very natural human emotion in response to their experiences. Yet, we see in Jesus, this is all turned on its head. His followers willingly suffer to advance his cause. They have made themselves servants and slaves of all people. They bless those that curse them. They don’t seek to be blessed by people but seek to be a blessing to others. The call of Christ is to take our natural self-interested and self-centeredness and to change us from the inside out so that we truly become other-centered, seeking to give our life even as he gave his life for us.

- Psalm 132 retells the promises to this nation through David. It calls on God to remember his covenant with David for both the temple and a king. In this song we see God's heart for his people, "I will bless her with abundant provisions, her poor will I satisfy with food." He desires to bless a people that they might be a source of blessing and help to others in need. The song continues and promises that one with authority ("a horn") will grow for David and set up a lamp for my Messiah ("anointed one"). God's enemies (spiritual enemies) will be clothed in shame but he will receive a resplendent crown. What an awesome promise of the coming Messiah.
- Psalm 147 contains many themes we have come to see throughout the unfolding drama: 1) God's heart for the broken and wounded ("He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds"); 2) The ultimate power of God ("He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name"); 3) His rejection of the proud as he embraces the humble ("The Lord sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground"); 4) God is our only provider ("He provides..."); 5) God's heart is for those that trust him completely ("The Lord delights in those who fear – completely trust – him, who put their hope in his unfailing love"); 6) His heart is for people to experience peace/shalom ("He grants peace..."); 7) His word is what has the power to change everything ("he sends his word..."). Each of these expressions in this song are set within the context of Israel but we can see how they transcend the immediate context and stretch throughout the entire drama. God is ultimately relational. Even through the Torah or Law he wanted the people to envision them not as rules but expressions of his heart and of being in relationship with him. Yet, we see that until God's "word becomes flesh" (see John 1) that people will consistently take what God revealed and turn it into religious legalism.
- Psalm 149 is a song of praise for the people. Here we see their desire to see their enemies wiped out (Jesus' teaching on enemy love is not yet revealed) and in their vengeance to see that as their glory. We see this is one of the key points that is completely inverted by Christ. Our glory is not in how we kill our enemies but in how we suffer that some might be saved. The one point in this song that remains consistent is this: God crowns the humble with salvation. Again we see this consistently declared throughout the narrative. God is not a God of the proud but of the humble!