

Psalms: He is My Shepherd



I was raised in a small country church called Ledbetter Baptist Church. For us, worship began when the song leader stopped and stood beside the piano player and said, "Would everyone please stand, grab your hymnal, and open to page..." He would give us the page number, and then worship began. We had sung the same songs for so long that we all knew which song was on which page, without the song leader even telling us.

This is our 19th exit. We are in the second book in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, the book of Psalms. We are looking at Israel's hymnal. There are one hundred and fifty songs, divided into five books. Most of our Bibles say, Book One, at the top of Psalms 1. The Hebrews divided Psalms because the Jews believed that to some degree, the psalms in each of those sections mirrored the first five books of Moses. They divided Psalms as follows:

Book One: Psalms 1-41

Book Two: Psalms 42-72

Book Three: Psalms 73-89

Book Four: Psalms 90-106

Book Five: Psalms 107-150

A Book of Worship

Psalms is a collection of songs and prayers that were put to music. The Hebrews called this the book of praises. In our English Bibles, we follow the Septuagint name, Psalms. The translators of our English Bible coined a new word; they transliterated the Greek word, *psalmos*, to the English equivalent, Psalms. It is the same as they did with the word, baptize, when the Bible was being translated into English. The king had authorized the 1611 version, and when they came to that Greek word, *baptizo*, the translators didn't know what to do with it because it meant to dip, submerge, or to plunge. The king had not been dipped, submerged, or plunged; he had been poured. Since the king had authorized the translation, they didn't know what to do. They feared submerged or plunged might offend him, so they transliterated the word, *baptizo*, into English as baptize. They did the same thing to the title to Psalms. The Hebrew, and the Greek word, means a poem or a song sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. It's the picture of David on his harp, singing, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures." Psalms is a book about worship. It is a book that teaches us to worship God as the Shepherd of our life. If I were to title the book of Psalms, it would be He is my Shepherd.

A.W. Tozer said, "Worship is the missing crown jewel of today's church." He talked about all those things that we do so well in the church, yet the one thing we seemed not to do so well was worship. As I have studied the book of Psalms, I have come to believe that worship is what we do because of who He is. Worship is the releasing of our attitude toward God. When we study the book of Psalms, we will see that they are founded on the Law, the historical section of the Old Testament, and the Prophets.

Usually, the psalms came out of the everyday life of the community, whether from an individual or a nation. Therefore, you can't miss that they sang about what they believed to be true about God. They also sang about how they felt about God. I am amazed at the dynamic of the songs and how they balanced the objective truth of who God is and what He has

done. They weren't afraid to talk about how they felt about Him. Their songs were about a living relationship with God. Sometimes, their songs were about their disappointments. They questioned where God was when He let someone unrighteous, who didn't worship Him, get victory over them, who did worship Him. They didn't mind singing about God stepping in, destroying their enemy, and showing no mercy. Then, they would be on their face in agony before Him, realizing the reason they are in the mess they are in was because of sin. They cried out for His mercy and grace.

Psalms is the longest book in the Bible. It contains the shortest chapter in the Bible as well. It is tough for a pastor to preach from a book that was meant to be sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument. In Luke 24 when Jesus was teaching the disciples after He had been resurrected, He specifically mentioned the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms talk about Him. You can take the book of Psalms and picture the death of Jesus on a cross. It is amazing because so many of the Psalms have a Messianic emphasis, and I wanted to show that. Many of the psalms ultimately talk about Jesus, such as 22:1, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" that is a Messianic psalm. When David wrote, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek," that is Jesus. When he talks about "making His enemies His footstool," that is Jesus. But I am choosing to do this a little differently. I felt led to choose just one psalm that pictures all the psalms and their intent. I believe the intent of the book of Psalms is about worship. I believe we were made to worship our Shepherd. Our worship has an objective side to it that is all about Him and who He is. But that brings about a relationship that is so subjective; some will express that a little differently. Yet in worship, there must be spirit, truth, order, and design. There must not be confusion.

Let's imagine that we just drop in to a worship service of Israel. We will see one of the psalms, and learn what God was teaching them about what He desired in worship. We take the liberty to criticize worship songs written today. We think we might have said it differently. But don't do that with Psalms, because you are criticizing God when you criticize a psalm. The people who wrote the psalms were inspired by God, just as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and the other writers of the Bible. This hymnbook of

Psalms carries the very breath of God. During Israel's history, from the time of Moses to the time of Nehemiah, God was leading people to pen songs and prayers, and put to music. God desired to be worshipped with them.

We are going to imagine the children of Israel are using Psalms 100 in the worship service we are visiting. I pray we get a flavor, a preview, in the seven imperatives of worship. In grammar, imperatives are commands to act. We will discuss the seven found in this song.

Scripture

A Psalm for giving thanks

"Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!"

Serve the LORD with gladness!

Come into his presence with singing!

Know that the LORD, he is God!

It is he who made us, and we are his;

We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,

And his courts with praise!

Give thanks to him; bless his name!

For the LORD is good;

His steadfast love endures forever,

And his faithfulness to all generations."

If you were conditioned to worship in a certain style, you might have been uncomfortable when the style is different. You might find yourself watching how they worship instead of actually worshipping. In this lesson, we are going to watch Israel worship according to what God says is true in Psalms 100.

Seven Imperatives of Worship

1. Shout with Joy

Shout with joy to the Lord, all the earth. That has been presented a little differently in the English Bible, which says, "Make a joyful noise to the Lord." When I keep that phrase in context of this whole song, it isn't saying it doesn't matter how I sing, but that I should sing joyfully. If I sing joyfully, it doesn't matter if I can carry a tune or not; but that isn't what this is saying. I have used this verse wrong my whole life, and I didn't recognize it until this study. The context is the community is going to the temple to worship God. Before they get there, the first thing God says is shout with joy! The first imperative of worship was a command of God to shout. You know the difference between normal speech and shouting. Normally, when you shout you are trying to get someone's attention. The Bible says the first thing God wants Israel to do is shout to Him, joyfully, but they aren't at the temple yet.

What is this picturing? It pictures people letting God know they are coming for the purpose of worshipping Him. They want God to know the only reason they are there is because of Him. The shout, the being boisterous, is to get God's attention. It draws attention to yourself in order to let God know you are here. That goes against everything we have ever been taught! Some of us kind of just sneak into a church service. We come inside and blend in; we want to be anonymous. We don't want to be seen. But God wants to see you. He wants you to let Him know why you are there. You get His attention by shouting.

For me, this is similar to going to a wedding I have been invited to attend where I am not performing the ceremony. Now, I don't go because I like

weddings. I don't mean to be disrespectful, but I am only there because I have been invited, not for any entertainment value for me. I am there for them, and I want them to know I have attended so at some point, I try to get their attention so they see I have come. I want them to know I am there for them.

This picture of Israel going to the temple is a long parade, a long line of people. They are building up steam, everyone is excited, and they are letting everyone know. Then Israel begins to shout at the top of their lungs because they are going to worship God! I don't know how we would capture that today, but it would be so neat if one of God's angels asked Him what that noise was, and God said, "That is Hardin Baptist Church trying to let Me know they are coming to My house! They are gathering together because it is all about Me, not them, and they want Me to know they are there." WOW! Israel's worship puts us to shame, doesn't it? We are almost prevented from worshipping because of everything we do before we even get to church, because it isn't about God. God is telling us to let Him know we are coming before we get there.

2. Serve with Gladness

Serve God with gladness. Don't let your mind run to the point that God wants you to serve with your spiritual giftedness with a smile on your face. That is not what this is saying. The context here is that as you come together as the house of God to serve/worship Him, He wants us to have an attitude of gratitude. The picture is coming together as a nation of priests, and we aren't coming reluctantly. We aren't coming because we have to; it is not drudgery. We don't have other things on our minds. We are to take, very seriously, what we have been designed to do, and that is to worship Him.

Have you ever worked with people who just grin all day long doing what they are doing? You get the idea they like what they are doing. Then there are those who just grin and bear it; they just can't wait for the day to be over. God is telling Israel to want to be there, to come to Him with gladness.

3. Come with Singing

God said to come into His presence with singing. There is something about singing that God likes. The longest book in the Bible, the most material covered in the Bible, is in the book of Psalms! God wants you to sing. He wants you to be singing when you come into His presence, not just when you get into His presence. So many of us don't even sing; we don't hum, or whistle. You are debating the song in your mind and you can't wait for it to get over; that is so wrong. You don't have to be a lover of music to sing, but you have to be a lover of God to sing. I am not being hypocritical when I listen to talk radio in my truck. But when I come to the house of the Lord, I enjoy singing, because it isn't about me. If I had my way, we wouldn't even sing, it would be preaching the whole service. But this isn't about me; it is about God.

Psalms 137 tells us the children of Israel in Babylon hung their harps on the willow trees. The Jewish exiles in Babylon hung up their instruments. But once the Babylonians get to know them, they ask them to sing a song they had sung to their God when they were in Israel. The exiles replied that they couldn't sing because they had nothing to sing about, because they were in bondage.

Do you understand this? The reason we sing to God is because we are free! We have been redeemed by Him, and no matter our circumstance in life, He is worthy of our worship. Job lost it all! But the last phrase in chapter 1 of Job is "and he worshipped God." David lost his baby, and he went to the house of the Lord and he worshipped God. When the children of Israel came across the Red Sea, the first thing they did was to stop and sing a new song to God!

For many, the reason you don't sing because of your bondage, so you make excuses. "I don't like that song. I don't like the music, it is too loud." You are there to worship the music; you are there to worship God with music. The section before this psalm tells us that God is King and He sovereignly governs the universe, and many, many times, He tells His people that He wants us to sing a new song; shame on us for not liking new songs. I will not pass judgment for liking old songs better than new songs, but I think it is because we like the familiar. When we think about Amazing Grace, and Victory in Jesus, and other older hymns, I think that

we identified with those songs. Early in our Christianity, those songs meant something to us because we identified with them. But several years ago, my family was going through something we had never been through before in our life. At the time, our church introduced a new song called, Blessed be the Name of the Lord, and the words say, "He give and takes away." My family couldn't sing that song without bursting into tears. In spite of what we were going through, all we could do was to praise God. We realized that yes, He gives, but He takes away. But even when He takes away, He is worthy to be praised. Honestly, I don't want to sing that song anymore, but I still want to sing Amazing Grace.

God wants us to sing a new song because He wants us to realize we should be growing in our relationship with Him. You shouldn't keep looking at the relationship in the way of the old. You should be formulating new thoughts with God on a daily basis. Don't only want to sing the old songs because you want to look back; God wants us to sing new songs. He wants us to come into His presence with singing, heartfelt songs that express where we are with Him!

4. Know the LORD is God

Know that Yahweh is Elohim. In the Hebrew, it says, "Know that Yahweh, He is Elohim!" *"Know that the LORD, He is God."*

Imagine you are summoned to the Oval Office and you got to meet the President of the United States. Being who he is, it would influence me. I would know whose presence I was coming into, and I would dress appropriately. My remarks to him would reflect who he is, the President of the United States of America. Do you realize who we worship? Yahweh; He is God! We come into the presence of the God of the universe, through His Son, Jesus Christ. He wants us to know who He is! He wants our worship to be based on knowledge, fact, and truth. That is why psalms are anchored in the Pentateuch, the historical section, and the Prophets. He wants us to know the relationship we have with Him, and this is why He says I made you; you are Mine! In this context, I do not believe this is talking about God as Creator; I believe it is talking about God as Redeemer. Yes, He is Creator, and there are many psalms that talk about

Him as Creator. But in this context, I believe He is telling Israel that He made them into the people they are, and they belong to Him.

Listen church, God has made us into who we are; we belong to Him! We cannot take credit for who we are in Christ! We are not self-made people. Self-made people worship their creator, and if you are self-made person, you are into yourself; you can't help it. Christians are not self-made people. Therefore, we worship the One who made us and we belong to Him. God says, "*We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.*"

When I drive down the road, I usually look at the livestock as I pass by farms. When I brag about someone's cows, horses, goats, or sheep, to me, it's a reflection of the owner. If the cows aren't in good shape, I think the owner is a sorry cattleman. If they look good, I think the owner is a really good cattleman. The cattle reflect the owner. I can tell he is a good cattleman because of his cattle. God says we are the sheep of His pasture. We reflect who God is. Our very life should say what kind of Shepherd God is, therefore, we should be prizewinning sheep.

My wife got our grandson a goat to show at the county fair and he won in his class. Instead of giving him a blue ribbon, as they should have, they gave him a purple ribbon. He knows the purple ribbon means grand champion, so now you can't convince him he doesn't have the grand champion goat of the county! That means I am stuck with Gertie the goat on my farm forever! Gertie is my grandson's prized goat, and I will never be able to sell him or eat him. I will have to feed Gertie for the rest of her life! My grandson knows that he is a great herdsman because his goat is the grand champion of the county. That is what you say about God! As a sheep, you don't say how good you are; you say how good God is as a Shepherd!

5. Enter with Thanksgiving

Enter His gates, or courts, with thanksgiving and praise. Do we assemble with thanksgiving and praise? How can you step into church assembly and the first thing out of your mouth be a complaint or a critique? The reason you do is because it is all about you, and not about God. Yet, you say you are here to worship! For Israel, it is in the courtyard, inside the temple, and

He said to enter His presence with an attitude of thanksgiving and praise. What would people watching us walk into a church service think? I wonder if they would think the same thing they do when they see us at work. Do you get this? Our lives reflect God.

6. Give Thanks

We are to come in His presence, entering with thanksgiving and praise, and then, we are to give thanks. Listen, you can't bring a present of praise to God with a sorry look on your face. So many of us aren't giving Him a gift of thanks because we aren't worshipping Him for who He is; we worship Him because of who we are. This is not about you; this is about Him! If we ever get that part right, we will get the next part right, and that is our life is about Him. Then we will quite making the separation of our worship and our life. Instead of just our worship being holy, our life will be holy. It is all holy, and it is all God's.

7. Bless His Name

This word, "bless," means 'praise.' Praise His name. I went into two different businesses recently, and someone in both places said, "Were your ears burning?" That phrase means you are being talked about. When someone says that to me, I always follow up with, "I hope it wasn't bad." They always say, "Oh no, it was good." I mean, if it were bad, they wouldn't tell me, right!

But listen, this isn't about my name...this is about God's name. We are here to praise His name. In the Old Testament world, name signified character; it signified who you were. We are here to praise Yahweh, the Great I Am! Verse 5 says, "For the LORD is good; His steadfast love endures forever, and His faithfulness to all generations." The only relationship you have where you will not be let down is your relationship with God. He is good! He is good! He is good! Let's praise His name! Let's get God's attention so He knows our lives are totally about Him.