

Songs of Ascent Pt. 3

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, July 26, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us today. Whether you are here IN PERSON or watching via the LIVESTREAM, you are most WELCOME. Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes. Let us turn to the Book of Psalms (cf. Psalm 125).

SETTING THE STAGE

FYI – This morning I want to offer the THIRD installment in our SERIES through the Songs of Ascent...

Q. What are the Songs of Ascent?

The Songs of Ascent are a special GROUPING of psalms within the broader Book of Psalms (cf. Psalms 120–134). As we have noted, the ancient Jews would use these psalms as traveling songs as they made PILGRIMAGE to Jerusalem for the annual feasts of Unleavened Bread, Weeks/Pentecost, and Tabernacles/Booths. Since the city is situated on a high hill (el. 2,700-ft), pilgrims would have to ASCEND or GO UP TO Jerusalem...

...Hence the name: SONGS of ASCENT.

NOTE 1 – The Songs of Ascent were SIGNIFICANT to the people of ISRAEL...

- a) They were used in PREPARATION for worship
- b) They were vital in promoting national SOLIDARITY
- c) They gave INSIGHT re. the nature/work of the LORD
- d) They were REVELATORY re. their place in/before Him

NOTE 2 – Being short and easy to memorize, they served ISRAEL well for generations. Now, millennia later, they continue to inform and impact BELIEVERS in EVERY age. Yes, we may be removed from the ancient Jews by time, space and culture, but the THEMES these psalms touch upon are timeless and timely! Thus, they are of BENEFIT for us as we JOURNEY through this life and make PILGRIMAGE unto our heavenly home.

NOTE 3 – I would like to spend the REMAINDER of our time looking at Psalms 125–129. It is NOT my intent to provide a thorough treatise of each work! Rather, I want to IDENTIFY and EXAMINE overarching PRINCIPLES that inform and impact our lives in Christ in 2020 and beyond!

LET'S DELVE IN...

PSALM 125

Psalm 125 (NIV)

- 1 Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be shaken but endures forever.
- 2 As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
so the Lord surrounds his people
both now and forevermore.
- 3 The scepter of the wicked will not remain
over the land allotted to the righteous,
for then the righteous might use
their hands to do evil.
- 4 Lord, do good to those who are good,
to those who are upright in heart.
- 5 But those who turn to crooked ways
the Lord will banish with the evildoers.

Peace be on Israel.

NOTE 1 – The opening line(s) of EVERY psalm presents the dominant THEME that biblical authors seek to address. Thus said, Psalm 125 emphasizes the SECURITY of those who trust in the Lord. i.e., In a world of turmoil, tumult and turbulence, we have an abiding assurance of ultimate victory and hope in Him (**REPEAT**) – (**v. 1**).

NOTE 2 – I love the use of SIMILE in the opening verses (i.e., simile is a comparison using LIKE or AS). Those who trust in the Lord are LIKE Mount Zion in that BOTH shall ENDURE and are SECURE before the Lord for time and eternity.

Q. How is such an abiding victory and promise of security assured? Guaranteed?

A. Through the God who surrounds His people AS the mountains surround Jerusalem. (**v. 2**)

NOTE 3 – The Lord SURROUNDS His people and is the One who is WITH us in all times and seasons...

Isaiah 41:10

- 10 So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Isaiah 43:2

- 2 When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.

Psalm 23:4

4 Even though I walk
 through the darkest valley,
 I will fear no evil,
 for you are with me;
 your rod and your staff,
 they comfort me.

NOTE 4 – The One who is WITH us KEEPS us and shall DELIVER us unto a glorious end. Let us trust that...

Philippians 1:6

6 . . . he who began a good work in [us] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

NOTE 5 – It is worth noting that Psalm 125 presents a CONTRAST between the righteous and the wicked...

Psalm 125:3–5

3 The scepter of the wicked will not remain
 over the land allotted to the righteous,
 for then the righteous might use
 their hands to do evil.

4 Lord, do good to those who are good,
 to those who are upright in heart.

5 But those who turn to crooked ways
 the Lord will banish with the evildoers.

KEY 1 – Those who belong to Him know stability and security that will last into eternity. NOT SO with the wicked (cf. Psalm 1)! Sadly, not everyone chooses to avail themselves of a relationship with Him. There is a DIFFERENCE between being righteous and wicked; lost and found; saved and unsaved; etc.

Matthew 7:13

13 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

KEY 2 – Choose your path WELL for not all roads lead to the same end...

PSALM 126

Psalm 126

1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dreamed.

2 Our mouths were filled with laughter,
our tongues with songs of joy.

Then it was said among the nations,
“The Lord has done great things for them.”

3 The Lord has done great things for us,
and we are filled with joy.

4 Restore our fortunes, Lord,
like streams in the Negev.

5 Those who sow with tears
will reap with songs of joy.

6 Those who go out weeping,
carrying seed to sow,
will return with songs of joy,
carrying sheaves with them.

Q. What is the theme the author seeks to touch upon?

A. A celebration of the Lord’s provision of RESTORATION (v. 1–3)

FYI 1 – Commentators believe that this psalm looks BACK upon a time of historical return from captivity. Most likely, the author is looking back upon the conclusion of the Babylonian Captivity and the return(s) that followed.

FYI 2 – Remember that in 586 B.C., Babylon DESTROYED Jerusalem and took many into EXILE (i.e., judgment for their crimes). For decades the Jews LANGUISHED in a foreign land for their waywardness, and any hope of return seemed unthinkable; being under the heel of so mighty a nation. YET the Lord intervened and brought His people back into their homeland. This is the story of MUCH of the OT.

NOTE 1 – The author of Psalm 126 is likely looking back upon this event in thankful celebration. He CANNOT fathom that God allowed His people to come back home (and in the sight of all nations)! God had been so forgiving and gracious to a nation SO undeserving and burdened with sorrow (v. 1–3).

NOTE 2 – Yet the full work of restoration was NOT yet complete. The people were back home in nation of Israel, but communities were YET in disarray. There was abundant NEED (i.e., imagine the work of resurrecting a nation that was essentially dead for decades). Thus, we see his appeal in v. 4–6.

Q. How do the themes of this psalm find APPLICATION in Century-21?

Q. How many of us know the joy of being freed from slavery and granted new life?

Q. How many of us know that God was gracious in saving those as wayward as you and me?

Q. How many of us look back and we can see the handiwork of God in our lives (i.e., fueling praise)?

Q. Yet how many know that the work is not done and that there is so much still to accomplish (i.e., prayer)?

KEY – Perhaps we can relate to the sentiments of this psalm MORE than we might think at first glance!

PSALM 127

Psalm 127 (of Solomon)

1 Unless the Lord builds the house,
the builders labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city,
the guards stand watch in vain.

2 In vain you rise early
and stay up late,
toiling for food to eat—
for he grants sleep to those he loves.

3 Children are a heritage from the Lord,
offspring a reward from him.

4 Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are children born in one's youth.

5 Blessed is the man
whose quiver is full of them.
They will not be put to shame
when they contend with their opponents in court.

Q. What is the theme that Solomon seeks to touch upon?

A. The AID of the Lord God is CRITICAL for success and security...

KEY – In fact, the workings of the Lord are MORE necessary for success than human effort and agency, for apart from Him all is FUTILITY (cf. Ecclesiastes). Solomon herein is touching upon a principle that CHRIST Himself so profoundly posited many centuries later...

John 15:5 (Emphasis Mine)

5 . . . apart from me you can do **nothing**.

1) It is the Lord Who Provides STABILITY (v. 1a)

Man may work to build a house, but WHERE did the capacity and ingenuity to build come from in the first place? Moreover, it is the favor of the Lord and His blessing thereof (i.e., as His ways are put into practice) that makes a house into a HOME. Ever spend time in a beautiful home with a family in disarray? (cf. v. 1)

2) It is the Lord Who Provides SECURITY (v. 1b)

Not to diminish the efforts of competent leaders and officers, but WOE to the nation whom God chooses NOT to protect! I have often WONDERED how many times the Lord intervened and saved our nation, our families and ourselves (i.e., at the individual level) and we NEVER had a clue.

3) It is the Lord Who SUSTAINS our Living (v. 2)

Many work themselves to the bone with LITTLE to show for it (i.e., absence of peace). The godly may work hard (and they should), but they perceive that God is their ULTIMATE source. Thus, they are able to SLEEP at night in a state of blissful peace and contentment!

FYI – These points do NOT diminish human effort, agency or experience. There is a place for ALL of these items, as they are God-given in their own right. However, apart from the sovereign power of God, anything man seeks to achieve apart from Him is an exercise in FUTILITY. Remember John 15:5!

NOTE – The Lord is ALSO deeply involved and critical in the FAMILY unit...

1) It is He Who Supplies CHILDREN...

Psalm 127:3

3 Children are a heritage from the Lord,
offspring a reward from him.

2) ...Children Who are USEFUL to their Parents (i.e., Safety and Security)

Psalm 127:4–5

4 Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are children born in one's youth.

5 Blessed is the man
whose quiver is full of them.

They will not be put to shame
when they contend with their opponents in court.

QUOTE – “As arrows are indispensable for warriors to succeed in battle, so children are invaluable as defenders of their father and mother in time of war or litigation. The more such defenders, the better.” (John MacArthur). Children would often work to PROTECT their parents in times of battle or as legal witnesses against accusation in the ancient world...

Q. But who gave the children in the first place? A. The LORD.

Q. To what degree do we rely upon God or upon our own capacities?

Q. To what degree do we see Him as the source of our protection and provision?

Q. To what degree do we realize that everything in our lives/family is dependent on Him?

Proverbs 3:5–6 (Emphasis Mine)

5 Trust in the Lord with **all** your heart
and **lean not** on your own understanding;

6 in **all** your ways submit to him,
and **he** will make your paths straight.

PSALM 128

Psalm 128

- 1 Blessed are all who fear the Lord,
who walk in obedience to him.
- 2 You will eat the fruit of your labor;
blessings and prosperity will be yours.
- 3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.
- 4 Yes, this will be the blessing
for the man who fears the Lord.

- 5 May the Lord bless you from Zion;
may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.
- 6 May you live to see your children's children—
peace be on Israel.

Q. What is the dominant theme the author seeks to address?

A. The BLESSING of the Lord is upon those who reverently serve Him.

NOTE – Note that the opening of this psalm sounds quite a bit like the BEATITUDES of Christ in Matt. 5...

Psalm 128:1 (Emphasis Mine)

- 1 **Blessed** are all who fear the Lord,
who walk in obedience to him.

Psalm 128:1 (PJV – 1)

“An abiding happiness and fortune belong to those” who fear the Lord
who walk in obedience to him.

Psalm 128:1 (PJV – 2)

“Favored—for time and eternity—are those” who fear the Lord
who walk in obedience to him.

Psalm 128:1 (PJV – 3)

“To be envied or esteemed are those” who fear the Lord
who walk in obedience to him.

Q. Why? What BENEFITS are conferred upon those who revere and serve the Lord?

1) Natural Blessings in the PRESENT

Psalm 128:1–3

- 1 Blessed are all who fear the Lord,
who walk in obedience to him.
- 2 You will eat the fruit of your labor;
blessings and prosperity will be yours.
- 3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.

NOTE – These verses touch upon the themes of earthly abundance, prosperity, provision and fruitfulness. Of course, we must realize that this is by no means an exhaustive list! The blessing of the Lord is manifold in the lives of His own...

2) Blessings unto the FUTURE

Psalm 128:5–6a

- 5 May the Lord bless you from Zion;
may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.
- 6 May you live to see your children's children . . .

KEY – This psalm is short, sweet and touches upon a timeless and timely PRINCIPLE. i.e., Reverential obedience PRECIPITATES the favor of God for time and eternity. Serving the Lord in the present brings about present and future REWARD! Consider...

Psalm 84:11

- 11 For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
the Lord bestows favor and honor;
no good thing does he withhold
from those whose walk is blameless [i.e., upright].

PSALM 129

Psalm 129

- 1 “They have greatly oppressed me from my youth,”
let Israel say;
- 2 “they have greatly oppressed me from my youth,
but they have not gained the victory over me.
- 3 Plowmen have plowed my back
and made their furrows long.
- 4 But the Lord is righteous;
he has cut me free from the cords of the wicked.”
- 5 May all who hate Zion
be turned back in shame.
- 6 May they be like grass on the roof,
which withers before it can grow;
- 7 a reaper cannot fill his hands with it,
nor one who gathers fill his arms.
- 8 May those who pass by not say to them,
“The blessing of the Lord be on you;
we bless you in the name of the Lord.”

As we wind to a close this morning, the psalmist herein addresses the theme of VICTORY over FOES/FORCES.

FYI 1 – In the opening verses the author CELEBRATES the divine deliverance of Israel from the hands of its enemy (v. 1–4). This may be looking BACK upon release from the Babylonian Captivity (i.e., freed Israel recognizing the hand of God in securing their victory).

Q. Can anyone look back upon a time of deliverance (i.e., wherein God worked to rescue you)?

Psalm 34:19

- 19 The righteous person may have many troubles,
but the Lord delivers him from them all . . .

FYI 2 – The concluding verses CONDEMNNS the enemies of Israel (v. 5–8).

Q. What can we derive from this? Are we to similarly curse our enemies as Christians?

NOTE – In the OT, the people of God perceived the foes of Israel to be the foes of God—i.e., those who were deserving of righteous judgment. In the NT, however, we have come to learn that our enemies are NOT flesh and blood, for our warfare is against sinister spiritual powers (cf. Eph. 6:12)...

THEREFORE...

1) On a MICRO Level...

We must NOT utilize such a prayer against individual enemies, etc. We are to be of a DIFFERENT spirit, wanting for all—even our enemies—to come to forgiveness and the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. There is to be NO room in our hearts for hatred and bitterness against anyone! HOWEVER...

2) On a MACRO Level...

We are to desire the ultimate triumph of God over ALL evil, knowing that His enemies (i.e., those who persist in evil) will be put to shame. EVERY time we pray for His kingdom to come in this world, we are praying for the Lord to rise up in VICTORY over all who would oppose Him. THUS...

KEY – It seems BEST to avoid the OT condemning of individuals—leaving ultimate judgment to God...

Romans 12:14, 17–21

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." [i.e., bring him to a place of repentance]

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

SUMMATIONS

I can only IMAGINE how these Songs of Ascent would have impacted ancient JEWS pilgrimaging to Jerusalem. However, I can know and experience the realities of the themes they touch upon. As for me and my house, we WILL work to embrace and apply what has been shared today.

Q. What about you and yours? PRAYER

CONCLUSION PT. 1

H.W. for August 2 – Psalms 130–134

CONCLUSION PT. 2

KEY – Thank you for taking the time to join us today. Should those of you who have joined us online wish to give, please do so through the giving portal of our church WEBSITE (www.NewLifeBarre.org). For those who are present, you may place your donation in the OFFERING BOXES in this Sanctuary (**PRAYER**).