

Introduction:

The Psalms has held a special place in the heart of Christians since the very beginning of the New Covenant. It is the most quoted book in the New Testament. It is quoted 79 times and alluded to 333 times.¹ That means about 5% of the New Testament relates back to the **The Psalms**. The most quoted Old Testament verse in the New Testament is **Psalm 110:1**, quoted 18 times.² Christians and religious people of every century have hearkened back to **The Psalms** in time of trouble and joy. How many of our modern songs are from **The Psalms**, quote **The Psalms**, allude to **The Psalms**? Many Christians today when asked for their favorite Bible passage will turn to a psalm. When preachers or shepherds counsel and comfort those who are in grief, they often turn to a favored psalm. When Christians want to proclaim their joy at some victory, they often couch their thanksgiving and praise in the language of a psalm. Many Christians, longing to have a deeper relationship with God, look to **The Psalms** as the touchstone and guide to getting closer to God. But we often have a love/hate relationship with **The Psalms**. For all the glory and wonder we think is present, when we get there, we struggle. The language is different, sometimes frightening. The imagery is distinct. The meaning is sometimes, often times, illusive. And then, some of us say, "It's poetry. What can I get out of poetry?" I want to preach more from **The Psalms**. At least trying to preach from **The Psalms** once per month. Before we start digging into the individual psalms, I thought it might be good to demonstrate why we, as Christians, need to read **The Psalms**.

Discussion:

I. **The Psalms** are Scripture.

- A. We often struggle with **The Psalms** because rarely are they God talking to us. Usually, they are people talking to God. We know the Bible includes inspired accounts of the words of uninspired people and we wonder about **The Psalms**, especially since they are so shocking sometimes. But **The Psalms** are not simply the record of what religious people said. They are themselves inspired Scripture.
- B. In **John 10:34-35**, Jesus placed the stamp of approval on **The Psalms**. He quoted from **Psalm 82:6**, claiming it was "written in your Law" and then said it must be true because "Scripture cannot be broken."
- C. Notice a few passages that explain how **The Psalms** came into existence. In **Matthew 22:43**, Jesus said David wrote **Psalm 110:1** "in the Spirit" (**Mark 12:36** presents this very same account). In **Acts 1:16, 20**, Peter attributed **Psalm 69:25** and **Psalm 109:8** to the Holy Spirit speaking by the mouth of David. In **Acts 4:25-26**, the apostles prayed quoting **Psalm 2:1-2** and claiming it was what God, the Father, had said through the mouth of David by the Holy Spirit.
- D. For all of our struggles with **The Psalms**, we must recognize that they were not simply the thoughts of religious men. They are the very words of God that He spoke through inspired men by the Holy Spirit. We need to read them in the same way as **II Peter 1:20-21** describes all of Scripture. They did not come from anyone's private interpretation, but "men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (ESV). And as **II Timothy 3:16-17** explains, they are breathed out by God and profitable to us for teaching, reproof, correction, and even training in righteousness.

II. **The Psalms** are real.

- A. I do not mean to suggest the rest of Scripture is unreal. Rather, that many times the distance in time, geography, and culture of the rest of Scripture can let us see a gap between us and those saints of old. Not merely a gap, but a chasm. We can convince ourselves that Noah, Abraham, Moses, Rahab, David, Mary, Paul, Peter, Tabitha were different. Sure they sinned or had their successes, but those accounts can become to us nothing more than stories of distant people facing distinctly different problems than we face. They wouldn't know what it is like to be us; we are convinced we certainly don't know what it is like to be them.
- B. But **The Psalms** simply do not allow that. The raw emotion expressed in **The Psalms** is just too powerful for that. It strips away the frills, finery, and frippery of a stable and staid life and says, "Welcome to the real world of the religious." Certainly, we see some of the psalmists at their best, but we see some of them at their worst.

¹ http://www.theopedia.com/New_Testament_use_of_the_Old_Testament

² <http://www.havenfwbchurch.org/biblstat.htm>

All of the trite mantras and clichés that the shallowly spiritual hide behind when we are in the midst of the turmoil blanch and fade underneath the blazing light of **The Psalms**. **The Psalms** shine the light on every dark corner of our secret soul not allowing us to hide behind the illusion of normalcy we like to portray. They let us know there is no real need to hide. “Look at these saints,” **The Psalms** proclaim. “They were like you. They are you. You are no different. You don’t need to hide. These people were real. You can be real.”

- C. Certainly there is real praise and joy. Can we miss the real celebration, offered with seemingly wild abandon in **Psalm 145**? “I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever” (ESV). Or in **Psalm 146**? “Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being” (ESV). There is no plastic smile. The psalmist isn’t saying this because he knows it is the right thing to say. He is not sitting still in his pew while he proclaims this. It is real joy, a joy we long for. But perhaps more moving is the real despair, depression, and distress we see in **The Psalms**. In **Psalm 10:1**, “Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hid yourself in times of trouble?” (ESV). In **Psalm 13:1**, “How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?” (ESV) Or perhaps the most well-known, **Psalm 22:1**, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (ESV). The cry of despair that Jesus adopted as His own on the cross. These are statements we are afraid to speak out loud, and yet some of us, perhaps most of us, in the quiet solitude of our own bedrooms and prayer closets have uttered them, almost involuntarily, while fearing that we would be struck down for such insolence. But here it is in **The Psalms**. Real people. Real distress. Real life. Real prayers. We need to read **The Psalms** because we see people who have torn off their masks and cast them at the feet of God longing to be healed from their real wounds by the only real God.

III. **The Psalms** put words to our feelings.

- A. No matter what you are feeling, **The Psalms** provide expression of it. Modern students of emotions claim there are eight core emotions. All the other words of emotion will bring us back to these. We can find them all in **The Psalms** no matter how deep, how exciting, or how painful.
- B. *Gladness*: “Therefore my heart will be glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (**Psalm 16:9-11**).
- C. *Sadness*: “My wounds stink and fester because of my foolishness, I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning. For my sides are filled with burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart. O Lord, all my longing is before you; my sighing is not hidden from you. My heart throbs; my strength fails me, and the light of my eyes—it also has gone from me” (**Psalm 38:5-10**).
- D. *Hurt*: “Malicious witnesses rise up; they ask me of things that I do not know. They repay me evil for good; my soul is bereft. But I, when they were sick—I wore sackcloth; I afflicted myself with fasting...as one who laments his mother, I bowed down in mourning” (**Psalm 35:11-14**).
- E. *Loneliness*: “O Lord, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me?...You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness” (**Psalm 88:14, 18**).
- F. *Anger*: “Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem, how they said, ‘Lay it bare, lay it bare, down to its foundations!’ O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us! Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!” (**Psalm 137:7-9**).
- G. *Fear*: “My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me and horror overwhelms me” (**Psalm 55:4-5**).
- H. *Guilt*: “For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin” (**Psalm 32:3-5**).
- I. *Shame*: “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (**Psalm 51:3-5**).

IV. **The Psalms** put feelings to our experiences.

- A. Do you remember the Simon and Garfunkel song “I Am a Rock”? The singer proclaimed, “I’ve built walls, a fortress deep and mighty, that none may penetrate. I have no need of friendship; friendship causes pain. It’s

laughter and it's loving I disdain...Don't talk of love, but I've heard the words before; it's sleeping in my memory. I won't disturb the slumber of feelings that have died. If I never loved, I never would have cried. I am a rock, I am an island...And a rock feels no pain; and an island never cries." How sad? He had felt hurt, pain, and loneliness. So he numbed the feelings. He made himself a rock and an island. He never had to feel pain or cry again. Sadly, however, this song demonstrates that you cannot pick and choose which feelings you will numb. If you start to numb one, they all go. He may not cry anymore and he may not hurt anymore, but he no longer laughs or loves anymore either.

- B. In the song, the singer proclaimed, "I have my books and my poetry to protect me..." But **The Psalms** are not that kind of poetry. You cannot hide in **The Psalms**. You cannot wrap yourself in **The Psalms**, hiding from the world. If you have taken the path of so many, hiding from, escaping, and numbing your feelings and emotions, **The Psalms** will slap you out of yourself. They will burst your bubble of protection. They will shine the light on your life and bring feeling to your experiences.
- C. They will let you know that it is part of life to feel pain at the abandonment of friends (**Psalm 41:9**) and even family (**Psalm 27:10**). They reveal the guilt and shame of sin (**Psalm 51**) and the joy of forgiveness (**Psalm 32**). They even show what it is like to be mad at God (**Psalm 88**). The feelings we didn't feel safe to feel, **The Psalms** bring them back into our lives, let us know it's okay to feel, and train us to sit in them, taking them to God to deal with.
- D. We need **The Psalms**.

Conclusion:

No doubt, **The Psalms** were written under a different covenant. They don't provide covenant requirements for us regarding prayer and worship. But they do show us the prayers and worship of covenant people. They light the way for us as we long to bring our hearts to God. They truly are Scripture, that is, though they may not be part of our covenant with God, they are part of God's canon for us. They are real, stripping away any fakery we might want to bring to our worship. They give words to our feelings and feelings to our experiences. They motivate us to open up our hearts to God in challenging ways even under our covenant. Let's dig deep into **The Psalms** and dig deeper into a relationship with our God.