

VCEFC Daily Devotional July 24 – July 30, 2006

July 24 Conversation with friends

Psalm 78

*"I'm chewing on the morsel of a proverb, I'll let you in on the sweet old truths, Stories we heard from our fathers, counsel we learned at our mother's knee." 78:2-3*

Among those for whom Scripture is a passion, reading commentaries has always seemed to me analogous to the gathering of football fans in the local bar, replaying in endless detail the game they have just watched, arguing (maybe even fighting) over observations and opinion, and lacing the discourse with gossip about the players. The level of knowledge evident in these boozy colloquies is impressive. These fans have watched the game for years; the players are household names to them, they know the fine print in the rule book and pick up every nuance on the field. And they care immensely about what happens in the game. Their seemingly endless commentary is evidence of how much they care. Like them, what I relish in commentary is not bare information but conversation with knowledgeable and experienced friends, probing, observing, questioning the biblical text. Absorbed by this plot that stretches grandly from Genesis to Revelation, captured by the messianic presence that in death and resurrection saves us one and all, there is much to notice, much to talk over.

Eugene Peterson, *Living the Message*, p. 342.

July 25 Prayer in a day of calamity.

Psalm 79

*"Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake." 79: 9*

This psalm expresses the plight, prayers and promise of God's people in a day of calamity, the Babylonian Exile. Its plea for divine redress and restoration is based on three grounds: first, the agony and distress of His saints(v.2); secondly, the compassionate nature of God (v. 8); thirdly, the ignominy and dishonor which other nations will attach to God's name if He leaves desolate those who are His servants and representatives (v. 10). These three aspects of the prayer are interwoven throughout the psalm. After shifting his focus from his present situation to God, the psalmist's final plea goes right outside all personal feelings of distress or vengeance. The intervention of God is sought for His own honor and glory. The psalm concludes on the note of dedication, not in a spirit of bargaining with God but because true supplication must be linked with consecration: the vow is of thanksgiving to God and testimony to men.

July 26 Double "turning"

Psalm 80

*"Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock, you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth...Awaken your might; come and save us. Restore us, O God, make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved." 80:1-3*

This psalm is mainly concerned with the northern kingdom of Israel, depicted by the names of Joseph, Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. (Nu. 2:17-24) The Lord is addressed as the Shepherd of Israel. He is also the divine King enthroned between the cherubim of the ark. However, it seems a great while since any light from God cheered

His people (vv. 3, 7, 19). Hence the prayer that He will shine (or flash) forth from the Holy Place for His people's comfort is repeated for three times. The prayer wholly relies on what God can do: only He can restore His people (lit. "cause us to turn" back to Him); only He can welcome them back with shining face, significant of His pleasure in them. Out of this double "turning"- of us to Him, and Him to us- comes the assurance that we are saved.

July 27 Honey from the Rock.

Psalm 81

*"If my people would but listen to me, if Israel would follow my ways, how quickly would I subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes! Those who hate the Lord would cringe before Him, and their punishment would last forever. But you would be fed with the finest of wheat; with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."* 81: 13-16.

This psalm is best associated with the Feast of Tabernacles in that it regularly places God's law before the people. The action of God is inseparable from His commandments to His people. Just as blessing precedes the call to obedience, so blessing is promised as its outcome. The consequence of disobedience is the temporary frustration of God's purpose, and the wilful people would be left to their stubborn hearts, and allowed to walk in their own counsels instead of in God's ways. The blessings of victory and provision await the response of heartfelt obedience. To this the people are called by the promise of even greater blessings than their fathers enjoyed- not water, but honey from the rock- for the grace of God is neither exhausted nor limited by even the best of the past.

July 28 The Judgment of the Supreme Judge

Psalm 82

*"They know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken."* 82: 5

This psalm declares God as the Supreme Judge who gives judgment in the High Court against earth's corrupt judiciaries. It affirms that all powers are subjected and accountable to God, the Ruler of the earth. The existence of evil is here attributed to the activities of forces hostile to God; but at the same time God's righteousness remains untouched by the injustice that exists in the world. He will pronounce judgment to those who have exercised judicial authority in a false and unjust manner. Their failure to carry out justice entails a death like any descendant of Adam, and a disgrace comparable with the condemnation of many princes in former times. To conclude the psalm, the psalmist calls upon God Himself to control all nations and administer true judgment. This is also the daily prayer of today's Christians.

July 29 An urgent plea for help.

Psalm 83

*"May they ever be ashamed and dismayed; may they perish in disgrace. Let them know that you, whose name is the Lord- that you alone are the Most High over all the earth."* 83: 17-18.

This psalm expresses an urgent plea for help from God in the midst of multiple enemies. The recollection of previous deliverances gives passion and eloquence to the cry for immediate help, expressed in three pictures of total vanquishment by divine intervention

(vv. 13-14). The supreme aim of this prayer is the glory of God, and the psalmist pleads for an unforgettable experience of humiliation for the opponents of God so that they and all men everywhere might acknowledge that “You, whose name is the Lord, alone are the Most High over all the earth.”

July 30 The joy in the house of the Lord

Psalm 84

*“Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless. O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.” 84:10-12*

In this psalm we may well picture a pilgrim newly arrived, exclaiming in rapture over the long-anticipated beauty of the house of the Lord. His first reaction is to its loveliness (vv. 1-2), his second reaction is to its safety, which associates with the Lord’s provision of the altars, the places of sacrifice for sin, reconciliation and communion with God. However, the climax of the psalm lies in the concluding verses: it is not the house that is the psalmist’s delight so much as its Occupant, loved for His nature as sun and shield, His bountiful gifts and the simplicity of the way of faith.