



PSALMS: THE PRAYER BOOK OF JESUS

Session 1: Why Study the Psalms?

“Joy in praising God is the pure essence of the spirit of the Church’s prayer, and it is the reward of a soul that knows how to penetrate fully by faith, love, and perfect submission to God, into the deepest meaning of the Psalter.”

– Thomas Merton, *Praying the Psalms*

PSALM 1, *Beatus vir qui non abiit*

Blessed is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, *

nor stood in the way of sinners, and has not sat in the seat of the scornful;

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, *

and on his law will he meditate day and night.

And he shall be like a tree planted by the waterside, *

that will bring forth his fruit in due season.

His leaf also shall not wither; *

and look, whatever he does, it shall prosper.

As for the ungodly, it is not so with them; *

but they are like the chaff, which the wind scatters away from the face of the earth.

Therefore the ungodly shall not be able to stand in the judgment, *

neither the sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, *

but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

—

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;*

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

CLASS OVERVIEW

- This 13-week course will introduce us to the Psalms as poetic scripture, deeply rooted in the worship life of the Church.
- We will pay close attention to:
 - The original context of the Psalms, including their time and authorship.
 - The artistic composition of the Psalms, including their literary style and genre.
 - The Psalms through the lens of the life of Christ and his Gospel.
 - Anglican liturgical use of the Psalms, particularly the Coverdale Psalter (1535) and New Coverdale Psalter (2019), which is our primary text for this course.
 - Personal application of the Psalms through prayer.
- Each session will include teaching, group discussion, and prayerful engagement with selected psalms.

WHY STUDY THE PSALMS?

- The Psalms are the largest book of the Bible.
- The Psalms are the most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament.
- The Psalms are the hymnal and prayer book of the Bible. For the ancient Jewish people, these two things could be very much the same. The Psalms, from their origin up through the time of Jesus, were typically sung.
- It's much easier to memorize something if it is set to music. If I ask you to memorize a speech or a long passage of scripture, it will take you a decent bit of time to do it. However, if I ask you to sing a favorite song, you'll remember all the lyrics like they were written right in front of you. Music connects words to our minds like few other things can.

WHY STUDY THE PSALMS?

- The Psalms, or Psalter, was the prayer book of Jesus.
 - The Psalter was the Prayer Book and hymnal of the Jewish people.
 - Jesus would have learned the Psalms from an early age in the synagogue, to the degree that he was able to quote them, even as he was dying on the cross.
- The Psalms point us to Jesus.
 - The language of many of the Psalms finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.
 - **"If we want to read and to pray the prayers of the Bible and especially the Psalms... we must not ask first what they have to do with us, but what they have to do with Jesus Christ."** – Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*
- The Psalms give us language for prayer.
 - Every human emotion is represented in the Psalms. Joy, love, sadness, anger, envy, wrath, and many more find language through the Psalms.

WHY STUDY THE PSALMS?

- The Psalms have been the constant prayer book of Christianity.
 - All the major Christian liturgies have incorporated the Psalms.
 - Praying through the Psalms was (and still often is) a weekly occurrence during the seven daily offices of Benedictine monasteries.
 - **“Whenever the Psalter is abandoned, an incomparable treasure vanishes from the Christian church. With its recovery will come unsuspected power.”** – Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*
- The Psalms feature prominently in both the Eucharistic and Daily Office liturgies in the Book of Common Prayer.
 - The 1662 Daily Office Lectionary prescribes reading through the entire Psalter every 30 days.
 - The 2019 Daily Office Lectionary gives both 30-day and 60-day options for reading through the Psalter.

“The Psalms train us to pray with others who have prayed, and are praying: put our knees on the level with other bent knees; lift our hands in concert with other lifted hands; join our voices in lament and praise with other voices who weep and laugh. The primary use of prayer is not for expressing ourselves, but in becoming ourselves, and we cannot do that alone. The “only child” is not God’s. It follows that this primary condition in the making of the Psalms, praying “in step” with others, is also a condition for praying them and learning to pray.”

– Eugene Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer*

MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS CLASS

- Literary scholars C.S. Lewis (Anglican) and Leland Ryken (Presbyterian).
- Pastor-theologians Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Lutheran), Thomas Merton (Catholic), Eugene Peterson (Presbyterian), W. David O. Taylor (Anglican), and Michael Wilcock (Anglican).
- Old Testament/Hebrew Bible scholars Robert Alter (Jewish), Christopher Ash (Anglican), Tremper Longman III (Reformed), and David L. Taylor (Anglican).