

Summer Psalms
WASHED SHIRTS
Saturday, August 23
Reading: Psalm 26

Psalm 26:1 *Vindicate me, LORD, for I have led a blameless life; I have trusted in the LORD and have not faltered.*
2 *Test me, LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; 3 for I have always been mindful of Your unfailing love and have lived in reliance on Your faithfulness.*

In the early 20th century, British India had a great problem. The “Criminal tribes”, so called because of their propensity for crime, were uncontrollable. The British governor John Hewett had tried everything. He had the tribes harassed by the police. He had punished them severely. Nothing had stopped these roving bands from bringing chaos across the country.

One day, the governor decided to try a different approach. He spoke with the aged founder of The Salvation Army, General Booth. It was agreed that the government would provide territory for the Salvation Army workers to reach the “Criminal tribes” with the love of Christ. It was such a success that it infuriated the native Hindus. The love of Christ seen in the lives of these missionaries brought large numbers to saving faith. General Booth’s philosophy could be summed up in one statement: “You cannot make a man clean by washing his shirt.”

Many themes are repeated as we read through the psalms. There are many psalms where David pleads his integrity and righteousness before the Lord. Perhaps David wrote about this theme so often because he realized that as human beings we need to have constant “check-ups” on our lives.

Many today appear to have a “clean shirt.” Their lives look good on the outside but inside they are full of sin and hypocrisy. They have merely “washed” their appearance but not dealt with the real problem - their heart. Like David, we need to plead with God to judge, test, and examine us thoroughly! We must allow Him to dig into our thoughts, feelings, and motives to expose anything that might be lurking there (26:1-3).

Two areas that constantly need to be examined are our dealings with unbelievers and our dealings with the saints. David pleads that he does not associate with the wicked. He does not follow their ways (26:4-5, 9-10). His words echo those of Psalm 1:1 - “Blessed is the one who does not walk in the steps of the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers.”

David next proclaims his love for God’s people and God’s house. He goes for forgiveness to the altar. He shouts God’s praise and proclaims God’s works. His greatest joy is to be in the presence of the Lord among His people, thus his feet “stand on level ground (26:6-8, 11-12).

Would we pass David’s test? Does God have free reign to examine and expose our hearts and lives? Are we separating ourselves from the wicked and joyfully worshipping with God’s people? Do we merely have “washed shirts” or clean hearts?

¹ John Phillips, Exploring the Psalms, vol. 1, p. 197