

July 19: Psalms 25-27 and Acts 20: 17-38

Psalms 25 speaks of God's justice. David asks that he not be disgraced. He understands that those who do not wait on God or act treacherously will be disgraced. David does not want to fall into that pit. He wants God's ways to be known to him. He seeks God's truth.

Psalms 26 has a rather bold statement in it. David asks that The LORD try him and test him. He asks that his heart and mind be examined by God. David is confident in what the outcome will be because he lives by God's truth.

Psalms 27 speaks of God's salvation and light. David has nothing to fear because of who he belongs to. As believers, we have nothing to fear since we are owned by Him as well. Knowing that we cannot be snatched from His hand, we can feel courageous and strong to go and live for God and do His will for our lives.

In the New Testament reading, Paul leaves Ephesus. He gives a farewell address to the elders. There is a lot of crying because Paul informs them that they will never see his face again. Paul is somewhat reluctant to go. He knows that when he leaves, someone else will come in and try to pollute their minds about the Way. He says these people will have deviant doctrines to lure the disciples into following them. Not much has changed in the last few thousand years. There are still groups out there that will twist Scripture to make it mean what they want it to say. Others will pick and choose certain Scriptures to justify things. We cannot be like that and we certainly should not fall for it when people twist God's word. It's up to us to be Biblically literate!

July 20: Psalms 28-30 and Acts 21: 1-14

In Psalm 28, David asks that God not be deaf or silent toward him. Deaf and silent are often connected with being "far from" someone. David cries that God is being silent during his time of need. David refers to lifting hands, a common gesture for prayer at the time.

In Psalm 29 "heavenly beings" literally mean sons of gods. However, in this context we should view these heavenly beings as God's angels. They were the witnesses of God's creation and are allowed access to God in heaven. They surround His throne to give Him praise and worship.

David deals with struggle in Psalm 30. Even though he has fallen on hard times, he knows that mourning will only last for a while. When there is mourning at night, there will be joy in the morning. As believers, we are not promised that life is going to be easy. The Bible does not promise that we will never struggle or be sad. When those times of sadness and struggle hit, lean into God and He will bring you through. We might suffer some pain, but joy will return.

In the New Testament reading, there is a lot of travel being completed by boat. It is brought to Paul's attention that trouble waits for him in Jerusalem. The locals hear this and ask that Paul not go to Jerusalem. Paul replies that they should not weep and break his heart. He is ready to go and die for Jesus. Up to this point, we have seen Paul avoid trouble where he can. When they wanted to kill him in Damascus, he was hidden in a basket and lowered through a window outside of the city. When he found out that there were enemies lying in wait, he went a different

route to get to his destination. Now Paul is ready to face his death head on. He will no longer hide from the persecution.

July 21: Psalms 31-33 and Acts 21: 15-40

Psalm 31 uses the words refuge, rock, and fortress to convey Yahweh as our protector and defender. We can find security in Him. Verse six seems a little harsh with the use of the word “hate”. David is communicating that people that are faithful to The LORD should hate what He hates. In this case, David uses the example of idolatry.

In Psalm 32, David gives praise for forgiveness. As believers, we have been forgiven of our sins. That is great news! David gives encouragement to confess sins. He kept silent at first about them, but the sin was eating away at him. Once he confessed it to The LORD, the burden was lifted, and God took away the guilt of his sin. When we mess up, we can take our sins to God. He will forgive us. The more we confess our sins to Him, we will be more aware of the other sins we commit. It is all part of the sanctification process where He is perfecting us before we join Him in the afterlife.

Psalm 33 is another psalm praising the creator. How can we look at all of the wonderful beauty of our world and not think “Wow, God!”? There are so many amazing things that He created, it is easy to give praise to Him.

In the New Testament reading, Paul makes it to Jerusalem. The brothers welcomed the travelers gladly. Paul gives an account to the elders about the growth in the Gentile community. The elders bring up a problem within the Jewish community. Paul is accused of telling the Jewish converts among the Gentiles to abandon the Old Testament covenants like circumcision. To dismiss these accusations, the elders propose a solution that will absolve Paul of the charges. That proposal backfires. When they are assembled, the Jews see Paul and immediately launch their charges against him. They identify him as the one that brought Greeks into their holy place, profaning the temple. The entire town is stirred up, they rush Paul and begin to beat him. Eventually, a centurion comes down and sees what is happening. Upon his arrival, the people stop beating Paul and then ask the centurion to take him into custody. Paul makes a request to give a defense.

July 22: Psalms 34-35 and Acts 22

David proclaims that praise for The LORD will always be on his lips. My prayer is that we have the same attitude. My prayer is that we regularly give praise to God Almighty. He deserves it! David speaks more of God’s protection in his life. The LORD redeems the life of His servants. God makes a way for the righteous. There is a lot of bad going on in the world right now. This causes some folks to worry. God makes a way for the righteous. He did it before, He will do it again. No need to worry about the things of this world. Keep focused on Him and all will be well.

Psalm 35 is a prayer for victory. David is asking that God will take down his opponents. There is some worry expressed in this psalm. Things were not going all that wonderful for David.

There are people that launch false attacks on him. He has deceitful enemies and people that hate him for no reason. David asks to be delivered from them.

In the New Testament reading, Paul speaks to the gathered Israelites. They are amazed that he speaks to them in Hebrew. Paul starts off explaining that he had been brought up under Gamaliel. Gamaliel was a loved member of the Sanhedrin and sought for advice often. There are extra Biblical texts that talk about how wonderful he was. Gamaliel was the very one that gave advice to the Sanhedrin not to attack the Way earlier in Acts. The assembled crowd would easily have recognized the name and his importance. Paul explains to them about what happened to him on the way to Damascus. He gives them great detail on exactly how he was converted. He went from being the adamant opposition of Christianity, even guarding the clothes of the men killing Stephen, to being an ardent defender of the faith. We would think that this would cause the crowd to see the error of their ways. Instead, it just drives them to hate him. They cry for him to be taken up. The Romans decide they will whip him, but as he is tied up, Paul asks if it is legal for a Roman citizen to be whipped. The commander and other guards would have assumed that Paul was not Roman since he spoke in Greek and Hebrew. However, Paul was Roman and had certain protections because of his citizenship. The commander wants to know exactly why the Sanhedrin are out to get Paul. So, he releases the prisoner and brings him to the Sanhedrin the following day. I am sure they were surprised to see Paul!

July 23: Psalms 36-37 and Acts 23:1-11

David is accurate when he says a wicked person has no dread of God. We see that on display today. This is not a new problem; it has been around for a long long time. Some folks just do not want to believe, so they will act however they want and hold God in contempt. I have had some folks look at me and say that they are going to swear and when they do, if there is a God, then he will be struck down. The individual swears and nothing happens, the wicked walks away thinking that he or she has proven a point. Some people simply have no fear of God.

In Psalm 37, we are encouraged not to be vexed by those that do evil. We should not envy them. Instead, we should cling to God and seek His ways. We all have one thing in common; one day we will not be here anymore. Evil-doers will be destroyed, but the ones that put their hope in The LORD will inherit the land.

In the New Testament reading, Paul faces the Sanhedrin. He begins giving his defense. Then something interesting happens, we see a squabble break out within the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a body comprised of both Pharisees and Sadducees. Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection or even the afterlife. The Pharisees affirmed them all. This led to the two parties arguing against each other. The fight became pretty contentious, and the Romans were worried they would tear Paul apart.

A house divided against itself cannot stand. As believers, we must be united under the banner of Christ.

July 24: Psalms 38-40 and Acts 23:12-35

Psalm 38 is a lament. David is confessing his sins asking that God not punish him with His wrath. The psalmist says he is speechless and has no arguments because he knows that God is punishing him for his sins. He deserves the punishment coming to him. David confesses his guilt and turns his attention to his enemies. God's punishment might be over, but now he is afraid of those around him and what they will do. Now that the psalmist is seeking good, he is worried about those that will repay that good with evil.

Psalm 39 focuses more on the brevity of life. The psalmist strongly desires to know how long he has here on earth. A few years ago, my buddy Smitty and I were enjoying a nice meal. A young man asked if he could get our opinion on something. He asked whether it would be better to know the day that we are going to pass away or to be clueless about it. Both Smitty and I agreed that it was better to be clueless about it. Rather than counting our days here on earth and wondering how long we will be here, I humbly submit it is better to live every day to the fullest serving The LORD. In the instance of this psalm, the psalmist is conveying the idea that we must look at time like God looks at it, not as humans do.

Psalm 40 begins with David giving thanks to God for helping him. Throughout the psalm it transitions to a cry for help. David begins by reminding himself and God of all the help The LORD has given him. With all of that in mind, he requests that God would not withhold His compassion from him and that His love guard and protect him.

In the New Testament reading, the Jews are so incited toward violence and killing Paul that many of them put themselves under a curse. They will not eat anything until Paul is dead. They hatch a plan to have Paul delivered to them by the Romans and execute him. However, Paul's nephew discovers the plot, reports it to Paul, and then reports it to the Romans. They will not fall into the trap.

The plot from the Jews begs the question: how would they explain away Paul's execution? Since Paul was a Roman citizen, he had a certain level of protection. If they killed him without having a fair trial, how would they explain that to the Romans?

July 25: Psalms 41-43 and Acts 24

Psalm 41 speaks of victory even when we are betrayed. The psalmist describes the happiness of taking care of the poor. The term poor here could be used to describe folks in a lowly status, or someone who was humbled and brought low by their own circumstances or others. These people that care for the low will be saved by The LORD from adversity.

Psalm 42 is a Maskil of the sons of Korah. The Korahites were the gatekeepers in the temple. Many scholars believe that the sons of Korah became associated with musicians involved in the worship of God. The psalm begins with a longing for God. Just as the deer pants for water, the psalmist's soul longs for God. Just as the thirsty deer will not give up until it finds water, the psalmist won't stop looking for God until he has found Him.

Psalms 43 is a prayer for vindication. The innocence and integrity of the psalmist is assumed when we see the request for vindication. The ungodly nation is difficult to identify. It could either be a Gentile nation or Israelites who were disloyal to God Almighty.

In the New Testament reading, the Israelites lawyer up! Ananias, the high priest, brings the lawyer Tertullus to plead the Jewish case against Paul. Tertullus begins his defense stating that Paul is threatening their peace. He accuses Paul of being a plague on the community. Paul gives his defense, stating that he simply goes to the temple to worship and not cause disturbance. He goes to worship, but he also follows the Way. He knows that there will be a resurrection of the righteous and unrighteous. Felix orders that Paul be kept under the centurion's guard. Felix was married to a Jewish woman. He brought her with him to converse with Paul. He sees the composure of Paul as he discusses the faith and becomes afraid. After two years, Felix has still not given a verdict. His successor is identified as Porcius Festus. Felix kept Paul in prison at the turnover as a favor to the Jews.

July 26: Psalms 44-46 and Acts 25

Psalms 44 is a cry from Israel. The nation is upset. It seems that God has abandoned them. They do not feel His presence anymore. They have heard of all the wonderful things God did for their ancestors. Now they want Him to do the same for them. They believe they have been rejected by God. He is not marching with their armies and they have been forced to retreat from their enemies. This is all very different than what we have seen in the history of the Israelites. However, they are forgetting that there were instances where their ancestors suffered.

Psalms 45 is a royal wedding song. It was a common practice in the Ancient Near East to compose songs honoring kings to perpetuate their memory for younger generations. These songs would use the same hyperbolic phrases as "the most handsome" and "grace flowing from your lips." The psalm moves from praising the king to praising God Almighty.

Psalms 46 is a reminder that God is our refuge and our strength. He is there as a helper in trying times. Because He is there with us, we should not be afraid when we are going through the rough spots of life. We are never promised that life will be peaceful and easy breezy when we come to faith in Christ. However, we are promised that The LORD will be with us always, no matter what we are going through.

In the New Testament reading, the Jews are still trying to have Paul executed. Festus arrives in Jerusalem. The chief priests and other leaders present their case against Paul to him. Festus informs them that Paul should be kept in Caesarea. The leaders are welcome to come there with him to make their case against him. Paul maintains his innocence. Festus continues to try to make the Jews happy and asks Paul if he will go back to Jerusalem to stand trial there.

King Agrippa and his wife Bernice pay a visit to Festus in Caesarea. Festus presents Paul's case to the king. King Agrippa asks to have a conversation with Paul. Paul is brought before the king. King Agrippa's judgment is that Paul has done nothing wrong. As far as he sees it, it is unreasonable to send a prisoner without indicating any charges against him. The Jews have no case against Paul, they simply do not like him.