

## July 26: Psalms 44-46 and Acts 25

Psalms 44 and 45 are cries 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 46 and 47 are royal wedding songs. 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 48 and 49 are reminders 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.

## July 27: Psalms 47-49 and Acts 26

Psalms 47 and 48 give praise to God. He is the Most High, King of all the earth. Many earthly kings and rulers will come and go, but God is in charge forever and ever. God will continue to lead His people for all eternity. We do not know how long we will walk this earth; we do not even know what will happen tomorrow. However, we can be certain that God is on the throne!

Psalms 49 and 50 read more like a proverb. The psalmist has no need to fear in times of trouble. He is surrounded by his foes, but they trust in their wealth and abundance. Wealth and abundance fade. The psalmist has his faith in the eternal God that reigns forever. Those that trust in their wealth are headed to the grave. The righteous will be redeemed from the grave.

In the New Testament reading, Paul gives his defense to King Agrippa. He begins his defense by flattering the king. Then he explains how he was a Pharisee that spent his time persecuting the

followers of the Way. We are treated again to Paul's conversion story. This time, Paul says that the voice told him not to "kick against the goads". This most likely means that he was being warned not to fight against the spiritual.

Having heard Paul's explanation, the king even becomes interested in Christ. He finds that there are no grounds for holding Paul. However, there is one problem. Paul's appeal to Rome put his case in a special category. His case can only be discharged by Caesar.

Each and every one of us has a testimony. We are going to come across people that want to know why we have the hope that we do. When we are asked, we can give our story and tell how God has changed us. I will admit that my testimony has changed over the years. Nowadays when I give testimony, I do not talk as much about my conversion. Instead, I talk about the dark and hard times that God led me through. There have been several times in my life when God told me to do something, it was rough at the time, but He brought me through on the other end and it was much better than I could have ever imagined.

July 28: Psalms 50-52 and Acts 27:1-25

Asaph wrote Psalm 50. He was one of David's chief musicians. God assembles all of the people of the earth. The psalm encourages the people of God to give thank offerings. When they bring their offerings to The LORD it is not because they must feed Him because He will go hungry. God owns it all. It all belongs to Him, so when they bring their offering to Him it is to show thanks, not to sustain Him. These sacrifices are meant to be from the heart and personal, not rote ritual. Everything we have comes from The LORD. When we give to Him, we are giving back part of what He has given to us.

In Psalm 51, David works through some serious grief over his sin with Bathsheba. Just as a reminder David saw Bathsheba bathing one night, sent for her, and got her pregnant. Upon realizing she was pregnant, he had her husband killed. David's conduct was terrible. He asks that God be gracious to him. David admits that he has sinned against God alone. God is right to pass sentence on him. David begs that God wash him with hyssop and cleanse him and he will be whiter than snow. David admits that sacrifice of a burnt offering is not going to give God delight. Instead, the sacrifice of a broken heart and submissive spirit are what will please Him.

David did some pretty egregious stuff, yet he continues to seek God. We too have acted egregious toward our Father in Heaven. There is nothing that God cannot forgive. No matter what we have done in our past, God can and will forgive us of those trespasses. Do not be afraid to take those mistakes to Him and confess them and ask for forgiveness.

In the New Testament reading, Paul sets sail for Italy with his captors. The trip is treacherous and the boat sinks. Paul advised them to find a suitable place to winter over in, but they refuse. They try to make it to Crete, but a northeaster comes and pounds the ship. They do what they can to lighten the load and help the ship weather the storm. However, Paul knows that it is no use. The ship will eventually sink.

When I read of Paul's travels on the Mediterranean, I am reminded of the few voyages I had across that sea. The weather can get incredibly rough, especially in the winter. On one occasion, the Mighty Warship Cole was sailing through and we got hit with 30-foot swells. The weather was so rough, we had to use our hurricane straps to prevent being thrown out of our racks while sleeping. At one point, the swells got so bad that the waves washed a life preserver from the side of the ship. I can only imagine that this was similar weather to what Paul and the rest of the crew were facing. It was rough enough going through it on a steel ship. I cannot imagine what it would be like to go through on a wooden vessel!

July 29: Psalms 53-55 and Acts 27: 26-44

Psalms 53 is an indictment against the wicked. David goes so far as to say that when God looks down on the human race, He sees there is no one that is wise and seek Him. Everyone has turned away from Him. David asks that Israel's salvation would come from Zion. David has hope in a future restoration. Unfortunately, he looks around now and sees sin and vice.

Psalms 54 is a prayer for deliverance. Psalm 55 deals with a particularly hurtful subject. David has been hurt, not by an enemy or other wicked person. Instead, he has been attacked by a trusted friend. He has been betrayed. Betrayal hurts deeply because it comes from someone that we trust, someone that we have confided in. We are hurt by someone that said they would look out for our best interest, but then stab us in the back to get ahead. Betrayal hurts the worst because it comes from a friend. We expect our enemies to attack and harm us, but we would never expect our friends or family to.

In the New Testament reading, the ship is coming closer to the shore from what their soundings are indicating. The water is 120 feet deep and then it is 90 feet deep. Some of the sailors decide to drop anchor from the stern instead of the bow. This is why Paul tells the centurion that they won't survive. If they dropped the anchors from the stern, the bow will get beat up as the ship swings around. So, they cut the small boats loose preventing them from dropping the anchors. Paul encourages the men to eat since it has been two weeks since any of them had eaten. They eat and become encouraged. They spot land and start going full speed ahead. Unfortunately, the ship runs aground on a sandbar. It's every man for himself so they begin to jump ship. Since they are transporting criminals, the plan is to execute the prisoners before they can escape to shore. The centurion prevented the sailors from killing the prisoners specifically to keep Paul safe.

July 30: Psalms 56-58 and Acts 28: 1-15

Psalms 56 is a call for protection during the time that the Philistines seized David in Gath. The Philistines were relentless in their pursuit of David. However, David kept his trust in The LORD.

Psalms 57 is praise for God's protection when he hid from Saul in a cave. David recognizes God's hand in everything that is happening as he flees from his enemy. God's love is as high as the heavens.

Psalms 58 speaks of injustices committed by people. The mighty ones do not speak righteously. Instead, they seek to take care of themselves giving no regard to what is right or wrong. One day, they will be swept away and the righteous can rejoice.

Throughout the Psalms, we see all kinds of different cries to The LORD. Sometimes they are cries of joy and adoration. Other times, they are cries of despair and anguish. My prayer is that no matter whether we are going through good times or bad, that we are always crying out to God. He desires a relationship with us. As we go through life, don't hold back talking to Him. Something good happens, give Him praise. Something bad happens, seek His counsel.

In the New Testament reading, the shipwreck survivors wind up in Malta. The locals were very nice to them. Paul gathers a bunch of wood for a fire. When he put the wood on the fire, a viper came out and bit his hand. The locals stood by watching this, thinking that Paul must have been a murderer because now he was being judged by the snake bite. They expected him to die, but he did not. Instead, he just flung the snake into the fire. From there, Paul went to and healed a man suffering from dysentery. After three months in Malta, they set sail again for Rome.

July 31: Psalms 59-61 and Acts 28:16-31

Psalms 59 was written by David when Saul sent his agents to watch the house and kill David if the opportunity arose. The background for this particular Psalm can be found in 1 Samuel 19:11. David cries for deliverance from his enemies. He knows that his pursuer is powerful and there is nothing he can do to escape the king's grasp. However, David rests in God's refuge. He knows fully that God will deliver him from Saul. God is David's strength. He does not try to do it on his own, instead he leans into God and trusts in Him for safety.

Psalms 60 describes the incident recorded in 1 Chronicles 18: 3 and 12. David acknowledges that God owns all Shechem (Canaan) and can divide it up however He wants. David marches against his enemies and many of their soldiers fall. God helps David's men perform well on the field and their foes are trampled. Yet, David does not take credit or even give credit to his soldiers for the victory. Instead, he gives all the glory to God.

Psalms 61 is a song about the security we find in God. He is our only hope. He is a strong tower in the face of the enemy. We can take refuge under His wing. When life comes at us hard, we can take our strength and resolve from God, He will get us through.

We finish up Acts with Paul's defense in Rome. Paul assumed that many letters had come from the officials regarding him. However, none of those letters arrived. The Romans still ask Paul to tell them about the Way since they are aware of the sect that is spoken against everywhere. Paul spends his days trying to show them who Jesus is. Some come to Jesus and confess Him as Lord and Savior. Others do not.

Paul spends two years in his own rented house and proclaims the Gospel with full boldness and without hindrance.

August 1: Psalms 62-64 and Romans 1

Psalm 62 speaks of rest. The psalmist rests alone in God. The term “rest” here expresses silence. The author is resting, waiting on God. My hope and prayer is that we will have rest in God. The world is full of its ups and downs. However, God is constant. Despite the inconsistency of the world, we can look to God, He is always the same.

Psalm 63 is another psalm from David’s flight from Saul, but it provides less detail than others. David speaks of looking to God when he writes about gazing on God in the sanctuary. His lips will glorify and honor Him, lifting up his hands in worship to Yahweh. Even in this time of fleeing from his enemies, David still gives worship to The LORD.

Psalm 64 uses interesting language regarding speech. Sharpening the tongue was often used to describe destructive and divisive speech. No doubt, there were many of David’s enemies sharpening their tongues against him.

In the New Testament reading, we start Romans! Paul wrote Romans to the house churches in Rome. In those days, believers did not have a dedicated house of worship. Instead, they met at homes of other believers to worship God and fellowship with one another. Romans focuses on the doctrine of salvation and gives practical ideas on how a believer can implement it into his or her life.

Paul begins the letter letting them know that he wants to visit, but has been unable to. He explains that he has been praying for them. Prayer is just as necessary as preaching and teaching when it comes to Christian ministry. I hope that we all pray to our Lord often and lift one another up in prayer regularly.

Paul speaks of how the world has gone wrong. The Gentiles did not want to receive the message of God. Instead, they began worshipping false gods. The LORD then gave them over to their immoral lifestyles. Their idolatry led them into total depravity.

August 2: Psalms 65-67 and Romans 2

Psalm 65 sings of God’s praise for His care in creation. God is the creator. He made the mountains; He made the sea. He can bring the mountains down and He can quiet the raging sea. He gives water to the earth and gives abundantly. He softens the ground and brings growth. Creation sings of the wonders of God. As we go through this day, let’s take some time to look at all of the wonder in God’s creation. There is so much beauty around us, let’s not take it for granted. Instead, let’s give praise to the One that made it all!

Psalm 66 is a reminder of God’s mighty acts. The psalmist reminds us that God was the One that turned the sea to dry land and allowed the Israelites to walk across. He rules forever by His might.

Psalm 67 is a call for everyone to praise God. God is worthy of all of our worship and praise. Our praise does not have to be confined to the church building on a Sunday morning. We can praise on a park bench while feeding some birds. We can worship while we are driving down the

road. We can give praise while we help others. In all we do, let's strive to worship and serve The LORD.

In the New Testament reading, Paul warns the people not to judge. The fact is that we see plenty of people out there doing wrong and acting sinfully. The other fact is that we are just as guilty and culpable. Since we too are sinful, we should not take the judgmental route. It is not our place to judge. That is God's job. Instead of looking at what other people are doing or not doing, maybe we would do better to look at what we are or are not doing. It's an odd thing, but people are a lot more critical of others than they are of themselves. We all have our problems and are all guilty in the eyes of God's Law. So, when we see the lost going against God's commands, rather than look at them with judgment, let's try to look on them with compassion. They do not know any better and they certainly will not want to learn more about the Way if we come down on them with judgment.

Paul also writes about being doers of the word, not just hearers. As believers, we have been tremendously blessed by our salvation in Christ. What should our response be? Should we just take that blessing and rest in it, not caring about the rest of the world? Or should we roll up our sleeves and get busy doing what God has called us to do?