

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?

August 3: Psalms 68-69 and Romans 3

Psalm 68 speaks of God as a mighty warrior. He scatters the enemies like smoke, an insignificant thing. They melt like wax before Him. God is mighty! He rides on the clouds. When He went out before the people, the earth shook and the skies poured rain. Even in all of this power that God has, He bears the burden of His people. He is our salvation.

Psalm 69 opens up with imagery of being trapped in a life threatening situation. Being sunken in deep mud and floods were commonly used to describe situations where death seemed likely. The psalmist asks that others not be disgraced because of his guilt. This text is not expressing that he is worried people will lose their faith because of his sins. His sins have been identified. The

psalmist is expressing concern that other believers will see that the psalmist's suffering has not been relieved and will lose faith because of his discomfort.

In the New Testament reading, Paul answers the rebuttal that perhaps the Jew and the circumcised do not have an advantage. Paul explains that they do in every way. They were entrusted with God's word first. Yet, even though they are better off than some, they are still no better because they are still sinful. There is no one in the world that lives an upright and good life. Everyone stands guilty before God. In that guilt, though, God sent His Son Jesus to take that sin away from the believers. They are justified by Christ's blood. Since they are justified by Christ, they have nothing to boast about since they did not do anything to earn their salvation. Could you imagine how difficult heaven would be if entrance was all based on what we did here on earth? There would be all kinds of bragging going on. The folks would talk about all of the things that they did to get themselves into heaven. If that were to happen, then they would be worshipping the self and not God. We cannot do anything to save ourselves. God did that work for us, so we have no reason to boast. There is nothing we can do to earn our way, we are justified by Christ!

August 4: Psalms 70-72 and Romans 4

Psalm 70 uses some of the same verses we read in Psalm 40:14-15 and 40: 16-17. David asks that the people laughing at him and pointing their fingers in shame retreat because they are brought to shame.

Psalm 71 is deals with the psalmist getting older. He asks that God continue to give him strength and be with him in his old age. The author has leaned on God from a very young age. His prayer is that God does not abandon him now that he is older. The psalmist also makes the promise that even when he is old and gray he will continue to proclaim God's power.

Psalm 72 is referring to Solomon, though we do not know whether it is about him, or if he wrote it. In this regard the king and king's son are identified as rulers that will judge God's people in righteousness and take care of His afflicted. Notice that the author is not referring to the people as his, but to God's. The author sees the tremendous responsibility in ruling the people. He asks that the reign will go well, but the king is not asking for all these things to that he can benefit, but so that God's people will benefit as well.

In the New Testament reading Paul continues giving examples of being saved by faith and not by works. He brings up Abraham, the founder of the Israelites. Abraham was a nomad prior to God calling him. He did not know the law, nor did he even know God. His father made idols. Yet, when God called Abraham to leave his father, he was obedient. He walked by faith. Further, he was not circumcised until God gave him the command and covenant of circumcision. Abraham came to belief first, then these other things fell into place. Our salvation in Christ is a gift that we do not work for. If we worked for it then we would say we earned it. Salvation is a gift. There is no rote ritual or thing we can do to get ourselves into heaven. That is already taken care of by the blood of Jesus. When we come to Him we won't have it all figured out. We will spend our lives trying to be better and more like Him. However, we will never have it all figured out.

One day, we will be caught up with Him and then the sanctification process is complete. Until then, we are works in progress.

In the case of Abraham, he didn't know God at all until God spoke to him. He did not respond that he was a terrible person and felt the need to get himself figured out before coming to God, he just went. We don't have to get ourselves cleaned up before coming to Christ. He's the one that cleans us up. To think that we need to clean ourselves up before coming to Him is like thinking we must take a shower before we take a bath.

August 5: Psalms 73-74 and Romans 5

Psalms 73 gives the correct statement that God is good to Israel. After that confession of God's goodness, though, the author talks about the wicked. He identifies that the wicked prosper. They are well fed. The Hebrew word for well literally means "fat bellies" indicating they have much more than they need. The psalmist gives more complaint about how easy the wicked have it, but then turns to confession. He confesses that he was acting stupidly and did not see what God was doing.

Psalms 74 is a prayer for Israel. Times are tough and it seems like God is far away from His people. They are suffering. The temple has been desecrated. Their enemies have decided to oppress them relentlessly. The author is trying to cause God to act, stating that these foolish people have desecrated His name.

In the New Testament reading, Paul explains how we are reconciled to God by Jesus Christ. As believers, we are declared righteous, not because of anything we have done. Because Christ is our Lord, when God sees us, He does not identify us by our sinfulness. Instead, He identifies us as His child. Paul goes all the way back to the beginning to show how sin entered the human line through one man. In the same way, life for the believers has entered through One Man, Christ Almighty. Through one man's disobedience, all of us were made sinners. Through the obedience of one man, many will be made righteous.

August 6: Psalms 75-77 and Romans 6

Psalms 75 is a reminder that God judges the wicked. He is just and mighty and will one day judge them. However, we do not know when that time will be. He will judge them when He decides it is time. With that in mind, perhaps it is best to worry less about what the wicked are doing and how good life is for them here on earth.

Psalms 76 speaks of God as a powerful judge. He is resplendent and majestic. God is to be feared. No one can stand before God when He is angry.

Psalms 77 speaks of the confidence we can have in God during a time of crisis. The psalmist sought The LORD in his day of trouble and The LORD guided him through. We are not promised an easy time while we are here on earth. We are going to find ourselves in trying times. When that happens, we can lean into God. He will take us through whatever storm we are facing.

In the New Testament reading, Paul clears up a misconception. It is a misconception that exists today. We know that all sins are forgiven by Christ. This leads some to believe that since all sin has been cleared, we can go and sin as much as we like since we are free from the penalty of sin. Paul tells them that they absolutely should not continue in their sinfulness. If they continue in their sin, they are not showing that they are truly slaves to Christ. Instead, they remain slaves to sin. Jesus did not come to free us from our sins so that we could run right back to them. This is not to say that we will not continue to struggle with sin while we walk this earth. We surely will and we will surely fall into it. The difference is that the people Paul is addressing were actively going into sin. They had no guilty conscience in actively sinning and felt no guilt afterward. They were simply using Jesus as fire insurance.

August 7: Psalm 78 and Romans 7

Psalm 78 is a reminder about what God had done for the Israelites. The people were supposed to teach their children about God's ways so that they would follow Him. Unfortunately, they did not do as they were instructed. Instead, when God freed them from Egypt, rather than remain faithful to Him and rely on His blessings, they complained about not having any food. God sent Manna for them to fill their bellies. He also sent them meat from the skies. Even still, the people found reasons to complain. Rather than look at what God had done for them up to this point, they continued to chase after false gods. They kept sinning and did not believe in His wonderful works.

Eventually, they woke up because they started suffering loss. Some of them were killed and then they remembered how great and powerful God Almighty is. This psalm describes the Israelite history, but I think it also shows us how we too can have ups and downs with God throughout our lives walking with Him. We get on the right path, but then things are going well and we can possibly stray from Him. Suddenly, something happens and we start to walk with Him again. The cycle goes on and on and on, with the intention of walking with Him always and never straying.

In the New Testament reading, Paul talks about the benefit of the Law. Before the Law, people did not know what sin was. To be sure, the sin still existed. The sin of lust and of covetousness existed in the hearts of people, it just had not been identified as something that was wrong. The Law identifies things that are wrong. If we are not taught the right way to go, continuing in the sinfulness will seem natural. Many years ago, when I was in high school, I did not wear glasses. Since my last name starts with a W, I often was placed in the back of the class. In my sophomore year, I noticed that the teacher was not writing very big on the dry erase board. I had to start moving up to take a look at what he or she was putting up there. I figured it was just normal. It was not until I had an eye exam and they put me in glasses that I knew my eyesight was not working the way it is supposed to. I did not realize I could not see until a doctor showed me what 20/20 vision looks like. The law is similar. Without it, then sin would simply seem normal to our human hearts. Paul writes in this chapter that sin is within us. He knows how he should live, but he does what he does not want to do and does not do what he wants to do. If Paul, the man who had a life altering conversion on the way to Damascus, has struggles doing what he should, then we should not be surprised when we struggle too.

August 8: Psalms 79-81 and Romans 8:1-18

Psalm 79 speaks of the confusion the Israelites are facing. Their enemies have invaded and desecrated God's temple. They gave the corpses of His people to the birds. The desecration of a corpse was a detestable thing for the Israelites. There are some instances in the Old Testament where the Israelites feared their enemies would do things to the body of the deceased. To prevent that from happening, they would burn the flesh from the body so that they could bury the bones. The fact that their enemies are desecrating the bodies of the deceased show how far the nation has fallen. Even in this time of confusion, the psalmist holds to his faith. He prays and knows that God will repay the nations for what they have done.

Psalm 80 is a prayer for restoration. Psalm 81 is a call for the people to be obedient. One of the reasons the people fall into this destitution is that they do not obey God the way He commanded them to. They chased after other gods and sought the pleasures of the flesh. The people would not obey God so He gave them over to their stubborn hearts. That is why they are in such a mess.

In the New Testament reading, Paul explains that the Law could not give life. The Law itself was right. God had made it. The Law does not fail because the Law is flawed. Instead, the people failed to follow the Law. The Law was limited by the flesh because we could not follow it. Since we could not keep the Law, God fulfilled it in Christ. Anyone who comes to Him and confesses Him as Lord and Savior is free from the stain of sin and death. Since we have been set free by the slavery of sin, we should not fall back into it. As believers, we no longer live according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. My hope and prayer is that each and every day, we walk with The LORD and give Him glory and honor in all that we do.

August 9: Psalms 82-84 and Romans 8: 19-39

In Psalm 82, the phrase "God has taken His place" indicates that He has begun the judgment or sentencing process. The divine assembly mentioned indicates the "lesser gods" of the Egyptians and Mesopotamians. This is not to say that these lesser gods existed. Instead, it conveys a divine council consisting of good and evil spirits that God presides over.

Psalm 83 is a prayer against enemies. The nations around Israel have begun to rise up. The psalmist asks that just like God defeated the Midianites, He will do the same to the Ishmaelites, Moabites, Hagrites, and the other nations revolting against them. God defeated their enemies before; He can do it again. As we go through life and we face the giants, we can remember that God has defeated our giants before, He will do it again!

Psalm 84 is a song longing to get to heaven. As believers, we are not residents here in the world. Instead, our residence is in heaven. We do not belong here. We live with longing in our hearts to get home. This psalm is where a lot of the lyrics to the song "Better is One Day". Anytime I hear that song, I am reminded of chaplain Moon when I was on my first deployment on the mighty John C. Stennis. Chaplain Moon loved that song and played it at every single service.

In the New Testament reading, Paul writes to the Romans about our adoption into God's family. He states that all things work together for the good of those who love The LORD. I have said it before and I will say it again, the one thing I like about getting older is looking back and seeing where God said "no" to a prayer or took me through a rough patch to get me to a better spot. Many of you know that I worked to earn a masters while I was still active duty. When my retirement was denied, and since I met the requirements for the chaplaincy, my chaplain friends encouraged me to pursue the chaplain corps. From their vantage, it only made sense. I made it all the way to DC to face a panel of chaplains. My recruiter and everyone I worked with were convinced I would get in. I did not. It made no sense at first and I could not figure out what God was doing in all of that. I was upset and confused. However, through that "No", He set me up to be where I am today. Every day I wake up and thank Him for that "no" because I am a lot happier here than I would be if I had remained in the service. We can always trust God. His answer is always for the best. It is for our benefit and His glory.

Paul concludes Romans 8 with a wonderful reminder. As we go through life we will suffer the slings and arrows. Trust in God. Nothing has the power to separate us from Him. Nothing will snatch us out of His hand.