

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.

August 10: Psalms 85-87 and Romans 9

Psalm 85 is from the sons of Korah. The psalmist states that God had shown favor to His land. Jacob’s prosperity was restored. God’s fury was withdrawn. The psalmist asks God to do the same thing with His people now. Throughout the psalms when the author is crying in despair and asking for restoration, he always writes about God’s faithfulness in the past. When we struggle through situations in life and it seems God is silent, perhaps one way we can make it through is to look at the many times that God has gotten us through and all of the wonderful blessings He has heaped upon us.

In psalm 86, the author asks that God would answer him. The phrase “call to You all day long” was a common refrain meaning that the call would keep going to God until He answered. In psalm 87, the author gives an indication of what will happen in the end times. “The Most High Himself will establish her” indicates Israel’s special place in the eschatological kingdom. To be sure, God has made salvation available to the Gentile nations. He still has His eye upon Israel, though.

In the New Testament reading, Paul writes about Israel’s rejection of Jesus. Paul, a Jew himself, has tremendous anguish over his fellow Jews. He goes so far to say that he wishes he could be cut off from Christ if it would benefit the Jews that will not believe. Paul further goes on to say that the word of God has not failed despite the rejection. Some of them in the Israelite nations would become Christians. Others would not. Some in the Gentile world would become Christians, others would not. This brings up the rhetorical question: Is there injustice in God? Certainly, there is not.

Paul goes on to use the imagery of a potter. Some of the potter’s work will be used for honorable use. Other pieces that the potter makes will be for dishonorable use. The potter’s crafts are not allowed to ask why they were made the way they were. They were each made for a specific purpose.

This chapter of Romans is rich with several deep themes. It is beyond the scope of this daily Bible recap to get into the various nuances Paul outlines here. Entire books have been written on the subject of God’s justice and mercy!

August 11: Psalms 88-89 and Romans 10

Psalm 88’s authorship is credited to Heman the Ezrahite. He was a famous wise man during Solomon’s reign and served as the king’s seer. The author’s soul is saturated with turmoil. He is in the lowest part of the Pit and despair is all around. He asks if God’s wonders will be known in the darkness. The author calls for help but receives no answer. Darkness is his only friend.

Psalm 89 speaks of God’s promises. It also highlights how perplexing His promises can sometimes be. God had done miraculous and wonderful things to establish His people in Israel. The psalm refers to Rahab. The psalm is not speaking of the woman that helped the spies out when they were surveying the promised land. In this instance, Rahab refers to the mythological chaos monster associated with the sea in Ancient Near Eastern tradition. God calmed the mighty sea. He established a covenant with David, stating that no matter what, a descendant of David would always be on the throne. Yet, even though that covenant had been established, God allowed the kingdom to split. He allowed the Israelite’s enemies to come in and ransack them. Essentially, the psalm is showing that God makes us promises and He fulfills them despite when things go wrong. God fulfilled His covenant with David through Christ. God has made promises to us. Even when we are ransacked and things are confusing, we can trust that He will fulfill the promises made to us. This, of course, is a lot easier said than done!

In the New Testament reading, Paul explains that it is our faith that gives us righteousness. When we submit to Christ's Lordship, we receive His righteousness. We are no longer slaves to sin. To be sure, we can do absolutely nothing to save ourselves. We can do nothing to make ourselves holy, righteous, and pure. The only way to be cleaned is through Christ Almighty. He did all of the work, we did not. Again, Paul reminds the Romans that the message was rejected by the Israelites. However, people that were not even looking for God found Him.

August 12: Psalms 90-92 and Romans 11:1-21

Psalm 90 is labeled a prayer of Moses. This either means that Moses is the author of this psalm or it simply reflects a Mosaic perspective. Either way, the psalm describes how The LORD had given the people refuge in their early days. He provided physical aid and spiritual sanctuary for the Israelites. The text talks about the brevity of life. God is infinite, so our time on earth to Him is like a few hours. It is interesting to note the lifespan that the psalmist gives. Their lives last 70 years, 80 if they are stronger. Those years are filled with strife. The psalmist asks God to turn and have compassion on them. Sometimes life seems rough. Sometimes it is hard. When we are in the thick of it, it seems like it will last our entire lives. The things we suffer through in this world only last a little while.

Psalm 91 establishes God as a hiding place for the righteous. Those that dwell in His shadow are protected. God is the deliverer. Psalm 92 praises God for His love and faithfulness. It is good for us to sing His praises in the morning and His faithfulness at night. As believers, we can be in the habit of worshipping God wherever we are at. I hope we do not contain our worship to just church on Sunday mornings. God is so good, and He has done such great things that we can find reasons to praise Him throughout our daily lives.

In the New Testament reading, Paul continues writing about Israel's rejection of Christ. Since they have rejected Jesus, the question is: Did God reject Israel? The answer, of course, is no. Paul is quick to remind the reader that he too is an Israelite. He came to faith. Other Israelites can too! We are not saved by good works, we are not saved by our blood line, we are not saved by our citizenship, we are saved by the redeeming blood of Christ!

August 13: Psalms 93-95 and Romans 11: 22-36

Psalm 93 speaks of God's eternal reign. He is ultimate. There is none before Him. God is eternal, He is not bound to time like we are. He reigns forever and ever.

Psalm 94 speaks of God's justice. The text advises the reader to pay attention and asks if the One that created ears would have no ability to hear. Would the One that made the eye not be able to see? Sometimes we can fall into the trap of thinking that God is not watching or that we can hide from Him. Even though we may be able to hide our sins from other people, we cannot hide anything from Him. He is not blind or deaf to what we do or what we say. As believers we can find happiness in His correction and discipline. After all, parents that discipline their children (in an appropriate fashion) demonstrate that they love their kids. When God gives us discipline, it is a sign that He loves us and is refining us.

The text also asks an interesting question about whether a corrupt throne can become God's ally. This is a rhetorical question. However, it is worth noting in Kings and Chronicles we saw pagan nations rise up and executed God's judgment against the Israelites. That is not to say that God gave these pagan nations favor. He did not make an alliance with them. An alliance requires quid pro quo, this for that. God offers these pagan nations nothing, nor do they offer anything to God. God will not align Himself with impurity.

In the New Testament reading, Paul gives warning to the Gentile converts about thinking better of themselves than they should. He uses the example of grafting olive branches into an olive tree. He had to do this because some within the faith ran the risk of thinking that they were better than the Jews since they were able to see Christ as Messiah and the lost were not. This is no way for a believer to act. Simply because we belong to Christ does not make us any better than anyone else. I pray that we can carry on our lives with a spirit of humility and gratitude. Believers are just as broken and sinful as the lost. The difference is that we have Christ as our redeemer and our rock. Let's not get puffed up and full of pride thinking that we are better than anyone else. I think I've said this before, but it bears repeating: Anytime I hear someone start a sentence with "I'm a good Christian", I know that I am about to hear something non Christian and judgmental. We weren't called to judge, we were called to live as an example.

August 14: Psalms 96-98 and Romans 12

The psalms we read today focus on giving glory to God. There is no One that deserves the praise that is due Him. He is great and highly praised. Splendor and majesty are before Him. The Lord made the heavens. The LORD reigns and so we can rejoice. His foundation is righteousness and justice. The victory belongs to Him.

God is in control. Sometimes it might feel like life is reeling. Remember, He is our anchor and He will be with us as we weather the storm. Even in rough times, we can praise The LORD. (Though sometimes that is easier said than done.)

In the New Testament reading, Paul urges the believers to not think too highly of themselves. The body is made up of various parts that perform certain functions. It is the same in the body of Christ. None of us are better than one another, nor are we better than anyone. Some folks preach, some serve, some teach, some lead. Each person within the body has a vital function to perform.

Paul also teaches about Christian ethics. As believers, we should hold ourselves to a higher standard. We should strive to do what is honorable. Further, we should not take vengeance into our own hands. Vengeance belongs to The LORD. When the forces of the world attack us, when we are betrayed by a trusted friend, as difficult as it is, we should not respond with vengeance, instead, we should respond with love. This is a difficult task, but it is the winning strategy. We cannot fight evil with evil and expect to win.

August 15: Psalms 99-102 and Romans 13

Psalm 99 continues with the theme of singing praises to God because He is holy. We should bow in worship to Him, for He is great, mighty, and holy. Psalm 100 encourages us to serve The LORD with gladness. We should give Him thanks because we are His. We can give thanks because He is good, and His love endures forever.

Psalm 101 is a Davidic psalm swearing integrity. The psalmist will not let anything worthless before his eyes. He hates the practice of transgression and will not let it cling to him.

Psalm 102 is for the afflicted person. The psalmist cries out, asking God to hear his prayer. His days vanish like smoke and his bones burn like a furnace. The psalmist withers away like grass. God's days are without number. He is enthroned forever. The nations will fear His name and He will rebuild Zion. Though the person is suffering through something, there is still hope. The affliction will come to an end. Considering eternity, even if the person suffered his entire life, it is a blip.

In the New Testament reading, Paul explains that the believers must still answer to the state. They cannot stop paying their taxes or refuse to obey the governing authorities. Though the governing authorities may do many things that we disagree with, we are still under that governing body. Paul explains that our primary duty is to love. Love does no wrong to a neighbor; it is the fulfillment of the law.

Paul longs for the day of Christ's return. Salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. Put on the armor of light and walk with decency. Make no plans to satisfy the fleshly desire.

August 16: Psalms 103-104 and Romans 14

Psalm 103 rejoices in God's forgiveness. He forgives sins, heals diseases and plucks us out of the Pit. The LORD gives righteous acts and justice. His love is great and tremendous. As human beings, we are fallible. We will fall into sin from time to time. God sent His Son Jesus to atone for our sins. There is no sin too big or too deep that God cannot forgive. What a merciful God we serve! Let us shout our praises to Him!

Psalm 104 speaks more of God's splendor and majesty. He is the One that made the earth and established it on its foundations. He covered it with water, then made the land. He made the mountains and the boundaries. God gave us this wonderful and beautiful creation to enjoy and care for.

In the New Testament reading, Paul urges the believers not to quarrel over doubtful issues. In this instance, Paul is referring to the eating of meat sacrifice to idols. For some folks, this served as a stumbling block for them. It might not be a stumbling block for someone else, but if it is a problem for another believer, it is best to abstain for the benefit of the struggling brother.

Paul writes, "Do not tear down the work of God because of food." The argument might seem kind of silly, but there are these little arguments that happen throughout churches today. It might not be over food, but it can be over a litany of things. One church I belonged to had a strict dress code. Seldom did I adhere to it. The way I saw it, God wants us to come and worship. If I were

to put on a fancy suit and then go to church and act prim and proper, then am I really worshiping or putting on a show? It was an argument I was willing to have with the people confronting me about it every Sunday. Though I chose to stay, I wonder how many other folks that group drove out of the church because they did not dress the way they wanted them to. Taking a little poetic license, we can say “Do not tear down the work of God because of clothes.”