

April 28

Psalm 76, 82, 84, 90, 92, 112, 115

Music has an amazing power over us. It can haunt us, transport us, inspire or elate us. It's hard to imagine a world without music. In the same way, it's difficult to imagine worship without singing. God designed music as a gift for us to express our worship. The Bible, especially the Psalms, shows us what an integral part music can play in our worship. It's been fun to read through the Psalms and notice the different passages of scripture that composers have used for some of the more familiar songs we use in our worship.

When the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem, King David charges the Levites to appoint a choir to sing joyful songs. These songs were to be accompanied by musical instruments. Among the musicians for the choir was Asaph, who played the cymbals (I Chron 15) and was the writer of numerous Psalms including the first of today's readings, Psalm 76. The descendants of Korah were another important group of worship leaders and twelve psalms are ascribed to them. The temple singers and musicians helped to foster a spirit of worship and praise among their fellow Israelites.

Psalm 76 is a Psalm of celebration that looks back at danger past and praises God for deliverance, it centers upon the fact that He, "the God of Jacob", is the one we can trust, so the Psalmist urges us to "*make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them...He is to be feared by the kings of the Earth.*"

Psalm 82 is a non-prayer, addressed not to God but to men. It is addressed to the rulers or judges who govern God's people. The gist of this Psalm is to remind rulers and judges that they are accountable but it also reminds them that their primary task is to protect the weak and see that justice is done.

Psalm 84 is written by the Sons of Korah, mentioned earlier in my opening comments. It is a more subtle cry for help. It is written by someone who has been prevented from traveling to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple. The love for the "dwelling place of the Lord" is foremost in the heart of the psalmist as he exclaims, "How Lovely!" He reflects on the temple as the place of God's symbolic presence, together with "the courts" where the worshipers and pilgrims assembled for their special days. He physically longs for the experience of God's presence, and he "yearns or faints" with his whole being. The psalmist total attention is on the "Lord Almighty" whose blessing he seeks.

While God is omnipresent, and His presence is always with us, we continue to long for an encounter with the Presence of God. When we talk about experiencing the presence of the Lord, we are talking about the realization of God's presence. God has promised that as we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us and we will experience His presence in ever increasing measures.

Verse 10 is the most familiar part of Psalm 84: "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked." The psalmist talks about the superiority of God's presence. One day of fellowship with God is a thousand times better than anything else.

In Psalm 92, the superscription says that this Psalm was used by the Levites in the temple worship on the Sabbath day. This Psalm could be described as a Hymn of Thanksgiving. Its essence is quickly discoverable in the opening verses:

*It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp. For you make me glad by your deeds, O LORD; I sing for joy at the works of your hands. How great are your works, O LORD, how profound your thoughts!*

The Psalmist tells us the reason he's praising the Lord: for what he does - "the works of His hands" – and in particular the deliverances that He has provided for us individually. All you really need is to open your eyes and see what God has done. You will be amazed. Many people miss it, especially the small things that happen everyday God's work on our behalf is always around us.

He even tells us how to praise the Lord. He says to praise Him with music in the morning and again at night – and use instruments, vs 3 specifically mentions the harp and lyre. Both are stringed instruments which were plucked when played. Both were important instruments of worship and mentioned many times in the Old Testament.

Let's wrap up today with a few thoughts on Psalm 115. Listen from the Message translation:

*Not for our sake, GOD, no, not for our sake, but for your name's sake, show your glory. Do it on account of your merciful love, do it on account of your faithful ways. Do it so none of the nations can say, "Where now, oh where is their God?" Our God is in heaven doing whatever he wants to do. Their gods are metal and wood, handmade in a basement shop: Carved mouths that can't talk, painted eyes that can't see, tin ears that can't hear, molded noses that can't smell, hands that can't grasp, feet that can't walk or run, throats that never utter a sound. Those who make them have become just like them, have become just like the gods they trust.*

This Psalm helps us to understand that man must worship something or someone. Because, too often, people will not worship God, the recourse they follow is to make a god of their own who they worship. But, what is their god like? Does a god made by man have any power?

In contrast, what is God like? He is in Heaven and does what He pleases. He has eyes and so He sees His Children on earth and cares for them. He has ears to listen to our cries for help and responds. He has a nose that smells the incense of sweet fragrance that His children offer up to Him in prayers and praise. He has feet to walk beside us and carry our burden when it is too heavy for us to bear. And that is why we will bless the LORD from this time forth and forevermore.