

Confession

TASTE & SEE

WEEK 3

SERIES INTRO:

This eight-week study is based on a sermon series on worship and the psalms called “Grace and Gratitude: Worshiping a Gracious God with a Grateful Heart.” Worship is our response to God and the grace and love he shows us in Jesus. Worship is how we relate to God—gathering, singing, confessing, hearing God’s Word, celebrating our unity with him through baptism and the Table, professing our faith to one another, and then re-entering the world as those who are ready to be part of God’s mission. The psalms lead us into worship, reminding us that God not only hears and understands all our many different prayers, needs, and emotions, but welcomes us and rejoices with us as we draw closer to him.

Mark Labberton, a contemporary pastor/theologian, calls worship a “dangerous act.” He writes, “When worship is our response to the One who alone is worthy of it—Jesus Christ—then our lives are on their way to being turned inside out. Every dimension of self-centered living becomes endangered as we come to show God’s self-giving heart.” Centuries earlier, Augustine said the gathering for worship is the “fundamental and original form of the church, for it is through this gathering that the church expresses to itself and to the world its nature, its purpose, its mission, and its role in history.” I believe both are correct!

A few years ago, followers of Jesus from around the world worked together to create a document called “Worshiping the Triune God” that attempted to explain the amazing potential of worship through a series of contemporary ‘proverbs.’ I was asked to write a commentary on these, and the book *Wise Church: Exploring Faith and Worship with Christians Around the World* came into being. We will be using some excerpts from this book as the basis for our small group study throughout this series.

Each week there will be different types of questions. Some might be better for longer-term small groups and others might be more useful for the new groups formed through Taste & See. Leaders may pick and choose what they want to focus on depending on the make up of their small group. May all we say and do over these next weeks encourage us all in our lives of grateful worship! *ped*

WEEK THREE INTRO:

Psalms 120-134 are referred to as the Psalms of Ascent. Ascent comes from the Hebrew root “to go up.” The Psalms of Ascent move towards a climax: to climb up to reveal the divine work of God as restoring the degraded spirit and condition of his people. Pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem sang the Psalms in order to worship as they traveled, as well as to prepare their hearts for corporate worship on reaching the temple.

Psalms 130 is also referred to as a “repentance” psalm (see also Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, and 143). The Psalms of Ascent are often read in conjunction with four keywords from the Aaronic blessing: blessing, protection, graciousness, and peace. The Psalms of Ascent are frequently referred to as “Pauline Psalms” by reason of their emphasis on grace and forgiveness. They were a favorite of Martin Luther.

The Psalms of Ascent are believed by many authorities to have been written around 400 BCE (and/or collected in their final form during that period of time). The Psalms were likely directed towards those Jews returning from exile who had endured great hardship, spiritual degradation, oppression, fragmentation, and humiliation at the hands of the Babylonians. Babylonia ultimately fell to the Persian Empire. The Persians took a far more lenient position with reference to the Jewish people allowing them to return to Israel and to rebuild their temple.

The majority of the Book of Psalms are psalms of lament which included a complaint, petition, motivation, as well as confession, trust, and praise. Psalms seek to provide comfort directed to the human condition with respect to both people that are challenged as well as blessed. Their purpose was and is to assist God’s people to move forward and gain new hope. In making the pilgrimage, the psalter is returning home. In returning home, the psalmist enjoys restoration of their personal identity.

Psalms 130 is divided into four sections. Verse one reflects a mortal threat to the psalmist and their great distance from God. Verse two reflects the opposite of hope, which is despair. Verse three reflects the desire that God hear and perceive the psalmist’s cry for help. In verse four the psalmist, in humility, acknowledges his/her own entangled soul and inability to climb out of the depth of his/her despair in the absence of the mercy of God. In verse five the psalmist recognizes God’s unfailing love, faithfulness and grace in total reverence (fear) of God. In verses six and seven, the psalmist recognizes God’s grace by reason of his unfailing love and mercy, confidently awaiting forgiveness and redemption with patience.

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and hope. In verse six the psalmist, using metaphor, waits for the break of day, i.e., the insight and redemption that comes as a consequence of God's unfailing love. In verses seven and eight the psalmist speaks toward communal redemption of all God's people by reason of God's faithfulness and compassion, suggesting interdependence between the individual and collective community.

This psalm seeks to reflect the everyday life of individuals and community. It references the human condition as reflected by despair or loss of "self." It reinforces God's concrete presence in everyday life. It establishes an arc of tension: the search for safety in a world filled with hostility. It reflects God's grace as a consequence of his unfailing love and mercy. It seeks to emotionally, physically, and intellectually empower the people of God to create and/or reframe their future stories. It provides the insight that hope is not merely an individual reality but is necessarily reflected by all of God's community. It teaches that the future is not simply dependent upon individual attributes and actions, which are unreliable, but on the wisdom and strength of the triune God. (See Isaiah 40:3)

This psalm, as a component of worship, reflects the fact that worship is the corporate work of the people. Worship requires communal participation in the Paschal mystery, embracing our paradoxical reality, eliminating barriers between self and others, thereby creating unity between God, people, and creation.

Psalm 130 reflects the need to ensure congregational communion with God during worship, both individually and corporately, as well as with each other. Worship should necessarily nourish the people to enable them to be the healing force in the world. The psalm suggests that through corporate worship of the triune God, we come into community with the Holy Spirit in order to experience salvation and grace on earth, as well as to allow participation in the stewardship of God's creation. In shedding despair and embracing hope, the people of God experience corporate and individual healing, reconciliation, liberation, and empowerment. Worship and faith in God's mercy gives his people the sense of transformed or redeemed time and offers a foretaste of the Kingdom.

Hope and joy come from the knowledge that we are recipients of God's invitation. Hope and joy necessarily reframe and transform perspective, ensuring resilience in our experience of the realities of this finite world.

Proverb

- Wise is the church that, following the example of the psalms, encourages honest and trusting prayers to God that express the full range of human experience—the “anatomy of the soul” (John Calvin) — spoken, sung, or silent, danced, dramatized, or visualized — prayers of celebration and lament, trust and desperation, supplication and intercession, thanksgiving and confession, healing and hope.

Questions for Discussion

General Questions:

1. Do you have a memory of despair or loss of hope? How did it make you feel? How did you respond to the world?
2. What does hope mean to you?
3. What type of emotions do you experience with hope?
4. Can you remember a time when you experienced God’s grace during a period of despair? How did it feel?

Questions about Psalm 130:

1. Do you think the psalmist was a person of faith? Why or why not?
2. What is the importance of humility to the psalmist?
3. What does it mean to wait upon the Lord? How do we as the people of God accomplish this?
4. How is grace associated with unfailing love and mercy?
5. Why must the people of God as a corporate body put their faith in the Lord?

Additional Questions:

1. How does the presence of hope in the future affect our present?
2. How does the presence of hope in the future affect how we perceive our past?
3. Has hope allowed you to reframe or transform a life experience? If so, how?

Scripture Texts

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord:

² Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive
to my cry for mercy.

³ If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,
Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But with you there is forgiveness,
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

⁵ I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits
and in His word, I put my hope.

⁶ I wait for the Lord
more than the watchmen wait for the morning,
more than the watchmen wait for the morning.

⁷ Israel, put your hope in the Lord,
for the Lord's unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.

⁸ He himself will redeem Israel
from all their sins.

Isaiah 40:3

A voice cries out:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God...”

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