

PRAYING IN THE DARK

Introduction

Here we are in week I don't know what since we have been able to meet together. While it has been a blessing to be able to communicate God's word via the internet to many of you that I have not had the opportunity to encourage before, I long for the coming days when we will be able to enjoy fellowship together in person. I have appreciated what the Lord has been teaching me in my struggles during this quarantine, but I have missed what he does to edify me through each of you as we worship the Lord together. I think these days have really helped us see the intended balance of the Christian life. Our relationship with Christ is intensely individual & personal, but also designed by God to be encouraged & fortified in fellowship with one another. We can sometimes emphasize one of these parts above another to our detriment, but I think this time of separation has helped us to see the importance of the entire Christian life.

Pilgrim Psalms - Preparing the heart for worship

15 Psalms - 120-134 - Song of Ascent, or Song of Degrees

In these songs, the Psalmist takes us with him on a journey where he finds himself initially alone in the wilderness and yearns for the fellowship of God's people, and ultimately fellowship with God himself.

What is the context of these Psalms?

Probably the songs for the pilgrims who journeyed together on their way to Jerusalem.

Going up - Jerusalem sits 2500 ft above sea level, 3000 - 3500 ft above the Jordan Valley

Kind of like Windham, you always need to climb to get into town.

Going up to Jerusalem - to worship together as God prescribed

Deuteronomy 16:16 - Three times per year for festivals

Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles:

Luke 2:42-44 - Times of community worship

And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. ⁴³ And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. ⁴⁴ But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

1 Kings 12:27-29 - Encouraging unity, protecting orthodoxy, edifying relationships

Jereboam: "If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah." Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan.

A Distressed Pilgrim Psalm 120

***I long to be with God's people. I long for the joy of corporate worship. I long for God's glory.
Because I live a distressed life.***

The Pathway of the Distressed Pilgrim

"To the LORD, in my distress, I call and he answers" - Heb. word order

This establishes where we are going, and why we are going there.

I called to the LORD - The pilgrim knew where he would find help, so he was traveling in that direction.

In my distress - trouble, adversity, affliction

1 Kings 1:29 - The tenor of David's life

The Psalms provide an anatomy for the entire soul of man - Calvin

Things are not always bright & encouraging

Like John Bunyan reminds us in his classic work *The Pilgrims Progress*,

the way to the celestial city often leads through the Slough of Despond.

The Reason for the Pilgrim's Distress

Meshech & Kedar - North-east & South-west of Israel's territory -

Far from home, isolated from the support & encouragement of his friends, in turmoil

- He isn't with the people of God.
- He isn't in the place where God's truth is proclaimed & demonstrated.
- He isn't hearing the encouragement of God's people, telling him what God has done!

Instead he is being bombarded with. . .

Lying lips & Deceitful tongue

False narratives & malicious lies about God, his people, his truth, his glory

The just judgment upon slander - repay what it gives

Sharp arrows of the mighty - words that give quick & unavoidable pain

coals of juniper - words that bring long burning pain

Peace haters

I am for peace - *shalom* - the peace that comes from fellowship with God & his children
internal, soul-strengthening peace

When I speak God's truth to his children, they delight in his peace's transforming power.

When I speak God's truth to others, they hear a call to war against their constructions.

I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war. - the struggle of the Christian life
**Tonight, the Lord has us end with an acknowledgement of the struggle.
And reminds us that he hears when we cry out to him in that struggle.**