



*But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. -*

**Matthew 15:9**

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## Thoughts on Psalms 73

This is my first week to use my wife's template for this weekly note. In the past I have written her an email and she has copied and pasted into this template.

I was thinking this week how I wanted the focus of this site and of these weekly notes to be on the goodness of God. We have contrasted it with the duplicity and meanness of the “good” human character. (I say “good” to indicate what most humans think is good as contrasted with the obvious evil of criminal masterminds, sociopaths and masochists.)

But in doing that we run the danger of getting focused on the negative rather than the positive. If you want to be good at recognizing counterfeit currency you don't spend a lot of time looking at counterfeits. Instead, you become highly familiar with the real thing, so that any deviation from it becomes obvious to you.

And that's how we need to be when we study the character of God. If we focus on what he is like we are bound to become more like him. If we focus on how corrupt even the best humans are we set our sights too low and run the risk of hitting the target we're aiming at.

And that brings me to the Psalms. I'm reading through them as my personal devotions lately. Perhaps more so than at any time in the past I am struck with how much the Psalms reflect the human view rather than the divine view. Repeatedly these hymns ask God to do terrible things to the wicked. And occasionally a psalmist will ask God to reward him according to his innocence.

Wait a minute! Doesn't that sound a little self-righteous? “I'm better than that guy over there!” Jesus pointed out that tendency in his parable of the two prayers. The religious person said, “God I thank you that I am not like that reprehensible person over there...” The “reprehensible” person said, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Jesus said only the latter went home justified before God.

So we have to understand that the psalmists give voice to very human emotions. What makes them worthy of Bible inclusion is that these emotions are directed toward God in prayer. God is willing to listen to all our human pride, arrogance, self-justification, and desire for revenge. I think it's part of dumping all our cares on him. Let it out and let go of it. Give it to God and let him take care of the revenge business.

This week I got to Psalm 73. It's the one that points out what is too often true in this world. The wicked do well and the righteous suffer. This would have been particularly difficult to understand in the old covenant world of Asaph. In the middle of the Psalm, however, he notes:

When I tried to understand all this,  
it was oppressive to me  
till I entered the sanctuary of God;  
then I understood their final destiny. (Psalm 73:16, 17)

What might this hymn writer have seen in the sanctuary? The primary service, the part visible to all Jews, was the sacrificial system. When sin was confessed on the head of the animal, the animal died. This represented the natural result of a life of sin. Sin and life are not compatible. Because God, in his mercy, offers a temporary miracle to give us a chance to choose for ourselves, we might think that sin and life ARE compatible.

But what we really see here is the mercy and compassion of God. Left to ourselves we humans would have gone extinct long ago. So what we see in the sacrificial system is a demonstration of the reality of sin—sin leads to death. That's the final destiny of all humans. The difference is for those who will take the remedy for sin. This is represented by the blood of Jesus. The blood itself has no miracle-working power (apologies to the author of "Ben Hur," but its ending is pure fiction).

And here's another chance to wonder at the beauty of God's character. At immense personal cost he made it possible for a rebellious species to be fixed and to rejoin life in the universe. He truly is awesome!

God bless and give you a productive and growing week.

Sincerely,  
Elkanah.

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