

The Psalms of Ascents

Calling unto God out of the Depths and Realizing That We are Just Sinners

Week 2 – Monday

Psa. 128

In Psalm 128 the thought changes again; the main point is that we must labour. Psalm 127 says that everything that we do is in vain, but Psalm 128 says that we are blessed when we eat the labour of our hands. What is the criteria for this blessing? Verse 1 says, “Blessed is every one who fears the LORD, Who walks in His ways.” What does it mean to fear the Lord? To fear here is in love; it is to be fearful that God will not be pleased with us, that we cannot please Him, that we will disobey Him. It is to be fearful that God cannot gain what He wants in us. The apostle Paul was a person who feared God. He said that he buffeted his body so that it would submit to him. He was afraid that he could not attain that which he preached to others. Hebrews 12:28-29 says, “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.” We must fear God to walk in His ways, that is, walk on the path God has for us, no matter how crooked it is or how much suffering and tribulation is on it. Still we must be faithful to go on this path. The labour of this kind of person will be valuable and will have a result. Then he can be glad and be nourished by those he laboured for. His will be like a fruitful vine and his children like olive plants around his table. A vine does not bear fruit one at a time; its fruit is in clusters filled with the riches of life. There are also many shoots that come out from an olive tree. All of this is a description of the riches of life. The ones who fear the Lord walk in His ways and are filled with the freshness of the fruit of life.

Psalm 129 can be considered the conclusion of this stage. Verse 2 says, “Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth; Yet they have not prevailed against me.” This Psalm is a praise in the environment of affliction, yet the affliction did not prevail against the psalmist. Just like Israel, he experienced many situations with many sufferings in the environment from God. No matter how difficult was the situation he faced, in the end he became mature just like Israel. Although his person was broken, at the end his life was mature.

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Week 2 – Tuesday

Psa. 130:1-2

In the first psalm of the Psalms of Ascent we see a man who dwells in Meshech and in the tents of Kedar. Yet at the end of the Psalms, this man is in the temple of God. These fifteen psalms begin with a man of God who desires to leave the world and enter into the church life. But at the end we see that this man has passed through a deeper dealing from God until he is one with God, mature in life and dwelling in the temple of God. These fifteen psalms begin with prayers. The psalmist has a desire before God and he has a prayer. At the end, he is filled with praises.

Therefore these fifteen psalms have a special place in the book of Psalms. They represent a man who receives grace and is saved. Yet because of his desire for the Lord, he progresses step by step until he becomes one with God and reaches maturity. These are the spiritual significances found in these fifteen psalms.

The five psalms beginning with Psalm 130 belong to the third group. The central thought is to be one with God. These are psalms of ascents; we are not going downhill; we are ascending upward. The life of a Christian must be a life of ascending until we reach the pinnacle which is the maturity of life. Psalms 120 to 134 cover our experience from the time we are regenerated. Step by step we are growing, we enter into the church life and experience God's work in us so that we can grow in life until we are those who are watchful and waiting for the Lord's return.

Psalm 130:1-2 says, "Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD; Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications." The word *depths* here refers to someone falling into deep affliction. The one writing this psalm was in the depths of difficulties, hardships and troubles. The depths here are plural, not singular. Because he loves and desires God, God allows him to be in the depths. If a man loves God or says he is loved by God, he must often enter into the depths. According to the paths led by the Lord, the depths are a necessity.

The Psalms of Ascents

Week 2 – Wednesday

Lam. 3:55-56

Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:11-12; "...persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me... what persecutions I endured.... Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." This is the last stage. When we grow in life to such an extent, we will be put into many difficulties, hardships and troubles so that God can break us. This is so that we fully realize that we are nothing in ourselves. We cannot rely on ourselves any more. This person was put into the depths and cried to the Lord. Jeremiah said, "I called on Your name, O LORD, From the lowest pit. You have heard my voice: 'Do not hide Your ear From my sighing, from my cry for help'" (Lam. 3:55-56). Jeremiah was a person who loved the Lord. He prayed according to God's desire. God allowed him to be placed in a pit in the prison. There he prayed to the Lord. All those who desire to follow the Lord, those who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. This what God has measured to us. This is different than our concept; our natural concept is that if we believe in and follow the Lord then He will give us many good things. Some Christians preach a prosperity gospel, that if you believe in the Lord, you will be wealthy; the Lord will direct all the wealth in the world to you. One time a friend invited me to come to where he met. The preacher there said that if you are a Christian who loves the Lord, you will be wealthy. The entire message was about God directing all the wealth to you. At the end, he called all those who want to be wealthy to come to the front so he could pray for them. Then he stretched out his hands to pray for all the ones who flooded to the front. I couldn't believe that there would be a preacher like this. If being faithful to God means that you will become wealthy, then the Lord Jesus must have been wrong. He was living in poverty His whole life, He was persecuted, He was rejected and despised, and in the end died on the cross.

The Psalms of Ascents

Week 2 – Thursday

2 Corinthians 11:28-31

If the prosperity gospel is true, then Paul also must have been wrong. What was his experience as shown in the New Testament? Without a doubt, in the New Testament, Paul's influence is the greatest and his suffering is also by far the most severe. 2 Corinthians 1:8-9: "For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead." Paul's testimony is that he was burdened beyond measure, above his strength, so that he despaired even of life.

When Paul testified that he was a minister of Christ, he did not say how many people he brought to the Lord or how many churches he established. He testified of his suffering for the gospel. During the time of his ministry, he was frequently persecuted from Damascus to Jerusalem, Syria and Cilicia. He suffered much during the time he laboured among the Gentiles and the four journeys he took. He said in 2 Corinthians 11:23-33, "Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands." Many of these sufferings are not mentioned in the book of Acts. The time that he was stoned the persecutors thought that he was dead. It only records once when Paul was shipwrecked but that time happened after Paul wrote this. He had been shipwrecked three times before then. At the end he said that if he needed to boast, he would boast in his weakness.

The Psalms of Ascents

Week 2 – Friday

2 Cor. 12:5-9 – Footnotes 9¹, 9², 9³

The New Testament presents such a picture of the one who ministry was the most effective of all the apostles. What kind of life did Paul live as he was ministering to God? He truly experienced a life in the depths. While we are ministering to the Lord, God allows us to fall into the depths. Why? So that we will experience Him even more, so that we will grow in life. This is the third stage of the Christian life to experience the deeper work of God. We are put into the depths so that we can know our weakness. This is why Paul could not boast in himself. He said that those how boast must boast in the Lord. He boasted in his infirmities so that the strength of Christ could cover him. After he had received the visions and revelations, he said, "...yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me. And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:5-10). This is the experience of such a great apostle. This is also the experience that God will give to every Christian who desires to grow in life.

The Psalms of Ascents

Week 2 – Saturday

2 Cor. 12:10

If our Christian life is smooth sailing, with nothing big happening day by day, month by month, and year by year, when we look back at the end of life there will be nothing worth remembering. This means that you did not have much growth in life or experience of life. When Paul talked about his life, it was colourful, full of tears. What has happened to you in the years that you have been a Christian? What has left a deep impression? When I think of my Christian life, I think of my experience in the church life. When I started to love the Lord, an elder brother began to deal with me. After he would deal with me he would come to shed tears and pray together with me. Afterward, he would deal with me again. This is something that I cannot forget. One time I got into trouble because of a brother. I was late for a young people's serving meeting. I was responsible for the meeting, yet I was late. While they were waiting, a full time worker said that when brother Frank comes, he needs to kneel down. One of the other young serving ones went and found a cushion so that I could kneel on it when I came. When I arrived, I was put in the middle to kneel down in front of everyone. This experience is hard for me to forget. There are many, many other things that happened to me in the church life. When I went out to hand out tracts and preach the gospel, I cannot forget how I was rejected by people. When I knocked on doors, people would rebuke me. I remember these things, but all the other little things I forget. When affliction and hardship comes, it helps us to experience the Lord more, to experience the Lord's grace, to experience the Lord's blessing. We must realize that the day when we stand before the Lord in His presence, we will remember all the times we suffered for the Lord or were persecuted for the Lord. All these experiences are the real blessings.