

THE ASSUMPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE PRAYER

PSALM 5

Introduction:

It is probable that Psalm 5 was written about the same time as Psalms 3 and 4. Psalm 3 was a prayer offered in the morning, and Psalm 4 was offered in the evening. Psalm 5 would be the prayer offered the next morning. In each case the prayer of the king was set to music so it could be sung in the temple. It must have been a moving moment when the worshippers heard this sung in the temple and were mindful of the circumstances out of which it came.

Let me remind you: King David has been in flight from his rebellious son. Absalom has gathered an army under the command of David's trusted friend Ahithophel. Great numbers of the fighting men of Israel have cast their lot with the rebellious son, and it appears he will prevail. David fled the city with a little band of faithful souls. What will his future be? What will be the future of the kingdom? Will the promises that God made to him through Nathan come to naught? It is out of the darkness of that ordeal and trial that these prayers come.

The fifth Psalm exposes some of the assumptions upon which David built His prayer life. Whether we realize it or not, each of us has some assumptions that guide our prayers. I have found that consideration of these assumptions of the king encourage my prayer life. They encourage me to be bolder and more faithful in my prayer approaches to God. Consider them with me.

I. GOD IS GREAT ENOUGH TO ANSWER OUR PRAYERS.

As David offers his appeal to God, he sets forth an assumption that he makes about the ability of God to answer his prayer. Let me just read through the first two verses and highlight the assumption that he is making. It is evident that he bases his assumption on things that God has revealed about Himself to Israel and to him personally.

Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation. ² Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God: for unto thee will I pray. (V. 1-2)

"O LORD" is the first. LORD translates the Hebrew word Yahweh. This is the personal name that God gave to Moses at the burning bush. It is built on the "I Am that I Am," statement. It is the covenant name of the Lord God. So David approaches God with an assumptions that he has a personal relationship with God that is based on the covenant that He established with Israel. This assumption makes a lot of difference in your approach to God.

"My King" is the second. The LORD is the one who saves and the one who rules, He is the King over the whole universe. We who live in America are not always comfortable with language that reveals God as King. We are accustomed to voting on our leaders, and we see them as peers who have been put in a position of authority. God is King because He chooses to be King. He created all that is and established Himself as the ruler over all that is. So when you approach Him as the King, you are approaching the One who the authority to rule and the One who has the resources to sustain His rule. So the underlying assumption of our prayers is that we approaching One who has all the resources and authority needed to meet our need.

"My God" is the third. There are gods and then there is "the One True God." David knew about the gods of the nations around him, but he knew personally the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob--the God of Israel. This is the Hebrew name of the deity that opens the Bible, "In the beginning God..." He is the one God who has called into being the whole universe by a Word, and sustains by His own will what He called into being.

We are more likely to address Him as "Our Father which art in heaven", based on the light that His Son Jesus gave us. In either case those who pray effectively make this assumption: I am coming to One who has the authority and the resources and the power to hear my cry and to meet my need.

II. PRAYER SHOULD BE A PRIORITY IN OUR LIVES.

The next verse of the Psalm reveals a second assumption of effective prayer. Notice the language of the verse and the assumption behind the statement will

be clear. "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct *my prayer* unto thee, and will look up." (v. 3)

"Thou shalt hear in the morning" reveals it. Effective persons do not do trivial things in the morning. Effective people know that you begin the day by addressing things of importance. So it is a matter of putting first things first when the king of Israel begins his day with prayer. Before he consults with those who serve him and carry out his biddings, he first consults with the One to whom he has ultimate accountability. Through prayer he makes himself available to the One he serves at the beginning of the day.

"And will look up" says something about this. The English Standard Version sees a sacrifice in the morning prayer. Another translation sees the idea of laying out the pieces of life before God in the morning. In either case the looking up suggests that you enter the day with expectancy in your heart. You keep looking up to the Lord for His blessing and favor on the day.

As a pastor across the years I learned to make this assumption a part of my life. I learned that it was a tragic mistake to enter any day without first having bowed before my God and King in prayer. As best I knew the things to be done in the day and the people to interact with, I placed them before God one by one. Then I entered every part of the day with the expectancy that God would provide what I needed moment by moment, event by event.

Those who are effective in prayer make this assumption. They assume that meeting with the King in prayer is the first priority of any day. And no wonder. Later in the prayer David will ask for divine guidance and leadership in the day. It is wiser to get the mind of God early in the day than it is to come broken at the end of day by some foolish blunder that you made because you did not ask for guidance.

III. GOD REJECTS THE WICKED OF THE WORLD.

The third assumption of effective prayer comes in the next verses--they remind us of God's response to the wicked and rebellious attitude of the world in which we live.

For thou *art* not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. ⁵ The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. ⁶ Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the LORD will abhor the bloody^a and deceitful man. (V. 4-6)

As you look at these verses, just underline some words with me. "A God that hath (no) pleasure in wickedness." The New Testament word for "wickedness" is "lawlessness". It is the essence of sin. It is conducting the affairs of life without any regard to the will of God; it is living life to please yourself. God designed the world so that we are to live for His pleasure. He finds no pleasure in those who find no pleasure in Him.

"Neither shall evil dwell with thee." God has no room in His house for those who do evil, live moral and ethically corrupt lives. So the effective assume that if I am to enjoy access to the presence of God, there can be no room for evil in my life or my heart.

In his list David indicates that when persons live for their own pleasures, they become "foolish" and they cannot stand before God. Such fools become marked by "leasing" (lying and deceit); they will have "bloody" hands and deceitful tongues. And God hates the whole mess.

If you assume that God despises the folly of the world, then you will avoid all evil so you may be able to lift up holy hands when you pray.

David expands this discussion. Take note of how he describes them. Actually Paul borrows from this passage in Romans 3 when he sets forth the depravity of the human heart, and gives the evidence that calls for universal condemnation. Notice that David points to the mouth, the "inward parts", the throat, and the "tongue."

For *there is* no faithfulness^c in their mouth; their inward part *is* very wickedness; their throat *is* an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue. ¹⁰ Destroy^d thou them, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions; for they have rebelled against thee. (v. 9-10)

No wonder that David prays for their destruction! They are in rebellion against God and against all that is good. Those who want to be effective in prayer want no part of such behavior. They cultivate a heart that is in submission to God and always ready to obey Him

IV. THE MERCY OF GOD MAKES OUR PRAYERS POSSIBLE.

The effective prayer takes seriously what God says about Himself. When He revealed Himself to Moses on the mountain, He emphasized His mercy. Mercy is also translated "loving kindness", "steadfast love", "love" and with other such terms. It involves God's faithfulness to the people with whom He has made a covenant. God is like a Hosea in dealing with His wayward people. Listen to the words of David again!

But as for me, I will come *into* thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: *and* in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy^b temple. ⁸ Lead me, O LORD, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face. (v. 7-8)

"As for me, I will come into thy house..." David was not a man without problems. It is his son who is turning the nations upside down. He has a lot of skeletons in

his closet. Will God hear his prayer? Can he approach God with confidence? Read how he continues these words...

"In the multitude of thy mercy." God is so full of mercy that the broken and contrite king is sure that he will be heard when he goes to the temple to pray.

Do we need to remind ourselves that the writer of Hebrews invited us to His throne of grace "to receive mercy." (Hebrews 4:16) O what an encouragement to my heart! I will assume that there is an abundance of love and mercy when I come in prayer. All of those who are effective in prayer make this assumption!

V. GOD HEARS THE PRAYERS OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

In the closing line in the prayer, take note of the three terms that David is using to describe those who are effective in prayer. Read it and identify them.

But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest^e them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee.
¹² For thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass^f him as *with* a shield.

Did you find them? They are those who "put their trust in thee." Something good happens when a person puts trust in the Lord. For one thing, they receive righteousness as a gift!

They are also those "that love thy name." They are so delighted with the name of the Lord; who He is in His character and in His deeds. Because of this they rejoice in Him.

Then the third term identifies them as "the righteous". These are the men and women who walk in His ways and daily seek to do His will. They have accepted His

standards of righteousness as the measurement for their lives, and they daily seek to live by that standard.

You can assume that God will bless and help those who are marked in these three ways. Do you remember the words of James, "The effectual fervent prayers of a righteous man availeth much." (James 5:16)

Do you need some encouragement for your prayer life? Spend some time in this morning prayer of a troubled and broken-hearted *king*.