

Thursday Morning Bible Study:

Unexpected Psalms: Do We Ever Sing Like That?

Hymns:

156 Come And Let Us Sweetly Join; 160 Fight The Good Fight; 185 Praise The Saviour Ye Who Know Him

4. Psalms of Resolution

I think that **Psalm 101** is perhaps the psalm that stands alone in the psalter more than any other. It is also, so far as I can tell, almost completely unrepresented in modern Christian song. It is – for want of a better phrase – a psalm of resolution. The recurring phrase that marks this psalm is “I will...” – it occurs in every verse except v. 7, but there it is replaced by words that amount to declaration of will any way. I want to spend some time today thinking about this psalm, and reflecting on why we may not sing songs like this today, and why we probably should!

But before we do, it is important to note that *in the majority* of the psalms, there is a declaration of will and intent on the part of the psalmist. Psalm 101 is not so very odd on that account! Very often in the psalms, the psalmists express their intent to give thanks, to sing praise, to be glad and exult, to recount all the LORD’s wonderful deeds, to approach God in worship by coming to His temple. See Pss. 5:7, 7:17; 9:1-2; 13:5-6; 16:7-8; 18:49; 22:22; 27:4, 8, 14....and so on!!

And this intention to praise God, exult and be glad in Him, rejoice in Him, tell His wonderful deeds, approach Him at the temple, and to hope and trust in Him all flows from His gracious and kind acts towards us. Jonathan Edwards, the great American theologian and philosopher, over the course of a couple of years, wrote a list of resolutions, actions that he committed to pursue to the best of his ability in his service of God.¹ His introduction to these resolutions reads: ‘Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these Resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to his will, for Christ's sake.’ For him, resolution was not a substitute for the grace, but the expression of the working of that grace within him.

St. Paul speaks of the resolve of his life twice times in his second letter to the Corinthians. 2Cor:5:9 speaks of his resolve, regardless whether he live or die, to please the Lord. In 2Cor. 8:21 he speaks about his aim (intention) to act in completely honorable way with regard to the administration of the collection for the saints in Jerusalem – honorable in the Lord’s sight and in the court of public opinion. And then in 2Cor. 13:11ff, he urges the Corinthian church to also have a noble aim – which is that in all things they will make their aim in relationships to be that of restoration – spelled out in the terms of comforting, agreeing with, and living in peace with one another. Now all this is all through the grace of the Lord Jesus, the love of the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2Cor. 13:14.)

In 1Timothy 1:3ff he urges Timothy to deal with certain people who are teaching things that digress from the grace, mercy and peace of God in Jesus Christ, and that

¹ You can find a list of these resolutions at <http://www.jonathan-edwards.org/Resolutions.html>. They are in numerical order on this site, in the order in which Edwards took them up (over a period of years.) There is another grouping of these resolutions according to theme at <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-resolutions-of-jonathan-edwards>.

lead into a devotion to speculative and endless discussions of arcane matters, rather than the matter of the gospel known by faith in Jesus. He intends that by doing this, Timothy will promote love, issuing from a heart, conscience and faith that have been purified through Jesus. In 2Tim. 2:21ff he urges Timothy to flee youthful passions and instead to pursue (doggedly make this his goal) righteousness, faith, love and peace – which is the characteristic of all those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Let's look at **Psalm 101**. David writes this psalm, and expresses his theme right up front – vv. 1-2a, 'I will sing of steadfast love and justice; to you, O LORD, I will make music. I will ponder the way that is blameless.' This is a psalm reflecting on the righteous life – but not dispassionately or like some esoteric or unobtainable exhibit in the museum of wishful thinking. Rather, this pondering and singing is expressed in the words of resolution, of determination to act. What he meditates on, this he will do.

Note v. 2b, 'O when will you *come to me*?' It is this one little comment that helps us to place this psalm in David's biography. It seems to be a direct allusion to a particular episode, in 2Samuel 6:1-11. Having established himself as king in Jerusalem, David arranged for the ark of the covenant to the royal city. Against the Lord's word about the transport of the ark, it was placed on a (new) ox-cart, and when the oxen pulling the cart stumbled, Uzzah (a priest) put out his hand to steady the ark – and died there and then for his sacrilege. 2Sam. 6:9 says, 'And David was afraid of the LORD that day, and he said, "How can the ark of the LORD *come to me*?"' It seems then that David in this Psalm is expressing the resolve to live the kind of life that would enable him to stand with confidence in the LORD's presence. Cf. Hebrews 12:14 'Strive for peace with everyone, *and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*'

Right at the heart of this life of resolved godliness are very great and wonderful matters – steadfast love and justice (v. 1.) These attributes are ascribed often to God in the OT, but they are the qualities are distinctive of the godly, and especially of godly kings. They belong together in a mutually 'checking' way – kindness checking justice from becoming too harsh, justice saving kindness from becoming demoralised. Everything following in this psalm is a detailed description of what belongs together here.

The psalm echoes the call for the wise in Psalm 1 – not at all going the way of the wicked, but opposing that way thoroughly. This psalm particularly focuses in on what it is like for *a king* to not walk in the counsel of the wicked, stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of scoffers. It includes the rejection of all idolatry (v.3), and all open unfaithfulness to the LORD (v. 4). David resolves to avoid all slanderous talk and all arrogance and sense of superiority. Where these are present, he will be resist and reject it (v. 5). Rather, David resolves to honour faithfulness, and to seek such people to serve in his court (v. 6). Lying, fraud, 'spin doctoring' – all these things he rejects for the nature of his rule (v. 7). He resolves to steadfastly and relentless oppose these things, and to shape his rule by all that is true – all that accords with steadfast love and justice.

Reading this psalm, it stands out for its *rigour*. David is committing himself – in the light of God's own steadfast love and justice – to be *godly*. The matter of resolve is really one of self-discipline, self-control. And this is a fruit born in us by the Spirit, by which the true king, Jesus, great David's greater Son, offered himself to God his Father. Think through this psalm and all that it meant for Jesus – in his temptations, his ministry, his dying, burial and rising. And then know that you are those on whom has come the riches of the ages to come through the Spirit of God.

The Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards – A Selection

1. Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory, and my own good, profit and pleasure, in the whole of my duration, without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriads of ages hence. Resolved to do whatever I think to be my duty and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolved to do this, whatever difficulties I meet with, how many soever, and how great soever.
3. Resolved, if ever I shall fall and grow dull, so as to neglect to keep any part of these Resolutions, to repent of all I can remember, when I come to myself again.
5. Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can.
6. Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live.
7. Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.
8. Resolved, to act, in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I, and as if I had committed the same sins, or had the same infirmities or failings as others; and that I will let the knowledge of their failings promote nothing but shame in myself, and prove only an occasion of my confessing my own sins and misery to God. July 30.
12. Resolved, if I take delight in it as a gratification of pride, or vanity, or on any such account, immediately to throw it by.
13. Resolved, to be endeavoring to find out fit objects of charity and liberality.
14. Resolved, never to do any thing out of revenge.
15. Resolved, never to suffer the least motions of anger towards irrational beings.
16. Resolved, never to speak evil of anyone, so that it shall tend to his dishonor, more or less, upon no account except for some real good.
19. Resolved, never to do any thing, which I should be afraid to do, if I expected it would not be above an hour, before I should hear the last trump.
21. Resolved, never to do any thing, which if I should see in another, I should count a just occasion to despise him for, or to think any way the more meanly of him.
25. Resolved, to examine carefully, and constantly, what that one thing in me is, which causes me in the least to doubt of the love of God; and to direct all my forces against it.
28. Resolved, to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.
29. Resolved, never to count that a prayer, nor to let that pass as a prayer, nor that as a petition of a prayer, which is so made, that I cannot hope that God will answer it; nor that as a confession, which I cannot hope God will accept.
31. Resolved, never to say any thing at all against any body, but when it is perfectly agreeable to the highest degree of Christian honor, and of love to mankind, agreeable to the lowest humility, and sense of my own faults and failings, and agreeable to the golden rule; often, when I have said anything against anyone, to bring it to, and try it strictly by the test of this Resolution.
33. Resolved, to do always, what I can towards making, maintaining, and preserving peace, when it can be done without overbalancing detriment in other respects. Dec. 26, 1722.
34. Resolved, in narrations never to speak any thing but the pure and simple verity.
42. Resolved, frequently to renew the dedication of myself to God, which was made at my baptism; which I solemnly renewed, when I was received into the communion of the church; and which I have solemnly re-made this twelfth day of January, 1722-23.
47. Resolved, to endeavor, to my utmost, to deny whatever is not most agreeable to a good, and universally sweet and benevolent, quiet, peaceable, contented and easy, compassionate and generous, humble and meek, submissive and obliging, diligent and industrious, charitable and even, patient, moderate, forgiving and sincere temper; and to do at all times, what such a temper would lead me to; and to examine strictly, at the end of every week, whether I have done so. Sabbath morning. May 5, 1723.
52. I frequently hear persons in old age, say how they would live, if they were to live their lives over again: Resolved, that I will live just so as I can think I shall wish I had done, supposing I live to old age. July 8, 1723.
56. Resolved, never to give over, nor in the least to slacken, my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be.
58. Resolved, not only to refrain from an air of dislike, fretfulness, and anger in conversation, but to exhibit an air of love, cheerfulness and benignity. May 27, and July 13, 1723.
66. Resolved, that I will endeavor always to keep a benign aspect, and air of acting and speaking in all places, and in all companies, except it should so happen that duty requires otherwise.
70. Let there be something of benevolence, in all that I speak. Aug. 17, 1723.