

Psalm 25 "A Song for the Lonely"
Psalm 25
Romans 5

April 30, 2023

"Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted." (v16)

How often do we sing about loneliness at church?

This is a problem in both traditional and contemporary worship songs.

The old Trinity Hymnal only contained one song ("His Eye Is on the Sparrow" -- 618)

that used the word lonely to describe us,

and even that song asks "why should my heart be lonely...

when Jesus is my portion?"

It almost rebukes us for feeling lonely!

But Psalm 25 is a song for the lonely.

It promises us that we will not always be alone

("the friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him") –

but it does not pretend that we will always experience that nearness of God.

Sometimes we are lonely.

And that's okay.

I'm not saying that loneliness is a good thing!

It's not a good thing!

But it is not a sin to be lonely!

What should you do when you are lonely?

We have God's promise that it won't *always* be like that –

but when we are lonely, we have a song to sing.

Sing Psalm 25

Read Romans 5:1-11

When Paul says that we have "obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand" –
he is talking about how we have obtained access into the heavenly Holy of Holies.

While we were weak – at the right time – Christ died for the ungodly.

God showed his love for us in that while we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.

We were helpless.

We were weak.

But Jesus did all that we could not do for ourselves!

This is what David longs for in Psalm 25.

We saw over the last few weeks that Psalm 22 is the centerpiece of Psalms 20-24 – five songs about the Messiah – the King – the Son of David.

We'll over the next few weeks that Psalm 28 is the centerpiece of Psalms 26-30 – five songs about the sanctuary (Psalm 30 even has the title – “A Song at the Dedication of the Temple”!)

Which means that Psalm 25 is the centerpiece of these 11 songs that explore the relationship between the King and the Temple – the Messiah and the Sanctuary.

And what is it that connects Messiah and Temple?

Well, what sort of language did we just hear?

“waiting on the LORD”

“make me know your ways”

“lead me in your truth”

“he instructs sinners in the way”

“all the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness”

“for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies”

“Him will he instruct in the way”

“he makes known to them his covenant”

This is wisdom language – or you could say, *torah* language!

The word “torah” is not used here –

but as we've seen in the last five psalms,

you don't need to use the word “Messiah” in order to talk about him!

But – as we saw in Leviticus in the evening service –

the Torah – the five books of Moses –

are all about how humanity can be restored to fellowship with God.

How can the LORD's Messiah bring his people into his holy sanctuary?

Through God's covenant –

when the LORD's anointed walks in the ways of God –

then keeping his covenant and his testimonies –

then God will redeem Israel (and all nations!) out of all his troubles.

And David gives us this song to sing –

so that we can see our loneliness in the light of God's purposes!

Why am I lonely?

I am lonely – not because I am physically alone.

The easiest place to be lonely is in a crowd.

Everyone else has a purpose – everyone else is happy...

and then there is *me*.
That was a fair chunk of my high school and college years.

And there are times – even in the last few months – where it has come back.

Only for David it's worse than that.
Because in Psalm 25, I am not lost in the crowd.
The voice of the Psalmist, after all, is the voice of the King.
Everyone knows who David is!

And *everyone* is out to get him!

The loneliness of Psalm 25 can be applied to every sort of loneliness –
but it is focused on the loneliness of the king – the loneliness of David,
who knows that his own sin has made a mess of things,
and that his enemies are ready to shame him publicly.

But if you think about it – all loneliness has the same root!
Why do we stand there – alone in the crowd?
We are afraid!
I'm so screwed up.
If they really knew me, they wouldn't like me.
If they knew all that I have done,
if they knew everything that has happened to me,
I would be publicly humiliated!
And so we prefer to remain anonymous, alone, and afraid.

Look around for a moment.
They are all just like you.
They all think that I'm preaching this just for them.

I get it.
It takes time.
Trust doesn't happen all at once!

We don't trust God all that easily – and we certainly don't trust each other!

We need the Psalms to serve as a mirror for our souls –
as Athanasius put it:

"The Psalms thus serve him who sings them
as a mirror wherein he sees himself and his own soul,
he cannot help but render them in such a manner
that their words go home with equal force to those who hear him sing,
and stir them also to a like reaction." ~Athanasius

Psalm 25 is an acrostic poem –
each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
In this way it is like Psalms 9-10 – and like Psalm 119

The structure of Psalm 25 is very simple.

There are three prayers in Psalm 25 –
Verses 1-7, verse 11, and verses 16-22.

The opening prayer expresses trust and confidence in God.

In the middle are two creedal statements –

Verses 8-10 and verses 12-15.

These are both statements of confidence that God *will* be faithful to his covenant.

You could summarize all this very simply:

Lord, I really need you.

And God is faithful to his promises – he does what he says.

So, LORD, I really, really need you!

1. Three Central Themes of the Christian Life: The Prayer of the Lonely (v1-7)

The prayer of verses 1-7 highlights three key themes:

the importance of *shame*,

the importance of the *way* and the *truth*,

and the importance of God's *steadfast love*.

Why are we lonely?

Because we are ashamed – and we fear shame.

a. “Let Me Not Be Put to Shame”: The Importance of Shame (v1-3)

25 To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

² O my God, in you I trust;

let me not be put to shame;

let not my enemies exult over me.

³ Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;

they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

When you are lonely, lift up your soul to the LORD!

We heard last week that the one who shall ascend the hill of the LORD

is the one who will not lift up his soul to what is false! (24:4)

David is saying, *I want to be the one who will ascend the hill of the LORD.*

As we'll see in Psalm 25 – the problem is that David has sinned!

But as Psalms 20-24 have shown us –

David understood that there was some connection
between God's kingdom and David's son.

And so, with David, all Israel would sing this song.
With Jesus, we sing this song in him!

We live in a culture where people are constantly being shamed:
social media provides a forum for public shaming on a whole new scale.

And yet, at the same time, we live in a culture that is allergic to shaming:
every parenting book on the market teaches us that we should never shame our children,
and when people in powerful positions use shaming, they are viciously attacked –
they themselves are *shamed*.

We need to understand that you *cannot* avoid shaming.
You cannot create a world in which no one is ever shamed.
After all, shame is the *proper* result of wicked behavior.
To use the language of verse 3, if someone is “wantonly treacherous”
they *should be* put to shame!
When Peter refused to eat with Gentiles in Antioch,
Paul publicly humiliated him.

When people do bad things – when they do things that seriously hurt other people –
when they do things that slander the name of God –
they should be put to shame.

But notice what the Psalmist wants to avoid:
“let me not be put to shame.”
Let me not be *shamed* by others – particularly, by my enemies.
The theme of shame here has to do with your hope – your trust.
If you put your hope in man, then you will be shamed.
Your hope will be revealed as foolish and insubstantial.
But if you put your hope in the LORD, then you will not be shamed.

“LORD, to you I lift up my soul – O my God, in you I trust;
let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me.”

“None who wait for you shall be put to shame.”

(Notice the end of Psalm 25 – verse 20-21 – “let me not be put to shame,
for I take refuge in you.
May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you.”)

I want to be the sort of person who is not shamed –
because I fear the LORD – because I wait for him – because I take refuge in him.

And that theme of waiting is fleshed out in more detail in verses 4-5
as we consider the importance of the *way* and the *truth*:

b. “Lead Me in Your Truth”: The Importance of the Way and the Truth (v4-5)

⁴ *Make me to know your ways, O LORD;
teach me your paths.*

⁵ *Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all the day long.*

If you would avoid shame – if you would wait upon the LORD –
then you need to *know* God’s ways.

There are two images intertwined in verses 4-5:
the image of the path – the way –
and the image of truth/teaching/knowledge.

God’s truth is not just a matter of correct information.
It includes correct information –
but correct information (by itself) is *not* the same as
“your ways..., your paths..., your truth”
“Make me to know your ways, O LORD”

Because we once walked in a very different path.
As Augustine says “Let me shun errors, ‘and teach me,’
for of myself I know nothing but falsehood....
Turned out of paradise by you and wandering in a far-off country,
I cannot return by my own strength unless you come to meet me in my wandering,
for my return has been waiting on your mercy
throughout the whole stretch of earthly time.” (194)

Jesus will comment on these words when he says “I am the way, and the truth, and the life...”
In Jesus, the God of our salvation became flesh and dwelt among us.

The teaching of God is not just a correction of our intellectual errors.
The teaching of God is a new way of walking – a new way of living –
based on the fundamental confession that “you are the God of my salvation.”

And that’s why the prayer of the lonely focuses not on who we are and what we have done –
but on who God is and what God has promised (verses 6-7).

c. “Remember Your Mercy...Not My Sins...Remember Me”: The Importance of God’s Steadfast Love (v6-7)

⁶ *Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.*

⁷ *Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,*

for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!

Notice the repetition:

remember your mercy, O LORD –
remember your steadfast love.

Remember *not* the sins of my youth – remember not my transgressions.

But according to your steadfast love *remember me* –
not for anything that I have done,
but for the sake of *your goodness*, O LORD.

If we are going to operate on the basis of *my* performance,
then I will be publicly humiliated – I will be put to shame!
I will remain lonely and afraid.

But the God of my salvation does not operate on the basis of my performance!
He remembers his mercy.
He remembers his steadfast love – his covenant faithfulness – his goodness.

I need to stop here for a moment.

Who is talking here?

This is a psalm “of David.”

It could mean that David wrote it – but it certainly means
that the *voice* of the Psalmist is the voice of David.

And as we have seen many times, the voice of David in the Psalms –
the first person singular in the “David Psalms” –
is taken up in the voice of Jesus.

You might say, “wait, but how can Jesus say “remember not the sins of my youth”?”

After all, Jesus never sinned!

But he who knew no sin *became sin for us*.

At the cross, Jesus took all of our sin – our guilt – our shame –
upon himself.

That’s *why* Jesus became the second Adam, the New Israel, the Son of David.

After all, how can we – how *dare* we – take these words upon our lips?

How can we say to God, “remember not the sins of my youth”?

How dare we say to God, “remember *me* according to your steadfast love”?

It is only because Jesus has taken your guilt and your shame to the cross.

He buried it in that tomb.

And when he arose from the dead – he left it there!

And that’s why in verses 8-10, the Psalmist turns from a *prayer* to a *creed* –
as he now declares to us what is true about God!

2. *The Paths of the LORD Are the Way for Humble Sinners: A Creed for the Lonely* (v8-10)

I want you to notice the way that this creed moves from “sinners” (v8) to “those who keep his covenant and his testimonies” (v10).

⁸ *Good and upright is the LORD;*

therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

⁹ *He leads the humble in what is right,*

and teaches the humble his way.

¹⁰ *All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,*

for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

How do you get from being a “sinner” (in v8) to one who “keeps his covenant” (in v10)?

Well, just look at the middle term:

“he leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble his way”?

The way of the LORD starts with humility.

The proud is full of himself.

The proud thinks that he knows everything that he needs to know.

The humble will listen with open ears,

“I need to hear what God is saying – or else I perish!”

In verses 4-5 the Psalmist asked God to teach him the ways – the paths – of the LORD.

Now the Psalmist confesses that the only way to learn these paths is the way of humility.

Humility is hard.

Humility means fearing God – constantly keeping the fear of God in view.

Humility means that “a man loves not his own will

nor takes pleasure in the satisfaction of his desires”

but instead imitates our Lord Jesus:

‘I came not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.’ (Benedict 7:31)

Humility means becoming obedient to the point of death (Philippians 2:8 –

We’ll be in Philippians 2 tonight!)

Humility means obedience even at great personal cost.

Humility means accepting the lower place – accepting the most menial tasks –

because what matters most is following Jesus.

And because the Psalmist has learned humility,

he returns in prayer in verse 11, and prays:

3. *“Pardon My Guilt”: A Prayer* (v11)

¹¹ *For your name's sake, O LORD,*

pardon my guilt, for it is great.

In a Psalm that opens and closes with an emphasis on shame –
the center of the Psalm is about guilt.

I do not want to be put to shame – therefore I will confess my guilt!

But again notice that it is *for your name's sake!*

It's not because of anything in me!

And then he returns to the creed in verses 12-15.

4. The Friendship of the LORD Is for Those Who Fear Him (v12-15)

¹² *Who is the man who fears the LORD?*

Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.

You can see how verses 12-15 connect back to verses 8-10.

In verses 8-10 the sinners of v8 become those who keep covenant in verse 10
by the path of humility in v9.

In verses 12-14 the path of humility is described as the “fear of the LORD.”

And in verse 13, we hear the promise that

¹³ *His soul shall abide in well-being,*

and his offspring shall inherit the land.

At the beginning of Psalm 25, David said,

“to you, O LORD, I lift up my soul” –

and now we hear of the one who fears the LORD,

that “his soul shall abide in well-being” –

and

“his seed will inherit the earth.”

This is an echo of the promise to Abraham –

that the seed of Abraham would inherit the earth (cf. Romans 4).

God's promise is not only for us, but also for our children.

But while verses 12-13 are third person singular –

the “man” who fears the LORD – the singular One who abides in well-being –

now in verse 14, it shifts to third person plural:

¹⁴ *The friendship^[b] of the LORD is for those who fear him,*

and he makes known to them his covenant.

When you hear the word “friendship” it can be easy to think in terms of our modern notions.

Friendship in the ancient world (indeed, friendship as late as the 19th century!)

was not just about a warm personal relationship.

If friendship just means “hey, we’re buddies now!”
then the rest of the verse makes no sense.

“The LORD is good buddies with those who fear him,
and he makes known to them his covenant.”

Yeah, no – that’s not what friendship means in Psalm 25!

Friendship *is* an intimate relationship, but it is an intimate relationship
that entails mutual obligation.

The word translated “friendship” here has to do with “secret counsels”.
In other words, the friend is the one who knows your deepest secrets.

Abraham was called the “friend” of God – (James 2:23)

Why?

Because in Genesis 18, God invited Abraham into his counsel,
in order to discuss how to handle Sodom and Gomorrah.

At the Flood, God revealed his *will* to Noah –
but Noah was not invited to give feedback.

Now the LORD is about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah –
but Abraham is invited to comment –
the LORD welcomes Abraham’s feedback on his plans!

And Jesus says “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master
is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made
known to you.” (John 15:15)

A friend is one that you can trust.

You know that your friend will always be there for you.

Not because you are buddies – but because you are bound together as friends.

When you fear God and put your trust in him,
God commits himself to be there for you as a friend.

When you are lonely –
when you feel as though no one else understands –
remember that Jesus calls you “friend.”

And so the Psalmist concludes his creed by confessing in verse 15:

¹⁵ *My eyes are ever toward the LORD,
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.*

As we walk in this life, our eyes must ever be toward the LORD.

This may sound strange.

Would it not be better to watch where you are going?

Watch your path!

If you saw the net in the first place, your feet would not have gotten tangled!

But that is not the Psalmist's way of thinking.

As we are seeing throughout this Psalm –

there are many snares and dangers,

and while I may be able to avoid some of them by keeping a sharp eye peeled,

I cannot avoid them all.

Therefore, I keep my eyes fixed on Jesus –

because *he will pluck my feet out of the net.*

Notice that there is no promise that you will never get tangled in the net!

The promise is that the LORD will pluck your feet out of the net!

And so we return to the LORD in prayer in verses 16-21:

5. Dependence upon God for Grace, Forgiveness, and Protection: A Prayer (v16-21)

a. “Turn to Me”: Crying out to God in Affliction (v16-17)

In the opening prayer, the Psalmist lifted up his soul to the LORD –

I want to be one who ascends the hill of the LORD!

Lead me in your paths.

Then in his creed, he declared that God instructs sinners, teaches the humble,

and gives his friendship to those who fear him.

So the Psalmist does precisely what he said that a humble man should do!

¹⁶ *Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.*

¹⁷ *The troubles of my heart are enlarged;
bring me out of my distresses.*

Things are not the way they should be –

I am not the way I should be.

I'm lonely.

Yes, I know that you have said that your friendship is with those who fear you.

So I'm asking you to demonstrate your friendship, O LORD.

“Turn to me and be gracious to me...bring me out of my distress.”

b. Consider My Affliction and My Foes: Being Honest with God about Our Sin and Our Enemies (v18-19)

Verses 18-19 then challenge us to be honest with God about our sin and our situation:

¹⁸ *Consider my affliction and my trouble,
and forgive all my sins.*

¹⁹ *Consider how many are my foes,
and with what violent hatred they hate me.*

Verses 18 and 19 both start with the same word –
which means that the acrostic is broken.
Some scholars think that maybe there was a different word in verse 18
(since that is the missing letter – qoph).
But I would suggest that the omission of the qoph
was designed to call our attention to this verse.

By repeating the same letter – and indeed, the same word –
we are left pleading with God – we are stuck in the same place.

And there are two sorts of troubles that ensnare me:
my sins – and my foes.

Sometimes my troubles have come upon me because of my sin.
And so I pray that God would forgive all my sins.
But sometimes my troubles have come upon me because of my foes.
My enemies are trying to destroy me.

And so the Psalmist cries out in verse 20:

**c. Guard My Soul and Deliver Me: Shame and Integrity in the Light of the
Cross (v20-21)**

²⁰ *Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me!
Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.*

We started with David lifting up his soul to the LORD –
now he asks God to guard his soul!

We started with the plea “let me not be put to shame” (v2),
and we come back at the end to the same plea.

Think about how our Lord Jesus dealt with this:
“looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith,
who for the joy set before him endured the cross,
despising the shame,
and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb 12:2)

Verse 21 may seem odd for a song that has highlighted sin and guilt so often!

²¹ *May integrity and uprightness preserve me,
for I wait for you.*

If I'm asking God not to remember my former sins (v7),
and if I'm asking God to pardon my guilt (v11), and forgive my sins (v18),
then how can I claim that integrity and uprightness will preserve me?
Because if God has *forgiven* all my sin and *pardoned* all my guilt,
then God is holding *nothing* against me!

Why do I have confidence before God?
Because while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us!
If God has forgiven you, then all you have *left* is integrity and uprightness!

He who knew no sin became sin for us.
Jesus is the sinless suffering servant.
And because of that as we heard in Romans 5:
“hope does not put us to shame,
because God’s love has been poured into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5).

Or to say in the language of Psalm 25:

Conclusion: The Application of David’s Prayer to All the Church (v22)

²² *Redeem Israel, O God,
out of all his troubles.*

For while we were weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.
We often talk and act as though the solution for loneliness is to “be a better friend.”
But the fundamental solution to loneliness is not horizontal –
it is vertical!
“For you I wait all the day long” (v5)
“My eyes are ever toward the LORD” (v15)
“I wait for you” (v21)

“You must arrange your days
so that you are experiencing deep contentment, joy, and confidence
in your everyday life with God.” (Ortberg)