

Psalm 81

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[0:00] Our text for this morning's Bible study, as Daryl mentioned in his prayer, is Psalm 81. So if you'll turn in your Bibles to Psalm 81. While you're getting there, let me talk to you just a little bit about our plans for our Sunday Bible study and then when we can meet back together, our Sunday sermons across this next year.

Just in case you didn't see my little video that I posted on Slack this past week. We are, just yesterday we started in the Bible reading plan that many of us are participating in and some of us are not, and that's okay.

This is not an obligation. This is the way to read the Bible. It's just a way, and it's a good way to read the Bible. But yesterday we started into the New Testament readings in the book of Matthew, and then there's a reading from a psalm every day, and yesterday's psalm was Psalm 81.

Today it's Psalm 82, and so forth. So if you're interested in doing that with us, we'd encourage you to do so. To do that, you can go to the Read Scripture app.

You can download that onto your device. Set the start date for August 27th, and this is really important, 2019. It's going to really be confusing if you set it for 2020. So August 27th, 2019, and that'll show you where you ought to be each day in your Bible reading.

[1:19] And beyond that, I'm going to post it every day to Slack, the Bible reading moving forward. And when we can meet again, it'll be on the screen and on your bulletin, etc.

And what we're going to do is we're going to teach from a text from that previous week's reading. So we're going to be going all throughout the Scripture, teaching, working to tie it together for you, to kind of present a biblical theology, tracing the main theme of Scripture, which is God's redemptive work for His glory and the good of His people.

So we're going to be picking selected texts across that time, which means we'll be working fairly progressively through the Bible. But from time to time, we'll step off to a psalm from the daily reading, which is what we're going to be doing today.

And then parents, I'm working on right now. I'm not, it's taking me a lot of time, as you might imagine, but selecting a couple of verses from each day's reading that you can read with your children.

So I think I've done between two and four verses per day. So if you're doing the Bible reading, and then you're sitting down with your children and doing that briefer Bible reading, hopefully you'll be able to help them, give them some context, press them along in their understanding of the Bible as well.

[2:35] If I can get my act together, I'll get that to you this afternoon. If not, by tomorrow, I'll have that to you, at least for the Gospels. That's where I'm at so far. So you can start doing that with your children.

And then on Monday, so starting tomorrow morning at 6.30, I'm going to host a Zoom meeting before our Devotion Plus Prayer meeting, 6.30 a.m.

And I'm simply going to say a quick prayer, read the text for the day, say a closing prayer of kind of application, what's coming to my mind as I'm reading. So if you'd like to join us for that, just pay attention, keep tuned in.

I'll talk a little bit more about the details for that later on. So that's the hope. So we've spent a lot of time as a church drilling into books. So we've just finished the book of Hebrews.

A lot of people who come and are part of our church come for just a number of years while they're in school or they're living in Dahlonga for a brief period of time. And it's a wonderful thing that we get to really, really get into the depths of a book together.

[3:34] But we thought it'd be nice to kind of step away, get a higher view, even as we come into particular texts as we walk through the Bible together. So we'll still be doing expositions.

We just won't be verse by versing it through a single book of the Bible. But so that said, today's text is Psalm 81. And I'll begin reading in verse one.

Sing aloud to God our strength. Shout for joy to the God of Jacob. Raise a song. Sound the tambourine, the sweet lyre with the harp.

Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon on our feast day. For it is a statute for Israel, a rule of the God of Jacob. He made a decree in Joseph when he went out over the land of Egypt. I hear a language I had not known. I relieved your shoulder of the burden. Your hands were freed from the basket. In distress you called and I delivered you.

[4:32] I answered you in the secret place of thunder. I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Hear, O my people, while I admonish you. O Israel, if you would but listen to me.

There shall be no strange God among you. You shall not bow down to a foreign God. I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.

But my people did not listen to my voice. Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own counsels. O that my people would listen to me.

That Israel would walk in my ways. I would soon subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes. Those who hate the Lord would cringe toward him and their fate would last forever.

But he would feed you with the finest of the wheat and with honey from the rock. I would satisfy you. So in order to set our minds moving in the right direction as we study the psalm, I'd like to begin by reading you a bit from an article on Psalm 81 that I found on Ligonier's website by a man named W. Robert Godfrey.

[5:46] And I just think this helps kind of set the stage for this particular psalm. So I try to listen carefully here as I give this a quick read. What does the church most need today?

In answering this important but rather general question, Psalm 81 is uniquely important and helpful. This psalm obviously contains beautiful promises and clear directions to help the people of God.

But careful study of this psalm will deepen our appreciation of it, increase its value for us, and show us how distinctive it is for helping the church. As we study psalms, we soon learn that the central verse of a psalm is often significant as a key to its interpretation.

The central line of Psalm 81 is the heart of that psalm as the plaintive cry of God is heard, O Israel, if you would but listen to me.

And this is the last half of verse 8. Perhaps this line will resonate more profoundly with the readers of this article if we translate it, O Israel, if you would but hear me.

[6:49] The center of Psalm 81, indeed the whole psalm, is a reflection on the Shema. And the Shema is from Deuteronomy chapter 6, verses 4 through 9.

And so I'm just going to read that to you real quick before going back to the article. And it says this, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house, and on your gates. Again, Deuteronomy chapter 6 and verse 4.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. So back to the article. The centrality of this line and its importance are underscored when we recognize that Psalm 81 is the central psalm of Book 3 of Psalter.

[7:54] Book 3, Psalms 73 through 89, principally concerns the crisis in Israel caused by the destruction of the temple and the apparent failure of God's promises that David's sons would forever sit on the throne.

Something of the cause and character of this crisis is contained in this central line of the central psalm. Since Book 3 is the central book of the five books of the Psalter, Psalm 81 and verse 8 actually is the central line of the whole book of Psalms.

It stands at the very heart of Israel's songbook. It calls Israel to deep reflection on her relationship to her God. This psalm also appears to be central to Israel's liturgical calendar.

The praise at new moon and full moon can refer only to the seventh month of the year, the Feast of Trumpets in Leviticus 23-24, which happened every year.

We know this as Rosh Hashanah, it's the harvest festival of Israel, and the Feast of Tabernacles, which is every seven years. Between these two feasts occurred the Day of Atonement.

[9:03] As God called Israel to celebrate his great provisions as creator and deliverer, so he called his people to hear him. As the Shema was crucial to the Torah, so it is central to the Psalter and the Christian life.

God's people must hear his word, particularly to reject false gods and to walk in his ways. They must not follow their own wisdom. How sad to contemplate that God might give us what we think is good for us.

So that sets the stage for what I want to point out today in the text, and that is that Psalm 81 contains within it three calls or summons.

First, in verses 1-5, there's a call to rejoice. Second, verses 6-10, a call to remember.

And third, in verses 11-16, a call to repentance. Let's look first at a call to rejoice, excuse me, verses 1-5.

[10:11] So a call to rejoice, or quite literally, a call to worship. This opening of this psalm was a specific call to worship, and it was used for, we know, historically, for the Feast of Tabernacles.

For this festival, the Israelites would make temporary shelters and would live in them for seven days as a reminder of their time in the wilderness and God's faithful provision for them there.

This was to be a celebration of God's goodness, and it was to be full of joy, right? This is a call to rejoice. Listen again to the first three verses.

So Israel was called to worship their God with gladness of heart.

They were to shout for joy, raise a song, and play instruments, the tambourine, the lyre, the harp, and the trumpet. They were to worship their God with the wholeness of their being.

[11:23] The psalmist is calling us to the very same thing, to not just work through the motions of our worship, but to worship God in our waking and in our going about or in this strange time in our staying in and to worship God in our lying down.

Every moment in all of our actions and all of our thoughts and all of our emotions, we are to give ourselves to the worship of our God. Worship is not just narrowed down to special planned times, although it is that, but it is so much more.

We're meant to live lives of worship for our God. We are to worship with all that we have for all that he is. Listen to what our God said to the Israelites through the prophet Isaiah, and this is Isaiah chapter 1, beginning in verse 11.

What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices, says the Lord? I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts. I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings. Incense is an abomination to me. New moon, note the new moon there, and Sabbath and the calling of convocations, I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.

[12:53] Your new moons again and appointed feasts, my soul hates. They have become a burden to me. I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you.

Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood. The Israelites were worshiping God by his prescribed means.

These were the things that God had commanded that they would do, but not with their whole selves. They were going through the motions.

Verse 13 and then verse 15 shows us this. I cannot endure iniquity, and your hands are full of blood.

They were going through the motions of worshiping God, but they were guilty of egregious sin, and as such were not worshiping with their whole being.

[13:48] God continues in Isaiah 1 to be instructive, and this should be helpful to us. In verse 16 and 17, he says, wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

means for lives to be given to him in worship. Beloved, it is altogether possible to worship the right God, but to worship him wrongly, in an unacceptable manner.

J.I. Packer, in his most wonderful work, which I strongly commend to you this morning, some of you may have some time to do some reading right now, called *Knowing God*, posits the following two points.

Listen carefully. One can know a great deal about God without much knowledge of him. He makes this distinction between knowing about God and actually knowing God, being in relationship with God, understanding his heart and his concern for his people.

And secondly, one can know a great deal about godliness without much knowledge of God. So we can know the rules, we can go through the motions without much relationship with our Lord God.

[15:18] I believe that we can all be guilty of this from time to time, right? Having sound doctrine that doesn't lead to sound practice. We can believe the right things, but we can hold them wrongly that doesn't lead to holy living.

of merely reading the Bible or some good book, of listening to good teaching, of singing gospel songs, of gathering all sorts of data about God without knowing him.

Packer goes on in his work to give some helpful thoughts on evidences of knowing God, wherein he employs the following four points. And I just want you to think about these things for a moment as I read them.

How well could you say, yes, that is true of me, of someone who gives evidence of knowing God, being in relationship with him? Number one, those who know God have a great energy for God. Number two, those who know God have great thoughts of God. Number three, those who know God show great boldness for God.

[16:26] And number four, those who know God have great contentment in God. So you can see what he is saying, right, is it encapsulates all of us, right, all of us given to the worship of our God.

Verses one through five of Psalm 81 are a call to rejoice in the God of our salvation. And I just wonder, on this day, will you heed this call to rejoice?

Secondly, we see in verses six through ten, a call to remember. First, a call to remember what God had done.

Verses six and seven. First, we see in verse six and the first part of verse seven, I relieved your shoulder of the burden. Your hands were freed from the basket. In distress, you called and I delivered you.

They were to remember that God had delivered them from their bondage in Egypt. We can read in Exodus chapter two, verse 23 and following. During those many days, the king of Egypt died and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help.

[17:35] Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God and God heard their groaning and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

God saw the people of Israel and God knew. the Exodus from Egypt was a foreshadowing of the deliverance of God's people from sin and death.

We look back to the Exodus and should remember the greater deliverance that we have in Christ. We are meant to remember the Exodus and so Psalm 81 speaks to us as well although we understand it more fully.

Paul wrote in Romans chapter six, verse six and seven, we know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin for one who has died has been set free from sin.

So we're meant to remember what God has done and the highest thing of most important order is that God has set us free from the bondage of sin. Second, we see in the rest of verse seven that they were to remember that God had relationship with them.

[18:53] God says, I answered you in the secret place of thunder. This phrase most likely refers to God meeting with Moses and therefore his people on Mount Sinai.

God listened and he spoke and he spoke so that he would be known, trusted, and obeyed. In the same way, God has spoken to us, not only on a mountain in the secret place of thunder, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son, Hebrews chapter one and verse two.

And we can read of all God's working on behalf of his people by his son in the totality of the scripture. Last part of verse seven says, I tested you at the waters of Meribah.

Here God is most definitely referring to the episode recorded at the beginning of Exodus 17 where the people quarreled against Moses and God showed himself faithful by providing water from a stone.

And although God showed himself faithful at Meribah and many other times, many of the Israelites did not trust him and were punished for their faithlessness. In the same way, God has shown himself faithful in provision to us and tests our faithfulness.

[20:09] We have much of God's kindness toward us, much of God's provision toward us. He has relationship with us and because he has that, he asks of us faithfulness.

This is why Paul instructs us in first Corinthians chapter 10 verse one and following. For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea and all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink for they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them and the rock was Christ.

This is their wilderness traveling, right? And this was meant to teach us something. Verse five, nevertheless, with most of them, God was not pleased for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples for us that we might not desire evil as they did.

So we are supposed to remember what God has done and be found faithful. Secondly, we're called to remember who God is.

[21:26] And here we find verse eight. Hear, O my people, while I admonish you, strongly warn you, O Israel, if you would but listen to me.

And I hope here and before you've seen the connection to the Shema found in Deuteronomy chapter six. Verse nine then says, there should be no strange God among you.

You shall not bow down to a foreign God. I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. the whole of the law of God was read at the Feast of Tabernacles every seven years.

So more than just the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, the whole law would have been read. But here in verses nine and ten, we see the preface of the Ten Commandments and the first two commandments in summary.

First, we see the first two commandments summarized in verse nine. Commandments for the proper worship of the proper God. These are found originally in Exodus chapter 20 verses three through six.

[22:36] And there is so much to unpack out of these two verses. Now remember, this would have been a call to worship. Psalm 81 would have been read at this particular feast, but also the rest of the law would have been read.

And so when we think of these two commandments, we often think, well, I have never carved a wooden idol and bowed down to it, but it means so very much more than that.

And the Westminster Larger Catechism is helpful to us in this way. They did a very careful work to summarize all of the scripture's teaching that feeds into and out of these commandments.

So I'm just going to read some of it to you until I feel like I've read too much and then I'll stop to give you some idea of what the scripture says about these commandments.

This particularly about the first commandment. Question 104, what are the duties required in the first commandment? And the answer, the duties required in the first commandment are the knowing and acknowledging of God to be the only true God and our God and to worship and glorify him accordingly by thinking, meditating, remembering, highly esteeming, honoring, adoring, choosing, loving, desiring, fearing of him, believing him, trusting, hoping, delighting, rejoicing in him, being zealous for him, calling upon him, giving all praises and thanks, and yielding all obedience and submission to him with the whole man, being careful in all things to please him and sorrowful when in anything he is offended and walking humbly with him.

[24:23] This is the summary of what the scripture teaches about what it means to obey, but then question 105, what are the sins forbidden in the first commandment?

Here's where I'll stop short because it goes on and on. The answer, the sins forbidden in the first commandment are atheism, in denying or not having a God, idolatry, in having or worshiping more gods than one, or any with or instead of the true God, the not having and avouching him for God and our God, the omission or neglect of anything due to him required in this commandment, ignorance, forgetfulness, misapprehensions, false opinions, unworthy and wicked thoughts of him, bold and curious, searching into his secrets, all profaneness, hatred of God, self-love, self-seeking, and all other inordinate and immoderate setting our mind, will, affections upon other things and taking them off from him in whole or in part, vain credulity, unbelief, heresy, misbelief, distrust, despair, incorrigibleness, and insensibleness under judgment, hardness of heart, pride, presumption, and it goes on for about another paragraph, listing off those things forbidden in that very first commandment.

The reason I read all of that, you think, why in the world, right, is that I think we find all of us breaking this command, just the very first one about how we think, and therefore how we act toward our God.

Secondly, we see the preface found in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 2 with a small but very significant addition, and this is in verse 10 of Psalm 81.

I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. This is found at the beginning of Exodus chapter 20 and verse 2. But then Psalm 81 says, open your mouth wide and I will fill it.

[26:37] John Calvin speaks to this in his commentary on Psalm 81. He writes, he not only bids them open their mouth, but he magnifies the abundance of his grace still more highly by intimating that however enlarged our desires may be, there will be nothing wanting which is necessary to afford us full satisfaction.

So, our God, this God that we are being called to listen to and to know, says to us, open your mouth wide and I will give you full satisfaction.

Now, if we have a good and proper view of the scripture, we'll understand that we'll have full satisfaction in him. So, I wonder on this day if you will heed this call to remember and to be satisfied.

Lastly, in verses 11 through 16, we see a call to repentance. First, we see a description of their sin in verse 11.

But my people did not listen to my voice. Israel would not submit to me. Beloved, we are often guilty of the same.

[27:56] We have an abundance of access to our God by his holy word and yet we often do not even take it up and read it. And when we do, we often do not heed its warnings or follow its commands.

We seem so very rolled to sleep by the reality we have a God who has spoken to us and we have it everywhere and I just think we take it for granted rather than recognizing this is a precious word from a God who loves us, who seeks our good, who wants us to understand who he is and how he's acted toward us in Christ so that our lives would be changed by that both for us, for our good, our deep joy and satisfaction, our peace in him but also for his glory, that others would see that we have a God worthy of worship and I wonder if part of the problem of our day, why we don't see more people coming to faith in Christ, is that they just don't see any need for it because they don't see us having any hope that is greater than theirs and beloved this should just not be so right, we should

be a people who are never guilty of this but I think very often we are.

Remember verse 8, hear oh my people while I admonish you, I strongly warn you, oh Israel, if you would but listen to me.

And then we see the verdict. Beloved, we should absolutely shudder when we read these words and we should want with every bit of our energy to avoid this consequence found in verse 12.

So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own counsels. For God to say, find them, go your own way, is the most horrible of punishments.

[30:12] If you understand anything about yourself, you'll know that your way is the worst way. My way is the worst way.

Many of us live as though this is not the case. We think our way is the best way rather than God's way. God, in his loving kindness for you, will say, find them, go your own way in order to teach you the error of your way.

He'll say, yeah, follow that path and just see where it takes you. When you find this to be true of you, the call of Psalm 81 is to repent because God is eager to forgive.

He's standing at the end of that road that you want to go down, that you think is the right way, and he is so very willing to forgive, to put you back on the proper path.

Listen to verse 13 and 14, God longs to forgive the repentant sinner.

[31:31] I am reminded here of Jesus' words concerning Jerusalem in Matthew chapter 23 and verse 37, where he said, Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it, how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing.

Notice the heart of Jesus there. He wants to gather them, but they're unwilling to be gathered. You may be thinking this morning, if I repent, can I really expect God to forgive me?

Even me, considering all that I have done? And the answer is an unequivocal yes. It's yes. God is abounding in mercy, and he's ready to grant it.

We should listen to his word and what his word has to say about repentance, right? Note the warnings of God, but moreover, note his great kindness towards those who will repent.

Turn and repent. This is available to all of us this morning, but we must repent. Verse 15 shows us this, that those who hate the Lord would cringe toward him and their fate would last forever.

[33:05] Don't be those people. Be a person who recognizes that you've not heeded the word of God. Repent of that, that he would forgive you, draw you back into his way.

This is the most wonderful way in which we can go. And so I wonder on this day if you will heed this call to repent.

We've been given three calls, a call to rejoice, a call to remember, and a call to repent. And so I want to close with verse 16, and I just want you to notice the abundance of the blessing, not just a blessing, but an abundant blessing from an abundantly loving, gracious, merciful God.

but he would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock, I would satisfy you. Will you be satisfied in God this morning?