The Wisdom Psalms

Who is the righteous one? “***Who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?”*** (Ps.15: 1-2) The wisdom psalms reveal God’s way of right living for God’s people. They lay out the ways to flourish, to walk in God’s ways. So we need to come to grips with these psalms for our own spiritual growth. And, as professional ministers of God’s word and way, we need to draw out this wisdom and be able to restate it clearly and with effect for the souls we serve. These psalms are an invaluable resource in instructing God’s people in holiness and right living. Who is the righteous one? Read on.

The wisdom psalms are distinct from the psalms of lament, of thanksgiving and of praise we have already considered in two ways: the focus is on their content, God’s holy way, not on their literary form. Nor are they a direct address to God, as the others are, but addressed to His people **as instruction**, in God’s holy way. Most would say that these are the wisdom psalms: psalms 1, 37, 49, 73, 112, 119, 127, and 128. We will consider a few of these here; you will profit from a prayerful and thoughtful reading of them all. They will assist you in your growth into a more holy and wise minister of the Lord.

The very first psalm in a wisdom psalm, “***Happy are those who do not follow the advise of the wicked….But their delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law they meditate day and night.”*** (Ps.1: 1-2) This is a beatitude, those who follow God’s way are happy, fortunate, blessed because they will flourish due to this choice. “***Not so the wicked, not so***.” The righteous will be fruitful, producing good fruit like trees planted beside streams of water. They are among those worthy to enter the temple to stand before God and be watched over by God. But the wicked will perish outside and be blown away like chaff. God is just and the world He created is ordered, and it includes the other realm of the kingdom. So our behavior determines our destiny and we need to prepare ourselves for worship, to “enter the temple,” and for the kingdom that is coming. Psalm 1 is the beginning of the lessons in wisdom. We can see here how the fear of God, which includes his mercy, is the beginning of wisdom.

Psalm 112 elaborates more specifically what constitutes God’s way of righteousness. How are we to act and assist others to act?

***They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright; they are gracious, merciful, and righteous. It is well with those who deal generously and lend, who conduct their affairs with justice. For the righteous will never be moved; they will be remembered forever. They are not afraid of evil tidings; their hearts are firm, secure in the Lord. They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor***. (Ps.112: 4-7, 9a)

Those who are loving toward others and trust in God will be rewarded in this life and their offspring also will flourish as you will see as you read on in this psalm.

But what about those righteous ones who do suffer, like Job, and like ourselves at times? Is God really just? The Psalms were complied after the return from the Babylonian captivity and the psalmists had seen many of the wicked who had flourished while the righteous were being oppressed. The psalmist who wrote psalm 73 had just this problem.

***For I was envious of the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked.***

***Is there knowledge in the Most High? All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, and am punished every morning.*** (Ps.73: 3,13-14

And then he did a smart thing in his misery and trial, take heed holy deacon, he went to

the temple and prayed! He went there to seek the answers that he needed.

***But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end.*** (Ps.73: 16-17)

In God’s presence, in prayer, he realizes that God is just and that the wicked will ultimately be destroyed. And the God who has accompanied him through his sufferings, and his doubts and questioning of God, and answered him, will ultimately receive him with honor.

***Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! They are like a dream when one wakes; on awaking you despise their phantoms.*** (Ps.73: 18-20)

In contrast:

***Nevertheless I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me with honor. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there in nothing on earth I desire other than you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever***  (Ps.73: 23-26)

The psalmist has come to believe firmly that God ***is*** just, despite superficial and transitory appearances.

Wisdom we receive from wise people. Have you known a wise person who has affected you? What wisdom has he, she or they imparted to you? How do you see yourself as possibly a wise person, a wise man, a wise old man, or a wise deacon? Other may see you as such even if you aren’t too sure. If someone asked you, “What must I do to live a life pleasing to God?” Your answer would be like one of these wisdom psalms. Try to answer that question, in preparation for that question to you, by writing a wisdom psalm.

By the way I’m still waiting to see the psalms of thanksgiving I know some of you have written. Share them with your brothers and sisters on deaconden to edify us and build up the church. Maybe your parish would also benefit from seeing your psalms in the parish bulletin!

I think this will be the last Psalms article. I can’t think of another theme to explore. But if someone sees something else to cover on the psalms, I will give it a try. Or, you could submit something to deaconden yourself.

I am going to look into some topics in diaconal spirituality to look into and write about for my own ongoing formation and growth and for whatever help they may be to you my brothers and sisters in ministry.