

We celebrated recently how the Lord reclaimed Asaph's faith when he was tempted to envy the wicked and give up his faith (Ps 73:2-14). It was when Asaph "went into the sanctuary" to worship God (Ps 73:16-17) that he rightly saw the violent end of the wicked and found the comfort available to him in the near presence of God – for, truly, it was the presence of God for which Asaph longed (Ps 73:23ff). This longing was fulfilled in God's coming to abide permanently as "God with us," through His Son born of a virgin. The *near presence of God* was the great hope of the Psalmist. This week, let's look at his confidence that God would remain true to His covenant. May every believer share such longing for fellowship with the Lord.

Mon/Tues: Read 1 Chronicles 16:34-36; Psalm 106:1 & 106:47-48
Confession and Praise

To understand Psalm 106, we ought not forget that it was originally composed as a song of praise for the settlement of the ark in Jerusalem. There it is used alongside two other Psalms as a song of praise. We see David quoting the first and the last portions of this Psalm in 1 Chr 16:34-36.

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!
Say also: "Save us, O God of our salvation,
and gather and deliver us from among the nations,
that we may give thanks to your holy name
and glory in your praise.
Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting!"

Psalm 106: 1 & 47-48

The note of joy at the beginning and at the end of Psalm 106 sums up the great celebration of joy that accompanied the return of the ark of the Lord to its resting place. But in between verse 1 and verses 47-48, Psalm 106 describes the darkest days of Israel's apostasy, how Israel rebelled against God. In one sense, therefore, this is a Psalm of confession of sin, but because of the Lord's ongoing compassion towards His people mired in sin, it becomes a Psalm of praise. How fitting for us to use it, then, to praise the Lord in the ups and downs of our lives! Charles Spurgeon writes of this Psalm:

This Psalm begins and ends with Hallelujah - "Praise ye the Lord." The space between these two verses of praise is filled with mournful details of Israel's sin, and the extraordinary patience of God; and truly we do well to bless the Lord both at the beginning and the end of our meditations when sin and grace are the themes ... While we are studying this Psalm, let us all along see ourselves in the Lord's ancient people, and bemoan our own provocations of the Most High, at the same time admiring His infinite patience, and adoring Him because of it.

Meditate and Pray: Father, our praise to you grows as we remember our own wanderings, sins and rebellion. May we find hope in your steadfast love.

Weds/Thurs: Read Psalm 104:1-5 & Psalm 106:4**God Moves In**

In our February 1 Bible notes, we saw that the Psalmist felt despair in acknowledging the suffering of the righteous and the comparative ease, wealth and defiance of God's authority on the part of the wicked. He wondered how the wicked could prosper in the world and increase in riches while the godly go about, "all day being plagued" (Psalm 73:12, 14 KJV). Compared to the heedless pleasure and success of the wicked, our own situation can feel disheartening.

Have you ever felt that God's will seems hidden in your life? Does the moral order in your world seem threatened? Does life seem to hold - instead of abundance - scarcity, sickness and death? Where then are we to find comfort and hope?

The answer is in the *domestic picture* of having a God who "moves into our neighborhood" (Psalm 104:1-3); One who promises in covenant grace to "visit" us (Psalm 106:4). Listen to these translations of Psalm 104:2-5 that shows God is willing to come to our aid by *residing* among us:

Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain:

Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind:

Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire:

Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever. (KJV)

And thou art clothed with light, as with a cloth. And thou stretchest forth heaven as a skin; (and thou art clothed with light, like with a cloak. And thou stretchest forth, *or spreadest out*, the heavens like a tent;)

and thou coverest with waters the higher parts thereof. Which settest a cloud thy ascending; which goest on the feathers of winds. (and thou layest the beams of thy chambers upon the waters. Thou who makest a cloud thy chariot; and who goest upon the wings of the wind.)

Which makest spirits thine angels; and thy ministers (a) burning fire. (Who makest the winds *to be* thy messengers; and flames of fire, *or flashes of lightning, to be* thy servants.)

Which hast founded the earth on his stableness; it shall not be bowed into the world of world.

(Who hast set the earth on its foundations; yea, it shall never be moved, *or shaken.*)

(Wycliffe Bible)

Meditate and Pray: Do you get the picture? (I speak reverently here): God is pictured as taking light to be His housecoat; the heavens are stretched to be His tent; He lays the foundations of His home in the earth's foundations; He hires the angels to be His house servants and even makes the beams above the heavenly waters to be the roof (or floor) of His upper-chamber! Creation becomes God's place in which to dwell among men. Sadly, of course, God left mankind in His sin for a time, until the coming of His Son.

But God's estates were still among us, and His Son moved back in to claim this world as part of His kingdom. God moved back into our world. No wonder the Psalmist has the confidence to pray that God would "visit him," (Psalm 106:4). He knows that God knows the way out of sin. Though a terrible history stains man's dwelling on earth, making the whole lower creation unclean with iniquity, God is able to build Himself a house and one day to fill that house with the deity of His Son – incarnate in human flesh. No wonder John the Apostle writes, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

Friday: Read Psalm 105:42-106:8**Accepting the Gift**

God's redemption of His people in Psalm 105, bringing them out of Egypt and providing for them as He led them through the wilderness, puts His people under obligation. Because God is now *their* God and Redeemer, they are bound to Him as their Lord. Psalm 105:45 emphasizes that God's redeemed are bound to keep God's law, not as a means of working their salvation with their own hands, but as an expression of gratitude to the God who has *already bought them*.

Sadly, as Psalm 106:13 recounts, Israel forgot their Redeemer and Savior-God, turning to the golden calf (Psalm 106:19) and then to the idols of the Canaanites, whom they were to destroy but did not (Psalm 106:34-36). The result was their utter defilement and the wrath of God poured out upon them (Psalm 106:39-40). Moreover, God gave them over to the surrounding nations and eventual captivity (Psalm 106:41-46).

Well, with this sad description of national apostasy we could be tempted to move on from this Psalm. Psalm 107, for example, speaks of the joyful days when God brought His people back from captivity after seventy years in Babylon. It is much easier to move to that Psalm of joy, but Psalm 106 is so realistically *close to our own experience* that we dare not dismiss it so quickly.

Meditate and Pray: Let us agree with Psalm 106:6 that we have “sinned with our fathers.” We cannot boast of a greater righteousness than past generations of Christ’s church. Our only hope, as theirs, is in the justifying blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. How does the Heidelberg Catechism put it?

Q & A 60: How are you righteous before God? **A.** Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments, of never having kept any of them, and of still being inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without any merit of my own, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, and as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is accept this gift with a believing heart.

Sat/Sun: Read Psalm 106:43-48**For His Name's Sake**

The pattern of Israel's sin is repeated so often in Scripture, and, sadly, so often in the experience of the church of Jesus Christ on earth. What then is God to do? Given that even the best of Israelite humanity fell so often and so far, is there hope for any other man?

Well, there is no security in human education or attainment. Paul speaks of the place of privilege which Israel occupied: “Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God” (Romans 3:1-2). Again he writes of Israel's great privileges from God: “They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen” (Romans 9:4-5)

But not even all these attainments could make up for Israel's refusal to trust in God's free grace: "Israel did not attain to God's righteousness. Why? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law" (Romans 9:31-32). Therefore, without faith in Jesus Christ, all Israel's other privileges would not avail to cleanse away Israel's sin.

If even the Jews fell from their position of favor with the Almighty, what hope is there for the rest of us if we place our trust in human effort? None. The only hope for rescue is that it is *for the glory of His Name* that He redeems, cleanses and saves sinners. This was how it was of old – "He saved them for His name's sake" (Psalm 106:8). This is the only hope which the Psalmist holds onto as He closes Psalm 106: 47. He asks God to save, and gather His people to Himself anew, so that they can, "give thanks unto His holy name."

Here then is our only confidence as we consider our history of sin in Psalm 106, and how we have failed, along with Israel, to live up to the demands of God's Law – (Psalm 105:45). It is to God's glory to save sinners by free grace. So, we can wait on the Lord for His redeeming arm to be laid bare in our lives. For we know that "with the Lord there is mercy and abundant redemption" (Psalm 130:7). Praise His Name.

Sing about this grace that perseveres patiently with us again and again.

Nevertheless, he looked upon their distress,
when he heard their cry.
For their sake he remembered his covenant,
and relented according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

Psalm 106:44-45

Meditate and Pray: Please, Lord, when we fall into grievous error and make regrettable mistakes, including sinning, have mercy on us. Remember your covenant mercies for they are from of old. Do not treat us as our sins deserve. Please remember that we are but dust. Restore us to yourself quickly after we sin; revive us for the glory of your Name alone. Then we will begin our lives with Psalm 106:1 – "hallelujah" (or "Praise the Lord") and end our lives with Psalm 106:48: "Praise the Lord" – no matter how many heartaches fill our lives in Psalm 106:6-43! Most of all, keep us from willful sins, let them not rule over us. In Jesus' Name, Amen."