

feeding . . . gathering . . . carrying . . . leading . (Isaiah 40:11)

February 12, 2013

Dearest family,



Well, we almoosooooooooost made it through the introduction – but not quite! I will complete it for sure next Sunday. That will give us a little more time than I was anticipating to do a better job on seeing the way that NT writers understood and interpreted Psalm 2, and the purposes they used it for when it came to pastoral application. This will be very helpful and applicable for us. (Take my word for it!)

Psalms 1 and 2 form a brilliant introductory unit to the rest of the Psalter. When we think of the psalms we think first of worship so both of these psalms seem a strange opening act. I don't think this is the kind of introduction we would have chosen. It feels at first like a bit of a downer on proceedings. Psalm 1 sounds more like the Proverbs and Psalm 2 sounds more like something severe out of an OT prophet. But these psalms are soberly reminding us that this is not about being happy-clappy. There are some serious choices we have to make before we continue our journey into the collection. I'm reminded of C.S. Lewis' observation that joy is a serious business! There's an interesting bit of internal biblical evidence about this unit. In early manuscripts Acts 13:33 quotes the "first psalm" when it in fact is quoting Ps. 2:7. This suggests that the two psalms were treated as a single introductory unit. (In modern translations it reads "second".) Taken together, they begin and end with a blessing. The internal connection is established by the fact that Psalm 2 begins using exactly the same word as Psalm 1 though in a very different context: the word translated "*meditate*" in 1:2 and the word translated "*plot*" in 2:1 are the same word.

- They describe the **righteous** and **unrighteous** versions of the same activity of mind, producing very different consequences.
- If Ps.1 is all about **receiving** God's word, Ps. 2 is all about **resisting** it.
- If Ps.1 is about truth, **verity**, then Ps. 2 is about emptiness, **vanity**.
- If Ps. 1 is about spiritual **delight**, Ps. 2 is about godless **disdain**.
- A life of holy **contentment** is contrasted with a life of unholy **contempt**. You could argue that the second psalm illustrates what psalm 1:1's "counsel of the ungodly" is all about.
- Both psalms contrast righteousness and wickedness: **personal** in the first, and **national** in the second.
- When you take them together as a unit the sequence is: blessedness...rebellion... rebellion...blessedness.
- They are both about someone special: **God's kin** – someone who so loves God's voice and makes his character his own; and someone who is **God's king**, the messiah no less – not just God's man but God-man.
- Both psalms are focused on how truth relates to real life. In Ps. 1 it is about how truth relates **to me in my present life**; in Ps.2 about how God's truth relates **to the world's future**.
- Both psalms have strong encouragements about how we can stand firm under pressure; and how we can stand secure at the place of judgment.

But over and above all this we cannot forget that this is a prayer manual that is being introduced,

and that foundations for prayer are embedded here in these two psalms.

- Psalm 1 teaches us that we need to understand the personal and private dimension of communion with God (“blessed be the man”, 1:1) and to know that prayer requires an understanding of the relationship between God and His Word, and our relationship with that Word.
- Psalm 2 teaches us that we need to understand the national and public dimensions of communion and relationship with God (“blessed are all”, 2:12) and to know that prayer requires an understanding of the relationship between God and His world, and our relationship with God’s world.

It was at the end of our time, when we were looking at v8 that this is emphasized. Asking becomes God’s essential and non-negotiable means for engagement with God’s purposes in the nations. The *personal meditation* that is encouraged in Psalm 1 is followed by an invitation to *public mission* in Psalm 2. In other words, God’s Word in us is for God’s world. The most common reason that many believers are not acting believers is because they are not asking ones.

Right at the beginning of the introduction to the Psalter is this massive invitation to ask, and to ask for huge things, for transformations that defy the imagination and challenge faith, given what is going on around us. Herewith is the agenda of faith. The call is to speak out in prayer what needs to be said and what cannot be silenced by the world’s mocking, raging and raucous unbelief. What is the strategy to take the nations? Asking is the strategy that overcomes. We *inquire*, and then find we *acquire* nations as our inheritance. Who’d ever have thought! And whoever would have thought that the meek (humble askers) would inherit the earth? Here is an invitation to boldness in a world that threatens us and would think it has the right to push us around and mock the choices of the congregation of the righteous.

Frankly, the tumult of the nations in the first stanza looks unchangeable, unstoppable, invincible, just as the drift of our national and global public life looks to us. What’s the use of hoping, of opposing, of praying about it? It’s too much, and it’s too late, so too bad. But wait! The asking son is installed, and he is invoking the father. He still is, as he ever lives to make intercession for us! And he invites us, his anointed ones, to join his asking of the Father. So asking is our public service. It is our national service. It is our secret service, as personal prayer is powerfully linked by the Spirit of God to the public domain of kings and rulers. Asking of God, in the private places (living rooms, sanctuaries), not of politics in the Senate chamber, remains still one of the greatest ways we influence the public square. It is those who meditate on the Word, whose hearts and minds are shaped by the thoughts and passions of God, who hear God speak when scripture speaks, who you will find in prayer meetings that are asking for God’s mission in the world. You rarely find someone who is passionate about the Word who is not passionate about asking. Word-less people are prayer-less people. If someone you love is concerned about something, don’t you want to ask them about it and talk to them? I hope that the numbers in our meetings that call this church to asking-prayer are not reflective of a personally shallow life in the Word, and consequently, of a rootless life. Don’t forget our next all-church ASK GATHERING on March 2 that is focusing on asking for the nations, in particular ASK AFRICA. Did you know that Africa is now the #1 continent in the persecution of believers? Does that motivate us to ask for the church there, and for nations and governments? I sure do hope so.

Psalmodycally yours,
Stuart

<http://www.christourshepherd.org/pastlet.htm> (and follow links to download MP3 audio of sermon)