

SESSION 1

THEOLOGY THROUGH THE PSALMS

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Theology is expressed in worship. The psalms express this well as the 'hymn book' of the temple. The studies follow largely Gunkel's classification of the psalms taking the theme in each of the groups of psalms in turn. There are 3 studies outside this classification. They are,

- i. the covenant in psalms, and
- ii. transcendence and immanence (Ps. 113). Both take on themes not touched on by the other studies.
- iii. Trinitarian theology in the hymns of Wesley and Bingham fits well into the overall theme of theology in worship.

THE STUDIES

1. Introduction. The covenant in psalms. Psalms 50, 78, 89, 111, 105.
2. Communal and Individual Laments (theology of forgiveness and repentance). Ps. 13, 51, 80.
3. Psalms of thanksgiving (the response to grace). Ps. 30, 92, 116, 118, 138.
4. Royal psalms (Kingship). Ps. 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 101, 110, 132.
5. Transcendence and Immanence. Ps. 113.
6. Hymns I. Ps. 145-150.
7. Hymns II. Ps. 145-150.
8. Trinitarian Hymns (Wesley, Bingham).

THE STUDY OF THE PSALMS

The psalms are the hymns of the Jewish people. They are used in the temple worship and express the devotion of the people to their God. What is expressed in the Psalms covers the whole of the complexity of human life and gives us a great insight to our worship, devotion and conduct. The Psalms cover issues such as creation, Israel's history (her rise and fall), judgement, redemption, the coming Messiah, warnings and exhortation, the tragedy and aspiration of life culminating in praise and thanksgiving, and underlying all these themes is the eternal covenant of God. Our studies will emphasise the covenant as the basis of the petition and praise. Because of the vastness of the subject matter, there are many other important issues in Psalms that will not be covered here. A session is available to me at the Winter School to expand on the prayers in the Psalms.

In the past the 150 psalms used to be classified into the 5 books each ending with a doxology. Studies were conducted as to the date of each of the psalm and its author. These studies are useful, but what is of more importance is the 'situation in life' in which they were written. It was Gunkel, a theologian early in this century that pioneered this study. The study was based on Form Criticism, ie. a study of the forms. The psalms sprang from various situations in the life of God's people and if we can capture something of these situations, our appreciation of these psalms will be greatly enhanced.

Gunkel's study has identified 6 categories of psalms.

1. **HYMN.** This would have arisen from the context of corporate worship and celebrates the greatness and goodness of Yahweh. (Ps. 145 - 150)
2. **INDIVIDUAL SONG OF THANKSGIVING.** A worshipper, having experienced some deliverance, describes his former distress, his appeal to God, and God's response. He makes an act of thanksgiving which is usually accompanied by an offering. (Ps. 30, 92, 116, 118, 138)
3. **COMMUNAL LAMENT.** This relates to times of distress affecting the whole community, and would be used on days of fasting and penitence. The plight of the community is described, and God's past mercies are recalled, and He is implored to succour His people. (Ps. 44, 74, 79, 80, 83)
4. **INDIVIDUAL LAMENT.** This is distinguished from the communal laments by the use of the first person, and the acknowledgment that suffering is a punishment for sin. (Ps. 3, 5-8, 22, 31, 42-43, 51, 64, 69, 71, 120, 130, 140-143)
5. **ROYAL PSALMS.** This is concerned with an Israelite monarch in pre-exilic times. In recent decades, increasing attention has been devoted to these psalms as evidence for the important cultic functions which kings are held to have exercised in pre-exilic times. (Ps. 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 101, 110, 132)
6. **LESSER TYPES.**
 - i. Pilgrimage Songs (Ps. 84).
 - ii. Torah liturgies (Ps. 15).
 - iii. Wisdom poetry (Ps. 73).

TYPES OF PSALMS

Classifying the Psalms by Genre

Dennis Bratcher

<u>Lament Psalms</u>	
Community	12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 89*, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129
Individual	3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27*, 28, 31, 36*, 39, 40:12-17, 41, 42-43, 52*, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89*, 120, 139, 141, 142
<u>Specialized Lament Psalms</u>	
Penitential	6, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143
Imprecatory	35, 69, 88, 109, 137, 140
<u>Thanksgiving (Tolah) Psalms</u>	
Community	65*, 67*, 75, 107, 124, 136*
Individual	18, 21, 30, 32*, 34, 40:1-11, 66:13-20, 92, 108*, 116, 118, 138
<u>Specialized Thanksgiving (Tolah) Psalms</u>	
Salvation History	8*, 105-106, 135, 136
Songs of Trust	11, 16, 23, 27*, 62, 63, 91, 121, 125, 131
<u>Hymnic Psalms</u>	
<u>Hymn</u> and <u>Doxology</u>	8*, 19:1-6, 33, 66:1-12, 67*, 95, 100, 103, 104, 111, 113, 114, 117, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150
<u>Liturgical Psalms (for Public Worship)</u>	
Covenant Songs	50, 78, 81, 89*, 132
Royal/Enthronement	2, 18, 20, 21, 29, 45, 47, 72, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 101, 110, 144
Songs of Zion	46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122
Temple Liturgies	15, 24, 68*, 82, 115, 134
<u>Specialized Types</u>	
Wisdom Psalms	1*, 36*, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133
Poems of the Law	1*, 19:7-14, 119

*These Psalms are difficult to classify because they could fit into more than one group or are mixed types.

SESSION 2

THE COVENANT IN PSALMS

READING: Psalm 105:1-45 (God initiates and upholds His covenant.)
Psalm 111:1-10 (God's eternal covenant.)
Psalm 89:1-52 (God maintains His covenant in His mercy despite man's failure.)
Psalm 78:1-72 (God's faithfulness despite man's failure.)
Psalm 50:1-23 (Sacrifices and the covenant.)
Psalm 25:1-22 (Forgiveness in the covenant.)

HYMNS: Psalm 105 - Rejoice 105.
Psalm 89 - Rejoice 111 (Tune in Rejoice 529, St Peter).
Psalm 78 - Rejoice 621.
The Covenant.

The Covenant by David Maegraith Tune: Duke Street.

How God the Father of love must yearn
For the lost sheep of his flock to return
To the family and covenant of peace
The yoke of sin to be released

For His Son died to set the world free
Covenant love by the prophets foreseen
The goal of Fathers love from time eternal
The wedding feast of Christ and bride

Yes, all His children come far, far away
Turn from the darkness of death and decay
Come before the throne of Father God
To soul and heart, accept His love

Our Father who art in heaven above
Hear now your children of covenant love
The way, we know, has been made by your dear
Son
True unity in Triune love

Rejoice 105 (Psalm 105). Tune: Carol

O praise the Lord, His deeds make known, and call
upon His Name; O sing to Him, His praises sing, His
mighty works proclaim. Let hearts rejoice that seek the
Lord, His Holy Name adore; O seek Jehovah and His
strength, seek Him forevermore.

O children of God's covenant, who of His grace have
heard, forget not all His mighty deeds and judgments
of His Word. The Lord our God is God alone, all lands
His judgments know; His promise He remembers still,
while peoples come and go.

While yet our fathers were but few, mere strangers in
the land, He vowed that Canaan should be theirs, and
made His covenant stand, permitted none to do them
harm in all their pilgrim way; yes, for their sake were
kings reprov'd and filled with great dismay.

The lands and toil of wicked men He gave them to
possess, that they might keep His holy laws, His Holy
Name to bless. Let hearts rejoice that seek the Lord,
His Holy Name adore; O seek Jehovah and His
strength, seek Him forevermore.

Rejoice 621 (Psalm 78:4-7). Tune: Evangel.

Let children hear the mighty deeds which God achieved
of old, which in our younger years we saw and which
our fathers told. He tells us make His glories known,
the works of power and grace, that we convey His
greatness on to each succeeding race.

We tell them to our children too, and they in turn tell
theirs, and generations yet unborn must teach them to
their heirs; thus shall they learn, in God alone their
hope securely stands; that they may not forget His
works, but honour His commands.

The Psalms are much read and much loved by most people. However, much of our reading of the Psalms is cursory and often only at times when we need some comfort. The Psalms express the intense relationship between Israel and her God and this is reflected in the deep human emotions and experiences. Nothing is hidden from view as Israel appears before her covenantal God (eg. David's confession in Ps. 51). In the Psalms, Israel reflects on the deliverance from Egypt (Ps. 78, 80, 81, 105, 106, 114, 135, 136). The numerous references to the deliverance from Egypt underline the importance of the event in conceptualising the covenant relationship. *God did something for them because they are His people.* Without this covenantal relationship the Psalms become merely a book of solace and comfort for most people and the thrust of the relation

between God and His people would be missed. Indeed without an appreciation of this covenantal relationship the whole of the biblical account would not be meaningful.

The covenantal relationship is so intrinsic within the Psalms that we can almost derive our understanding of the covenant. In fact, Calvin commented, 'there is nothing wanting which relates to the knowledge of eternal salvation'.¹ The covenant relationship became so characteristic for Israel and her God that the Psalmists in worship and in wisdom teaching called Israel to remember God and His covenants. This is explicit in some passages, eg. Ps. 25:10,² but implicit in others. We shall see in the subsequent sessions that the latter is so in many of the psalms.

GOD INITIATES AND UPHOLDS HIS ETERNAL COVENANT

This is so because God in His unflinching love (*chesed*) is faithful to His covenant. He initiates His covenant. He chooses His people Israel. His covenant is an everlasting covenant (Ps. 105:8-10; 111:5, 9). Reference is made to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and this is to continue in perpetuity to all generations. The covenant is not a mere concept but a historical engagement with humanity where the steadfast love (*chesed*) of God is expressed. God is faithful to His covenant. It is part of His nature as the Triune God.

He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, 9 the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. 10 He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant: (Ps. 105:8-10)

He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever. (Ps. 111:5)

He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever - holy and awesome is his name. (Ps. 111:9)

God's love flows to those who are within His covenant. His people are called to keep the covenant. (Ps. 25:10; 103:17-18).

All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant. (Ps. 25:10)

But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children - 18 with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts. (Ps. 103:17-18)

It is easy to understand the clause, 'who keep his covenant' on a contractual basis as if God has made the covenant and then left us on our own to keep our part of the bargain. He promises to sustain us (Ps. 54:4, 100:3).

Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me. (Ps. 54:4)

Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. (Ps. 100:3)

It is not because of our faithfulness that we are the recipients of God's covenantal love. His covenant precedes all. God's covenantal relationship is part of His Triune nature. It is not that He created us and then put a covenant in place because of the Fall. No, the covenant precedes creation and humanity. If this is so, then humanity is not an equal partner within the covenant. As we will see later, the response is provided for within the covenant.

There is an intimacy in the relationship as He calls His people to participate in the covenant relationship (Ps. 25:14, 106:4-5).

The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them. (Ps. 25:14)

¹ Calvin, *Commentary*, p. xxxix.

² All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant. (Ps. 25:10)

Remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people, come to my aid when you save them, 5 that I may enjoy the prosperity of your chosen ones, that I may share in the joy of your nation and join your inheritance in giving praise. (Ps. 106:4-5)

The covenantal relationship with God has to be understood on the basis of union as the covenantal relationship within the Godhead is a triunity. God is a covenantal God and the relation within the Godhead is covenantal. Our relationship with the Triune God is covenantal and so is our relationship with each other. Our prayers to, and worship of, God must need be covenantal as well.

In times of trouble the worshiper could call on God, claiming that they 'had not forgotten or been false to God's covenant' (44:17).

All this happened to us, though we had not forgotten you or been false to your covenant. (Ps. 44:17)

Israel could call upon God because they are His covenant people. There is a prior relationship.

THE COVENANT AND THE HUMAN RESPONSE

In worship the covenant people gathered to hear God's judgment (50:5, 7; compare 78:10, 37; Jer. 11:2-3). *Incorporated within the covenant is the judgement. The word of forgiveness is the word of judgement.*

(Psa 50:5 NIV) "Gather to me my consecrated ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice."
..... 7 "Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you: I am God, your God.

There is a strong word of judgment and rebuke to those who entered God's covenant with false intentions and results (50:16).

(Psa 50:16 NIV) But to the wicked, God says: "What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips?"

They also claimed God's covenant promises, asking deliverance from trouble by calling on God to "have regard for His covenant" (Ps. 74:20).

(Psa 74:20 NIV) Have regard for your covenant, because haunts of violence fill the dark places of the land.

However, Israel has not been faithful to God's covenant and has been wayward.

they did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law. (Ps. 78:10)

their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant. (Ps. 78:37)

Yet God maintains His covenant. He cannot deny Himself. This is despite the failure of humankind to respond appropriately.

You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, (Ps. 89:3)

I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. (Ps. 89:28)

I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered. (Ps. 89:34)

Yet Israel attempts to restore the relationship outside of the covenant, ie. on a contractual basis by making the prescribed offerings. That just does not work. (Ps. 50)

"Gather to me my consecrated ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice." (Ps. 50:5)

"Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you: I am God, your God. 8 I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, which are ever before me. 9 I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, 10 for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. 11 I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are

mine. 12 If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. 13 Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? 14 Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, 15 and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me." (Ps. 50:7-15)

Of course the prescribed offering by itself is meaningless and ineffective. It cannot stand alone outside of the relationship with God. Yet we must not think that what is prescribed can be done away with. It has meaning within the covenant. Thus Israel was called to 'sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me' (Ps. 50:14-15).

Factored into the covenant with His people is the provision for restoration. This is prescribed by the sacrificial system, not as an act complete in itself, but significant only within the relationship. This restoration is provided by God Himself and is not an action initiated by humankind. The response to the covenant is provided for within the covenant.

He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever - holy and awesome is his name. (Ps. 111:9)

O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love (*chesed*) and with him is full redemption. 8 He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins. (Ps. 130:7-8)

In the next session we will see how this covenantal relationship is expressed in the laments.

SESSION 3

COMMUNAL AND INDIVIDUAL LAMENTS

READING: Psalm 13 (Individual lament)
Psalm 51 (Individual lament - penitential)
Psalm 109 (Individual lament – imprecatory)
Psalm 80 (Communal lament)

HYMNS: Rejoice 396. God, be merciful to me (Ps. 51:1-15)
Rejoice 299 (Tune 307). Turn us again, O God of hosts, (Psalm 80)

Rejoice 299 (Psalm 80)

Turn us again, O God of hosts, And in Your love and grace, Lord, make Your face to shine on us And so we shall be safe.

O God of hosts, to You we call Return now, Lord, to us; Look down from heav'n, in love behold, And visit with Your grace.

This vineyard which Your own right hand Has planted us among; And that same branch, which for Yourself You have made to be strong.

O let Your hand be still upon The man of Your right hand, the son of man, whom for Yourself Lord, You made strong to stand.

So henceforth we will not go back, nor turn from You at all; renew our life again, O Lord and on Your Name we'll call.

Turn us again, Lord God of hosts, And in Your love and grace, Lord make Your face to shine on us And so we shall be safe.

Psalm 51:1-8 (Tune: Toplady)

1 God, be merciful to me, on Thy grace I rest my plea; in Thy vast abounding grace, my transgression all erase; 2 Wash me wholly from my sin; cleanse from ev'ry ill within.

3 For my sins before me rise, ever present to my eyes. 4 I have sinned 'gainst Thee alone, in Thy sight this evil done; that Thy judgement may be clear, and Thy sentence just appear.

5 Lo! Brought forth was I in sin; when conceived I was unclean. 6 Lo! Thou dost desire to find truth sincere within the mind and Thou wilt within my heart wisdom unto me impart.

7 Then with hyssop sprinkle me, and from sin I clean shall be. Wash me from its stain, and lo! I shall whiter be than snow. 8 Make me hear joy's cheering voice; make my broken bones rejoice.

The Complete Book of Psalms for Singing.

PREAMBLE

Much of our reading of the psalms and of scripture is based on our assumption and categories of thought. In other words, we read into the psalms our ideas of prayer, praise, confession and indeed of God. Now that will distort the original sense of the psalm and what we get out of our reading is a reinforcement of the ideas we have in our minds in the first place. Now that may be uplifting or not uplifting depending on how you adore your original ideas. What should happen is that the psalms or scripture alter our categories of thought and put us onto the plane of the psalmist. Only then can we appreciate these ancient writings.

The psalms need to be appreciated on the basis of the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and Israel. We have repeatedly pointed out that the understanding of covenant has been turned into a contract. We then use that contractual framework to work out all other areas of our theology. While we reject the contractual understanding, yet many areas of our theology are locked onto a contractual framework. The contractual framework is very deeply entrenched in our culture and theological framework. Our approach to prayer - our petition and praise - is mainly based on a contractual framework. I will try to show that this is so in this series of studies. Tonight we will deal

with one of those issues – that of repentance and forgiveness. Just before we will look at the lamentation in general. The penitential psalms are a subset of the lamentations.

LAMENTATION

Psalms of lamentation or complaint cry out for help in a situation of distress or frustration. The Psalmists protest their innocence or confess their sins. They vow to praise God and give thanks for deliverance. Such psalms show prayer as an honest communication with God in life's worst situations. The following psalms are laments: 3, 4, 6, 7, 12, 13, 17, 22, 25, 26, 28, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42-43, 44, 51, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59,60, 61, 63, 64, 69, 70, 71, 74, 77, 79, 80, 83, 85, 86, 88, 90, 94, 102, 109, 123, 126, 130, 134, 137, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144. (Holman Bible Dictionary)

Communal lament relates to times of distress affecting the whole community, and would be used on days of fasting and penitence. The plight of the community is described, and God's past mercies are recalled, and He is implored to succour His people. (Ps. 44, 74, 79, 80, 83)

Individual lament is distinguished from the communal laments by the use of the first person, and the acknowledgment that suffering is a punishment for sin. (Ps. 3, 5-8, 13, 22, 31, 42-43, 51, 64, 69, 71, 120, 130, 140-143)

INDIVIDUAL LAMENT (PSALM 13)

1. The complaint (v. 1-2)
2. The petition (v. 3-4)
3. The vow to praise (v. 5-6)

PENITENTIAL PSALMS

These psalms are a special form of lament where the individual repents of personal sins before God. Psalm 51 is a well-known one. It is a penitential lament. The psalmist prays for mercy, humbly confessing and lamenting his sins. It is a psalm of David when the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba. This is told in 2 Samuel 11-12.

IMPRECATORY PSALM

These psalms present a problem for most people. We have been inculturated not to have bad thoughts of others and not even for our enemies. We are taught to love our enemies. Yet these thoughts of vengeance are recorded for us by the psalmist and expressed very strongly. eg. Ps. 109

However, the psalmist at no stage turn these thoughts into action. His thoughts of vengeance turn into praise of the Lord who stands by his side (Ps. 109:30-31)

COMMUNAL LAMENT (PSALM 80)

1. The address and introductory petition (v. 1-3)
2. The lament or complaint (v. 4-7)
3. Review of God's past saving acts (v. 8-11)
4. The petition (v. 12-17)
5. The vow to praise (v. 18-19)

	INDIVIDUAL LAMENT	COMMUNAL LAMENT
	PSALM 13	PSALM 80
ADDRESS/ PETITION	1 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? 2 How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?	1 Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth 2 before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might; come and save us. 3 Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.
PETITION	3 Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; 4 my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.	4 O LORD God Almighty, how long will your anger smolder against the prayers of your people? 5 You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have made them drink tears by the bowlful. 6 You have made us a source of contention to our neighbors, and our enemies mock us. 7 Restore us, O God Almighty; <u>make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.</u>
GOD'S PAST SAVING ACTS		8 You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. 9 You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. 10 The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. 11 It sent out its boughs to the Sea, its shoots as far as the River.
WHY?		12 Why have you broken down its walls so that all who pass by pick its grapes? 13 Boars from the forest ravage it and the creatures of the field feed on it.
VOW TO PRAISE	5 But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. 6 I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me.	14 Return to us, O God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine, 15 the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself. 16 Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire; at your rebuke your people perish. 17 Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself.
		18 Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name. 19 Restore us, O LORD God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.

Chart 1. The Structure of the Laments.

According to Westermann, he sees the laments as praise. The laments are included within the praise as they acknowledge the dependence on the covenant God. They are special types of praise.

PSALM 51 (A PENTENTIAL PSALM)

(Theology of forgiveness and repentance)

DAVID'S REPENTANCE

51:1 Have mercy. on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. 4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. 5 Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. 6 You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

This prayer is not a begging for mercy in a legal situation. David prayed for mercy 'according to God's steadfast love' (*chesed*). This 'steadfast love' is the love that flows from a covenantal relationship. There is a covenantal relationship with David as we saw in our study last week. In David's prayer he acknowledged the presence of God and who He is.

LEGAL OR EVANGELICAL REPENTANCE

The psalms of lament are an important part of the worship of the Jewish people. We often think of lament as our repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This is nowhere brought out in the psalms. The basis behind the lament is the covenantal relationship the people have with their God. There is a prior relationship and that relationship is implied in these verses.

11 Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. 14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

The words, 'restore' (v. 12) and 'return' (v. 13) imply that there is a pre-existent relationship. That relationship was not annulled, but breached because of sin. Furthermore, the possessive pronouns in 'your presence' (v. 11) and 'God of my salvation' (v. 14) denotes something personal in the relationship. These words and phrases only make sense when they are read with the covenantal background.

Calvin sets out two types of repentance which he termed legal and evangelical. By legal repentance he refers to,

'that by which the sinner, stung with a sense of his sin, and overwhelmed with fear of the divine anger, remains in that state of perturbation, unable to escape from it. The other they term Evangelical repentance; or that by which the sinner, though grievously downcast in himself, yet looks up and sees in Christ the cure of his wound, the solace of his terror; the haven of rest from his misery.'³

In other words, legal repentance is forensic and devoid of any relationship between the two parties. Whereas, evangelical repentance implies a pre-existing relationship between the two parties and in the context of the scriptures, that is spelt out in the covenant that God made with His people, a covenant that is unilateral and sustained by His grace and power. In fact this covenantal relationship between God and His people is pivotal in our understanding of scriptures and God's dealing with His people. Without the covenant as the background, then we are back to a forensic and legalistic understanding.

FORGIVENESS PRECEDES REPENTANCE

One of the essential questions that needs to be answered is whether forgiveness precedes repentance or does repentance precede forgiveness? There are of course two other possibilities in the consideration and that is, repentance without forgiveness and forgiveness without the need of repentance. The former is sheer legalism while the latter is a form of liberal Christianity. Within evangelical Christianity, I suspect that most would hold the view of repentance before forgiveness. The biblical understanding and the understanding from the standpoint of the covenant is that of forgiveness before repentance. This is brought out well in the parable of the prodigal son told by Jesus. It is not just a point of technicality, but the very basis on which we think about God. We will consider the question as David expressed in this psalm.

51:1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your **steadfast love**; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

David's prayer for forgiveness has its basis in the steadfast love of God. 'Steadfast love' expresses the covenant relationship between God and David - the Davidic covenant.

(2 Sam 23:5 NIV) "Is not my house right with God? Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part? Will he not bring to fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire?"

(2 Chr 13:5 NIV) Don't you know that the LORD, the God of Israel, has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a covenant of salt?

³ Calvin's Institutes, III.iii.4.

God's covenant is everlasting and not annulled by the misdeeds of His people. There may be times of estrangement and discipline, but God will not abandon the covenant relationship with His people.

(Prov 2:17 NIV) who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God.

(1 Ki 11:12 NIV) Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. 13 Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen."

Today, we have lost the sense of covenantal relationship. With the first sign of difficulty we consider separation. Rather, 'the first sign of contradiction in committed relationships is not the end but the beginning of covenant love.'⁴ In a relationship, sin does not destroy the covenant. There may be a breach in the relationship, but that can be restored. In a covenantal relationship, forgiveness is built into the relationship. In other words, forgiveness precedes repentance. Did Paul not write, 'While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:8)? In exasperation, Paul asked which came first, the promise or the law, to the Jews who took so much glory in their history.

So does repentance precedes forgiveness or does forgiveness precedes repentance? We have to argue the latter. Then what is the place of repentance? Repentance brings about the restoration of the relationship. Repentance does not bring forgiveness. Otherwise it is no longer mercy. Forgiveness is part of the deal in the covenant, so to speak.

THE RESTORATION

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. 9 Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. 13 Then I *will teach* transgressors your ways, and sinners *will return* to you. 14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue *will sing* aloud of your deliverance. 15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth *will declare* your praise.⁵

The restoration is the work of the Lord. Note the verbs in the active voice in the passage above. The subject is God Himself. He restores because He forgives. He forgives because there is a prior covenantal relationship which He initiated and which He alone upholds. God does not declare His forgiveness and leave us to our own devices. This is because He initiates and upholds the covenant.

THE PLACE OF SACRIFICE

Sacrifice does not take away sins. Sacrifice in itself cannot effect forgiveness as Hebrews tells us.

Heb. 10:3 But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, 4 because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

David realised this as he said in his prayer.

16 For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. 17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. 18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, 19 then you will delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

There is a place for sacrifice. Just as repentance does not precede forgiveness, so sacrifice does not precede forgiveness. However, there is a place for sacrifice. It signifies the forgiveness that is effected and the relationship restored. In other word, the sacrifice points beyond itself to what God

⁴ R Anderson and D Guernsey, *On Being Family*, p. 45.

⁵ Bold type highlight what God did and the italics indicate the response.

has done. Sacrifice only has a place when a right relationship has been restored. It does not bring about the right relationship.

THE VOW TO PRAISE

14 **Deliver** me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue *will sing* aloud of your deliverance. 15 O Lord, **open** my lips, and my mouth *will declare* your praise.

‘I will praise’ marks the end of the lament. This is important to note. It speaks of the hope and the confidence in a covenantal God who will hear and bring about a change in the person and the circumstances. As in all psalms of lament, they close with a vow to praise and this forms the introduction in the psalms of declarative praise.

SESSION 4

PSALMS OF THANKSGIVING (DECLARATIVE PRAISE)

(The response to grace, Ps. 30, 92, 116, 118, 138)

READINGS: Psalm 30, 92, 116

HYMNS: Psalm 30, 116 (The Complete Book of Psalms for Singing)
Psalm 92 (The Psalter in Metre)

Psalm 30 (Angels' Story 76.76D)

1 O LORD, I'll sing your praises,
for you have lifted me,
my foes you have allowed not
to glory over me.
2 O LORD, my God, I pleaded:
and you gave me good health;
3 you saved me from the grave, LORD;
restored me, kept from death.

4 You saints, sing out GOD's praises,
and praise his holy name.
5 His wrath lasts but a moment,
his favour for all time;
For though the cry of weeping
may last throughout the night;
there comes a shout of gladness
when dawns the morning light.

6 In prosperous days I boasted,
"Unmoved I shall remain."
7 Yet, LORD, by your own favour
my mountain you maintain.
So when you face was hidden
I soon was troubled sore.
8 I cried to you for help, LORD;
the LORD I did implore:

9 "What can my blood avail you
if to the pit I go
Will dust proclaim your praises,
your faithfulness it show?
10 O listen to my cry, LORD,
your strong love show to me;
O listen to my cry, LORD,
and now my helper be."

11 And now you've turned my sorrow
into a joyful dance;
you've freed me from my sackcloth,
put gladness in its place;
12 my total being praises,
I'll never silent be!
O LORD, my God, I'll thank you
through all eternity!

The Complete *Book of Psalms for Singing*, The
Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (1991)

Psalm 92 (St Peter)

To render thanks unto the Lord
it is a comely thing,
And to thy name, O thou most High,
due praise aloud to sing.

2 Thy loving-kindness to shew forth
when shines the morning light;
And to declare thy faithfulness
with pleasure ev'ry night,

3 On a ten-stringed instrument,
upon the psaltery,
And on the harp with solemn sound,
and grave sweet melody.

4 For thou, Lord, by thy mighty works
hast made my heart right glad;
And I will triumph in the works
which by thine hands were made.

5 How great, Lord, are thy works! each thought
of thine a deep it is:
A brutish man it knoweth not;
fools understand not this.

7 When those that lewd and wicked are
spring quickly up like grass,
And workers of iniquity
do flourish all apace;

It is that they for ever may
destroyed be and slain"
8 But thou, O Lord, art the most High,
for ever to remain.

9 For, lo, thine enemies, O Lord,
thine en'mies perish shall;
The workers of iniquity
shall be dispersed all.

10 But thou shalt, like unto the horn
of th' unicorn, exalt
My horn on high: thou with fresh oil
Anoint me also shalt.

11 Mine eyes shall also my desire
see on mine enemies;
Mine ears shall of the wicked hear
that do against me rise.

12 But like the palm-tree flourishing shall be the righteous one; He shall like to the cedar grow that is in Lebanon.

13 Those that within the house of God are planted by his grace, They shall grow up, and flourish all in our God's holy place.

14 And in old age, when others fade, they fruit still forth shall bring; They shall be fat, and full of sap, and aye be flourishing;

15 To shew that upright is the Lord he is a rock to me; And he from all unrighteousness is altogether free.

The Psalter in Metre (Henry Frowde, 1909)

Psalm 116 (Kilmarnock)

1 I love the LORD because he hears;
he listens to my prayer.

2 I, while I live, will call on him
who turned to me his ear.

3 The ropes of death encircled me,
the grave's noose held me fast;
and so I grappled with much pain,
encountered great distress.

4 Then on the name of GOD I called:
'O LORD, deliver me.'

5 The LORD is faithful and he's true,

and full of sympathy.

6 The LORD preserves the helpless ones; he saved when I was low. 7 O be at rest again, my soul, for GOD his goodness shows.

8 You've rescued me from death, from tears, from falling in the strife⁹ so I before the LORD will walk within the land of life.

10 I still had faith although I said: 'How sorely I am tried;' 11 and in my trouble I've confessed that all mankind has lied.

12 What should I render to the LORD for all his gifts bestowed? 13 Salvation's cup I will take up, the LORD's name thus to show.

14 Before his people I'll now pay my vows made to the LORD; 15 the death of his own saints is not a small thing to the LORD.

16 LORD, truly I your servant am; set free, I am your slave; 17 to you thank offerings I will bring; the LORD's name I'll proclaim.

18 Before his people now I'll pay my vows made to the LORD, 19 in GOD's courts at Jerusalem. O praise, O praise the LORD!

*The Complete Book of Psalms for Singing,
The Presbyterian Church of Eastern
Australia (1991)*

A Resume

There are a few points from last week that I need to clarify before moving on. Some may find that holding forgiveness as prior to repentance may be difficult. Let me illustrate with the relationship in marriage. If a marriage is founded on a covenantal relationship, then breaches in the relationship do not annul the covenant of marriage. There are often breaches in a marriage. However the covenantal relationship remains though there may have a few problems to work through. When one partner holds out the hand, the other receives it. Now the issues or the problems may or may not have been resolved, but the breach is made up. One acknowledges the other. Whether it be said or not, there is then a commitment to work through the problem. In this way, we see that the forgiveness of one another is part of the covenantal relationship and the forgiveness precedes the repentance. In our imperfect humanity, forgiveness has to a part of the relationship, otherwise any meaningful relationship would be impossible. It would then have to be contractual. God relates with us in covenant and that implies that forgiveness is built into the relationship. Our repentance does not bring about the forgiveness from God. It is the response to forgiveness. The psalmist made this clear in his lament.

INTRODUCTION

The psalms express praises to God. Even in the lament, it concludes with a vow to praise. Praise is the response of one who has seen the steadfast love of God, ie. the recipient of the goodness of God within the covenantal relationship. Expressing praise or thanks is not easy for most people.

Westermann pointed out that there is no word for 'to thank' in Hebrew. They do not think in terms of the sequence of request and thank you. Thanking is part of praise.⁵ There is only praise and thanking is included in it. In the modern age, thanking and praise have become two separate entities. This is in part due to the development of individualism when thanksgiving is offered apart from praise. It says that the individual is prior to the community. So when the psalmist prays, 'O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures for ever!' (Ps. 118:1), the modern person **understands it as, 'I thank thee, O God, that thou ...'** **Westermann continued,**

in the thanks of the Psalter God is always the subject, but in our thanks almost always 'I' or 'we' is the subject,⁶

THE LAMENT AND THE VOW OF PRAISE

In the laments we saw that the petition changes into the vow of praise. We have noted that there is something that happens in the prayer which causes the change. We have also noted that the petition is in response to the covenant of God in which God has promised to listen to those who call on Him (Ps. 51:14-15).

Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, 15 and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me." (Ps. 51:14-15)

Some have understood faith as belief in something that will happen here and now - a questioning or cerebral faith as we may call it. It is a faith that demands evidence, if one can still call that faith. They preach that God will do something here and now - 'watch for it and here it comes' kind of thing. They are unable to hold together the unity of word and deed. What is spoken will be accomplished. In the framework of time evidences are demanded before commitment or belief. The Hebrew faith holds together word and deed and is open to the future. They live in the present as if the future is fulfilled. They are able to bring the future into the present whereas a questioning faith is not able to do that. It is temporal and contractual. Therefore it asks questions like, 'Does God answer prayer?' That question does not exist in a covenantal relationship. God listening and answering prayers is one of the assumptions of the Hebrew faith because God has asked His people to call on Him in their time of need. This is because of His steadfast love. This whole understanding can only be covenantal as expressed in the hymn.

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home.

As Westermann has pointed out, 'They are no longer mere petition, but petition that has been heard. They are no longer mere lament, but lament that has been turned to praise.'⁷ And he puts it beautifully, 'The vow of praise is the link between petition and

⁵ C Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, p. 25.

⁶ Ibid. p. 30.

⁷ Ibid. p. 80.

praise. It closes the circle from petition to praise.⁸ In this way, the lament opens to the hope in the future. It does not stop and wait for the fulfilment. The pain and grief may still be present. It considers the petition to have been answered and lives in this assurance.

Calvin, in his Institutes, commented on this.

But if our sense is not able till after long expectation to perceive what the result of prayer is, or experience any benefit from it, still our faith will assure us of that which cannot be perceived by sense, viz., that we have obtained what was fit for us, the Lord having so often and so surely engaged to take an interest in all our troubles from the moment they have been deposited in his bosom. In this way we shall possess abundance in poverty, and comfort in affliction. (Calvin's Institutes, III,xx,52)

It is with this understanding that the laments conclude with the vow of praise. Now, in the psalms of praise, the vow of praise at the end of the laments has become the introduction in the psalms of declarative praise. The declarative praise is, as it were, the fulfilment of the vow to praise.⁹

PSALMS OF PRAISE

Here, we review the categories of psalms and see that they, including the laments, are all to be considered as psalms of praise (see below).

LAMENTS	Of the Individual Of the people	(Individual Lament)* (Communal Lament)
PRAISE	Declarative praise Descriptive praise -- Royal psalms	(Psalms of thanksgiving - individual) (Hymns) (Royal/Enthronement psalms)

(*Gunkel's classification included within brackets.)

In the declarative praise, as described as psalm of thanksgiving in Gunkel's classification, the psalmist praises God for His specific deed of deliverance and recounts or declares it in his praise. Descriptive praise (hymn) praises God for His actions and His being as a whole.

⁸ Ibid. p. 77

⁹ C Westermann, *The Psalms, Structure, Content and Message*, p. 72.

PSALMS OF DECLARATIVE PRAISE

Psalm 30	Psalm 116
<p>1 I will exalt you, O LORD, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me. 2 O LORD my God, I called to you for help and you healed me. 3 O LORD, you brought me up from the grave ; you spared me from going down into the pit. 4 Sing to the LORD, you saints of his; praise his holy name. 5 For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning. 6 When I felt secure, I said, " I will never be shaken." 7 O LORD, when you favored me, you made my mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed. 8 To you, O LORD, I called; to the Lord I cried for mercy: 9 "What gain is there in my destruction, in my going down into the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness? 10 Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me; O LORD, be my help." 11 You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, 12 that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever.</p>	<p>1 I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. 2 Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live, 3 The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow. 4 Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, save me!" 5 The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. 6 The LORD protects the simplehearted; when I was in great need, he saved me. 7 Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you. 8 For you, O LORD, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, 9 that I may walk before the LORD in the land of the living. 10 I believed; therefore I said, " I am greatly afflicted." 11 And in my dismay I said, "All men are liars." 12 How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? 13 I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. 14 I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people. 15 Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. 16 O LORD, truly I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant ; you have freed me from my chains. 17 I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the LORD. 18 I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people, 19 in the courts of the house of the LORD - in our midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD.</p>

The psalms of declarative praise have a simple structure. Each one begins with the vow of praise taking up where the lament has left off. It then goes on with the ground of praise which is the deliverance of the Lord. This is the main body of the praise where the psalmist confesses to the goodness and mercy of the Lord in recalling the past. It then concludes with a renewed vow of praise.

There may be variations in the various psalms from the above structure, but the overall format remains the same. The heart that is rejoicing will not be confined to a rigid framework of praise.

	Psalm 30	Psalm 116
The vow of praise	I will exalt you, O LORD, (1 a)	I love the LORD (1 a)
The ground of praise	For you lifted me out of the depths (1 b-5)	for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy (1 b)
Recalling the past and the goodness of God	When I felt secure ... (6) When you favored me ... (7) When you hid your face (7) You turned my wailing into dancing; You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with Joy (11)	The cords of death entangled me (3-5) when I was in great need, he saved me (6) For you , O LORD, have delivered soul from death....(8) you have freed me from my chains (16)
Renewed vow of praise	That my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever. (12)	How can I repay the LORD ? (12) I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. (13) I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the LORD. 17

The Structure of the Declarative Psalm of Praise

The psalm of declarative praise continues where the vow of praise finishes.

It recounts the deliverance as a confession of the work of the Lord. It does not describe the act of deliverance but confesses that it has happened. The confession is mingled with praise. It testifies to what God has done for him.

Ps. 116:13, 17 combine both sacrament (cup and sacrifice) and word in the praise.

LAMENT AS PRAISE

We have mentioned above that the laments should be considered as praise. The comparison between lament and praise shows the close similarity.

	Psalm 13 Lament	Psalm 30 Declarative raise
Vow of praise	5 But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. 6 I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me.	1 I will exalt you, O LORD, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me.
Petition (Lament)	3 Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; 4 my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and m foes will rejoice when I fall.	2 O LORD my God, I called to you for help and you healed me. 3 O LORD, you brought me up from the grave ; you spared me from going down into the it.
Recall Praise		

Comparison between the lament and declarative praise.

THE RENEWED VOW OF PRAISE

The declarative praise makes mention of the deliverance (v. 1-3). It recounts the goodness of the Lord. It concludes again in a vow of praise. But this vow of praise is somewhat different from the vow of praise at the end of the lament. The praise as a result of the deliverance does not just end there as if that the thank you has been said and it is then finished. It continues, '... I will give you thanks forever.' (Ps. 30:12). Having experienced the deliverance by God and His steadfast love, the soul cannot be silenced. God's steadfast love is not limited to the one event of deliverance. The psalmist does not wait for the next dip in his lives to offer the next praise. God steadfast love encompasses the whole of our lives and all our days. So, the praise goes on and on, and is continually expressed. It continues through the generations (Ps. 79:13).

Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise. (Ps. 79:13)

The recounting of the deliverance is not done for its own sake or for the self, but it evokes the praise of God. This recounting of the deliverance of God in praise forms a bridge between two points in time, the past and the present.¹⁰ 'The life which was restored by deliverance out of *sheol* find its meaning in praise.'¹¹ The conclusion of the declarative praise points in the direction of the descriptive praise.¹²

¹⁰ C westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, p. 225

¹¹ Ibid. p. 110.

¹² Ibid. p. 80.

SESSION 5

HYMNS (PSALMS OF DESCRIPTIVE PRAISE) I

TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMANENCE - PSALM 113

READING: Psalm 113

HYMNS: Song 206 (Songs of the Kingdom)
Hymn 18 (NCHB 1)
Psalm 113 (Monkland 77.77. *The Complete Book of Psalms for Singing*)

1 Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!
You .GOD'S servants, praise accord.
2 Blessed be the LORD'S great name;
evermore his praise proclaim.
3 GOD'S great name is to be blest,
from sun's rising to the west.
4 O'er all nations GOD is high;
yes, his glory crowns the sky.
5 Who is like the LORD our God,
like the One enthroned on high,
6 he who condescends to know

things in heav'n and earth below?

7 He the lowly makes to rise from the dust in
which he lies, 8 that exalted he may stand with the
princes of the land.

9 He the childless woman takes and a joyful
mother makes; keeping house she finds reward.
Hallelujah! Praise the LORD.

The remaining sessions will be on the Psalms of descriptive praise (hymns in Gunkel's classification). Before we move on to them, we need to consider the theme of transcendence and immanence. Psalms 113 is a simple yet well-structured psalm (hymn). It belongs to the category of descriptive praise. The modern thinking is basically reductionist giving rise to sections of Christianity that hold solely to the transcendence of God while others emphasise the immanent nature of God. We need to hold the two aspects together and this is dealt with beautifully in the psalm. We have an Almighty God out there and He is also the seemingly weak and compassionate God in here. Holding one without the other gives an inadequate account of the reality of the Godhead. We need to hold His transcendence and immanence together as in a harmonious theological duet.

Psalm 113 is included in the 'Hallel' (Ps. 113-118). These psalms are recited during the Passover. Ps. 114 recounts the crossing of the Red Sea. The hymn that Jesus and His disciples sang (Matt. 26:30) at the Last Supper is probably one of these. Craigie's summary gives the historical context of this psalm.

With the passage of centuries, the psalm became more closely associated with the celebration of Passover. Indeed, in the modern Passover Haggadah, Psalm 113 is still recited in the context of the blessing of the cup of wine, prior to the participation in the Passover meal as such. And in Christianity, Psalm 113 was traditionally designated as one of the Proper Psalms for evening worship on Easter Day, thus linking the Christian use of the psalm to its more ancient Jewish antecedents. In both Judaism and Christianity, Psalm 113 was a special psalm, employed in the worship of God at those times in the liturgical calendar when praise par excellence should be addressed to the Almighty.¹³

¹³ Peter C. Craigie, "Psalm 113," *Interpretation* 39/1 (Jan. 1985), p. 70

THE TEXT

113:1 Praise the LORD. Praise, O servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD. 2 Let the name of the LORD be praised, both now and forevermore. 3 From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the LORD is to be praised. The LORD is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens. 5 Who is like the LORD our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, 6 who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth? 7 He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; 8 he seats them with princes, with the princes of their people. 9 He settles the barren woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Praise the LORD.

The psalm begins with the praise of the Lord and it leads straight off into a crescendo of praise in the first 3 verses. The call to the ‘servants of the Lord’ denotes the serving, worshipping community. To call on the name of the Lord is to evoke all that God is, His existence, character and reputation. It encompasses the totality of His attributes and actions. ‘Let the name of the Lord be praise’ emphasises the priority of praise. There is no other response that is more appropriate.

In verses 2-3 there is an inverse parallelism (‘now and forevermore’, ‘rising of the sun to the place where it sets’). God transcends both time and space. Note the progression in the thought of the transcendence of God (‘over the nations’, ‘above the heavens’). God transcends all that is earthly and heavenly. The prepositions, over and above, convey the idea of transcendence.

The watershed in the psalm is in v. 5 introduced with the rhetorical question. Of course the answer is ‘no one’. This gives the psalm its twofold division into transcendence and immanence. It then contrasts God’s transcendence with His immanence in v. 6 with the words, ‘stoop down’. Nothing in the whole of His creation escapes the sight and attention of the Creator. The lowly and the needy have His special regard. The description of God now changes from being to doing. We must read into this the covenant relation God has with His people.

There is a play of words by the psalmist to bring across the oneness of His transcendence and immanence, ie. it is the same Lord. The Lord who is *exalted* also lifts the needy. The same word is used in both instances.

4 The LORD is exalted (rwm) over all the nations, his glory above the heavens. 7 He raises the poor from the dust and lifts (rwm) the needy from the ash heap;

God’s dwelling (*sits*) enthroned on high also *seats* the lowly with princes.

5 Who is like the LORD our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, 8 he seats them with princes, with the princes of their people.

God is concerned with the poor and needy (v. 7) and the childless (v. 9). This is because God is rich in mercy and steadfast love. It is the transcendent God who enables His covenant people to transcend their distressing situations, ie. deliver them from their distress.

This compares similarly with Hannah’s prayer in 1 Sam. 2

Psalm 113:7, 8	1 Samuel 2:8
7 He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap;	8 He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
8 he seats them with princes, with the princes of their people.	he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor.

The conclusion does not end on a 'high' note, but with the forsaken of society. It is here that man's glory is contrasted with God's glory - a glory that is equally at home in the heavens and at the side of the lowly and forsaken.

9 He settles the barren woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Praise the LORD.

This is a majestic psalm (hymn). His grace and His grandeur are expressed in the unity of His person. Man cannot transcend himself to reach God. In covenant love, the transcendent God comes to man to establish once again the communion that should have been there.

This is a psalm of descriptive praise, the appropriate response from humankind who has been delivered. The response is the life of praise.

SESSION 6

HYMNS (PSALMS OF DESCRIPTIVE PRAISE) II

PSALMS 145-150

READING: Psalm 148, 145

HYMN: Psalm 148 (*Darwall's 148th, The Complete Book of Psalms for Singing*)
Psalm 145 (*Duke Street, The Complete Book of Psalms for Singing*)

THE PSALMS

145 An alphabetical psalm of David. This is a great outpouring of worship by David and his best.

146 The first of five Hallelujah psalms. An exhortation to trust in the Lord.

147 The God of Israel is set forth in His glory as caring for the sorrowing, the insignificant and the forgotten.

148 A call to all things in creation to praise the Lord - a cosmic choir.

149 A new song of praise.

150 The final curtain, but the praise goes on

These six psalms will be dealt with topically.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Praise does not come very naturally to most people. A child needs long years of conditioning in order to say thanks. Many of us thank the Lord, but only in so far as regards to what God has done for us in a personal way. Our praise is self-centered praise. We thank Him for passing exams, getting good jobs, material things, etc. That is good but not good enough. At other times when we thank the Lord, we give a long catalogue of the deeds that others have done. It becomes man's roll of honour in our thanksgiving. We need to move beyond thanksgiving to praise as the life we live is a life of praise. We praise God for who He is and what He has done, not only for us alone, but also for humanity as a whole.

There are two themes in these psalms that motivate us to praise.

1. God is creator and mighty.
2. He cares for His people.

This corresponds to the theme of transcendence and immanence. Power and might is often used to exert a pressure on others. It is often used to force or intimidate others, to bring them into line. That is not the right use of power. God uses His power to support, to lift up, to release and to comfort. He did not use His power to force us into conformity. He gives to a freedom. And in our freedom, we respond to land adoration. That is the praise that God wants from us.

We need to cultivate this sense of praise in our lives. It is hoped that looking at these psalms will help us in our praise of God.

WHO WILL PRAISE THE LORD?

- 'I' (corporate identity)
- 'From generation to generation' (145:4)
- 'All you have made - your saints' (145:10)
- 'Jerusalem -Zion' (147:12, 149:2)
- 'All creation' (148)
- 'Everything that has breath' (150:6)

WHEN DO WE PRAISE THE LORD?

- 'For ever and ever' (145:1, 2)
- 'Every day' (145:2)
- 'All my life' (146:2)
- 'As long as I live' (146:2)

HOW DO WE PRAISE THE LORD?

- 'Speak - meditate' (145:5)
- 'Tell - proclaim' (145:6)
- 'Celebrate - joyfully sing' (145:7)
- 'Sing - praise' (147:1)
- 'Sing - make music' (147:7)
- 'Praise - make music' (149:3)
- 'Rejoice - sing' (149:5)
- 'Praise Him with musical instruments' (150:3-5)

WHAT DO WE PRAISE THE LORD FOR?

- 'The name of the Lord' (145:1,2; 148:5,13; 149:3)
- 'His greatness' (145:3, 147:5, 150:2)
- 'His wonderful works' (145:5-6)
- 'His goodness and righteousness' (145:7)
- 'The glory of His kingdom - mighty acts' (145:11-13; 150:2)

WHY DO WE PRAISE THE LORD? (The grounds of our praise.)

- 'Great is the Lord and worthy to be praised' (145:3)
- 'The Lord is gracious and compassionate and loving' (145:8)
- 'His kingdom is everlasting' (145:13, 146:10)
- God providential care relieves human distress and affliction throughout the world (v. 13b-16, 146:6b-9),
- His loving care is demonstrated to those who are His (v. 17-20).
- God is creator (146:6)

1 You I'll exalt, my God and King, and I will ever praise your name. 2 I will extol you ev'ry day, and evermore your praise proclaim.

3 Great is the LORD, much to be praised; your greatness is beyond all thought. 4 From age to age your people tell of all the wonders you have wrought.

5 On your most glorious majesty, your saving deeds, my mind will dwell. 6 Your deeds will fill the earth with awe, and all your great deeds I will tell.

7 They'll celebrate your gen' rous love, and praise with joy your righteousness. 8 The LORD is gracious, merciful; he's slow to anger, rich in grace.

9 The LORD is good in all his ways; his creatures know his constant care. 10 All that you've made proclaims you, LORD; your faithful ones your praise declare.

11 Your kingdom's glory they'll recount, and of your royal might they'll tell, 12 so that all men may know your deeds, your kingdom's glories that excel.

13 Your kingdom lasts for ever more. through ages all it shall be known. * The LORD is faithful to his word; to all he's made his love is shown.

14 The LORD upholds all those who call; makes the bowed down securely stand. 15 All look to you, you give them food; 16 they're satisfied, fed by your hand.

17 The LORD is just in all his ways, and to his works he is most kind. 18 The LORD is near to all who call, who call in truth - his help they'll find.

19 Those fearing him he'll hear and help; he hears their cry and saves them then. 20 All loving him the LORD will guard; but he'll destroy all wicked men.

21 So with my mouth and lips I will speak out the praises of the LORD. His holy name let all things praise; forever let him be adored!

*13c,d are not in most Hebrew texts but are in some witnesses including the Dead Sea Scrolls.

This is a great hymn of praise by David. It was composed to stimulate the people to appreciate Yahweh's kingship. It is an acrostic psalm, ie. the structure is based upon the sequence of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet. A possible reason for this construction is that it is used for teaching purposes and made easier to remember. It is also the last of David's psalms in the book. It shows a careful construction of praise.

It has an alternating structure of calls to praise followed by the grounds for praise.

- I. vv. 1-2/3
- II. vv.4-7/8-9
- III. vv.10-12/13a
- IV. vv. 21/13b-20 (inversion of grounds and summons so that the last verse picks up the terminology of the first two).

	THE CALL TO PRAISE	THE GROUND FOR PRAISE
I.	I (v. 1)	The greatness of God (v. 3)
II.	One generation to another (v. 4)	The Lord is gracious and loving to all that He has created (v. 8-9)
III.	All God has made, in particular His saints (v. 10)	His kingdom is everlasting (v. 13a)
IV.	Every creature (v. 21)	a. God providential care relieves human distress and affliction throughout the world (v. 13b-16), b. His loving care is demonstrated to those who are His v. 17-20).

SESSION 7

HYMNS (PSALMS OF DESCRIPTIVE PRAISE) III

READING: Psalm 146, 147, 149, 150.

HYMN: Psalm 146 (8. 7 8.7. Stuttgart, The Complete *Book of Psalms* for Singing)
 Psalm 147 (St Peter, The Complete *Book of Psalms* for Singing)
 Psalm 149 (10.10.11.11. Hanover, The Complete *Book of Psalms* for Singing)
 Psalm 150 (Tyrolese, SKT)

A CALL TO PRAISE - PSALM 146

(TRUST GOD - THE CREATOR AND PROVIDER)

1 Praise the LORD! Sing hallelujah! O my soul, sing out GOD's praise. 2 While I live I'll praise Jehovah; praise my God through all my days.

3 Put no confidence in princes, nor on human help depend; 4 when he dies the dust shall claim him, and that day his plans shall end.

5 Happy is the one who chooses Jacob's God to be his aid. 6 He is blest whose hope of blessing on the LORD his God is stayed.

Heav'n and earth are his creation, seas, and all that they contain;

this is all the LORD's own doing, loyal love he will maintain.

7 He delivers from oppression, feeds the hungry in their plight. GOD leads pris'ners out to freedom; 8 GOD restores the blind their sight

GOD lifts up those bent with anguish; GOD loves all the righteous ones; 9 Yes, the LORD befriends the stranger; orphans, widows he sustains.

He upturns the wicked's pathway. 10 Evermore the LORD is King; your God, Zion, reigns for ever. Hallelujah to him sing!

The call to praise in this psalm is developed in terms of God's work in creation, history and His grace.

1. Call to praise (v. 1-2).
2. The ground for praise is the trust in God as creator. This is expressed negatively (v. 3-4) and positively (v. 5-6a), the latter in the form of a beatitude.
3. The thought is developed further in proclaiming the faithfulness of God which is expressed in His providential care (v. 6b-9).
4. The secret of His help is because the Lord is king (v. 10).

	THE CALL TO PRAISE	THE GROUND OF PRAISE
I.	'I will praise', 'I will sing' (v. 1-2)	Trust in God, our Creator. This is expressed negatively (v. 3-4) and positively (v. 5-6a). The faithfulness of God (v. 6b) is developed further to include His providential care (v. 7-9). This is so because God in Kin v. 10 .

A CALL TO PRAISE - PSALM 147

(THE CREATOR AND THE RESTORER)

1 O praise the LORD! How good it is psalms to our God to raise; how pleasant **lifting heart and** voice in fitting words of praise!

2 The LORD builds up Jerusalem, the exiles gathers home. 3 He heals the broken-hearted ones, and gently binds their wounds.

4 He counts the number of the stars, and calls them each by name. 5 Great is our Lord, his might is great, his wisdom is supreme.

6 The LORD sustains the humble ones, the wicked casts to earth. 7 Sing to the LORD and give him thanks. Praise God on strings with mirth.

8 The sky he covers with his clouds, gives earth its rain supply. he makes the grass on hills to sprout, 9 feeds herds, and birds that cry.

10 He does not joy, in horse's strength, nor in the strength of man,

11 but GOD joys in those fearing him, who trust his loyal love.

12 Extol the LORD, Jerusalem; O Zion, God confess! 13 He makes your city gates be strong, that he your sons might bless.

14 He in your borders grants his peace; for you fine wheat affords. 15 Yet to the earth sends his command; he swiftly speeds his word.

16 He spreads the snow as white as wool; spreads frost like ash on land; 17 like stones he hurls his hail down, and who his cold can stand?

18 Again he sends his mighty word, and they soon melt and go; he makes his wind to blow and soon the icy waters flow.

19 His word to Jacob he revealed; laws, rules, to Israel; 20 no other land he treated thus: O praise the God of grace!

In this psalm of praise, the thought of God as Creator and the One who keeps His covenant is further emphasised in the three sections of this psalm.

The two-fold call to praise starts as an implicit call and is developed explicitly in the next section. In the final section the call is specific to Jerusalem to be engaged in praise.

The ground of praise centres on the inter-relatedness of the greatness of the Creator and His faithfulness in coming to the aid of His people on the basis of the covenant He has made with them. The covenant with Jerusalem (symbolic of His people) and Israel is referred to as the ground of praise in the opening and closing of this chapter.

The greatness and power of God manifested is in His creation. God has not meant this power to be used in forcing His people into praise. Instead He gives them a freedom. It is out of this freedom that the response of praise is so pleasing to God (v. 1). The power of God is manifested also in His faithfulness and benevolence to His people. This theme, mentioned briefly in Ps. 145, is developed as the main theme in Ps. 146 and 147.

	THE CALL TO PRAISE	THE GROUND OF PRAISE
I.	'How good is it to sing praises to our God' an implicit call, v. 1	a. Creative greatness (v. 4b) b. Covenant aid v. 2-3, 5-6
II.	'Sing to the Lord' (v. 7)	a. Creative greatness (v. 8-9) b. Covenant aid v. 10-11
III.	'Extol the Lord, O Jerusalem' (v. 12)	a. Creative greatness (v. 15-18) b. Covenant aid (v. 13-14, 19-20).

A CALL TO PRAISE - PSALM 149

(AN ESCHATOLOGICAL HYMN)

1 Sing praise to the LORD, sing GOD a new song. Amid all his saints his praises prolong. 2 Let Isr'el rejoice in his Maker and sing; let all Zion's people rejoice in their King.

3 With timbrel and harp and joyful acclaim, with dancing and song give praise to his name. 4 For GOD in his people his pleasure will take, with robes of salvation adorning the meek.

5 Let saints now rejoice in honour restored. Let them on their beds sing praise in accord

6 May praise due to God from each mouth now be poured, and in their right hands may they hold a sharp sword.

7 Let them inflict wrath on all heathen lands. 8 Their kings bind with chains, their nobles with bonds⁹ the sentence that's written against them to fill. 10 This is the saints' glory. O praise the LORD still!

The psalm now takes us to the future when Yahweh will triumph over His enemies.

	THE CALL TO PRAISE	THE GROUND OF PRAISE
I.	'Let Israel rejoice' (v. 1-3). The theme of Creator and King is resented in the call to raise.	'The Lord takes delight in His people' (v. 4)
II.	'Let the saints rejoice' (v. 5-6)	The victory of Yahweh over evil on behalf of His people (v. 7-10)

THE CRESCENDO OF PRAISE -PSALM 150

1 O praise the LORD! O praise the LORD! In His sanctu'ry praise; O praise Him in His firmament! 2 Praise for His mighty deeds; Praise for His surpassing greatness! 3 Praise Him with trumpet sound. Praise Him also with lute and harp! O praise, O praise the LORD!

O praise the LORD! O praise the LORD!

In His sanctu'ry praise;

4 Praise Him with tambourine and dance; Praise Him with strings and pipe!

5 O praise Him with clanging cymbals; Praise Him with cymbals loud!

6 Let everything that breathes praise Him! O praise, O praise the LORD!
(SKT)

In this psalm, there are only calls to praise without the corresponding grounds for praise.

It opens and closes with a call to praise, in the heavenlies (v. 1) and all that has life (v. 6).

It gives the substance of praise (v. 2).

What constitutes adequate praise to the Lord. The psalm summons the orchestral instrument to supplement the voices of praise. As the soul responds in praise, so it is accompanied by the expression of the body - every aspect of the total person is engaged in praise.

Comment by Brueggemann:

This psalm, the final one, is the extreme case of inutility. It asks nothing. Indeed it almost claims nothing. It nearly says nothing. It is almost empty form, with a dozen or so summons to praise, mobilizing all of creation in praise, including the entire temple orchestra. The psalm is the culmination of glad self-abandonment in utter trust, so that all of life comes eagerly under this rule of Yahweh.'