

PSALM 125 SECURITY AND PEACE

This psalm is the Sixth of the songs of Ascents. Like Psalm 122 it focuses on Jerusalem and concludes with petition aimed at the establishment of peace. In this song Jerusalem, the destination of the pilgrim, becomes the symbol of God's presence and faithfulness to the pilgrim.

The Lord's protection for those who trust him (1-2)

You can imagine the pilgrims looking around at Mt Zion, an immovable rock surrounded by hills. In that picture they find their own story and the story God. Their own story is seen in the rock which is their stability founded on God.

Looking about surrounded by mountains they feel God's eternal protection for those who trust him (rely on, feel secure in). This is the first instance of the word for trust in the Songs of Ascents. The theme has been there of course in the other psalms but here it comes to explicit statement.

Relationship with God is the key to the Psalms. And this relationship is best described by trust. They trust God enough to live in a hostile world. They trust the Lord enough to undertake pilgrimage in a hostile world. Their trust in God is deeply personal, it is profoundly relational. Sometimes people read the OT as legalistic.

Jesus drew on psalms such as this.

Why did they want such protection? (3)

Verse three begins with the word "Surely". If we interpret it this way we see what the Psalmist is really worried about.

It appears that the wicked (those who reject the rule of God, who are not governed by God's word Ps1 or God's messiah Ps2) are truly in

control of the land. They wield authority and power and the poet is concerned that the righteous (those who live under God's word, accept God's rule and messiah) are tempted to follow their pattern of rebellion against God. The wicked are in control. The rule of the world is in the hands of those who oppose God's kingdom of peace and justice.

This reflects the time of the exile and return when the land is dominated by others. It was the situation for years to come.

The response; who rules? (4-5)

These verses accept the reality of the power of wickedness in the land, the rule of others with a very different set of agendas to the people of God. It appears the wicked rule. That is the political reality.

The psalmist knows that God reigns. So his prayer is that even in the midst of antagonism the people of God will experience God's goodness. And God's goodness is experienced in peace, that wholeness and integration life in love and justice and truthfulness. That is where peace is found in trust in the sovereign.

Those who throw in their lot with power structures of the world and sell their souls to them will find the company of the evildoers congenial.

Further reflections

It is important to read these psalms with the recognition that the majority of pilgrims who made their way to Jerusalem at this time were not the rich and the privileged. They were often the victim of oppression and injustices and they felt crushed and helpless (see Ps 120). That is the emotional and theological tone of this psalm. They have no power over the wicked.

The peace of God derived from service (Ps 123.2) under God's rule is no ordinary peace, a cessation of hostilities while the wicked regroup in order to assert their power once more. God's peace is greater than this (Phil 4.7). This peace is lived now in the midst of its opposite in the hope of its establishment. Like the NT the OT looks forward. These psalms do it all the time. The present contradicts the belief in God's peace. So the people of God live and proclaim the peace of God in the midst of a world where power is exercised for ends other than to glorify God.

Elie Wiesel the Jewish Holocaust writer addresses the ongoing opposition to the peace that God wills for the world:

“Though temporary in nature, war seems to last forever. In the service of death, it mocks living. It allows men to do things that in normal times they have no right to do: to indulge in cruelty. A collective as well as individual gratification of unconscious impulses, war may be too much a part of human behaviour to be eliminated-ever.”

In a novel I read the following: “War is better than Monday morning.” We find mundane things too boring. Living with each other in love, justice, truthfulness etc., is just too stupid for words.

Such evil has power to bewitch God's people. Instead of following the more excellent way of Christ we find ourselves seduced by power. We find it all through history. The miserable behaviour of all our denominations, the seduction of Christians under Hitler, our passiveness in the face of corruption, cruelty and abuse of children or the aged, we ignore.

Yet the psalmist's vision of trusting God in the midst of the madness of power, of living the life of peace in the midst of evil of destruction

of other human beings is a confrontation with God who abides forever. This is our God and we are to live in his rule. We have to take the courage to witness to this God. Security in God does not mean life has no risks in the confrontation with evil in our own lives and in our world. It is dangerous yet paradoxically we are secure.

Questions

Examine the way in which your life can be characterised as relying on and being secure in God. What difference does it make to live a life in this way?

What are some important 'holy places' in our lives? Why do they help us live of peace?