

## Sunday Scribbling's No.14 – 3<sup>rd</sup> after Trinity

Lectionary readings<sup>1</sup> for today are;

**Psalm 89: 1-4 & 15-18. Jeremiah 28: 5-9. Matthew 10:40-42. Romans 6:12-23**

In the book of Revelation, John writes to the seven churches in the province of Asia (known today as Turkey) to encourage them to keep on going despite struggling with all kinds of problems ... which sounds somewhat familiar to our situation today.

He speaks of grace and peace whilst reminding them that God is with them. Today, in our time of crisis, many of us might need reminding of God's love for us; of His grace and of His mercy.

In 1:4, John writes: **“Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”** Note how we are introduced to both the triune God and the workings of the Spirit. Seven, as you know, is regarded as a perfect biblical number and Isaiah 11:2 tells us what these are; <sup>2</sup>**“The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him; the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord.”**

As we tackle today's readings, bear John's teaching in mind.

### \*\*\*\*\* Psalm 89: 1-4 & 15-18 \*\*\*\*\*

The title of this psalm is **'A Contemplation of Ethan the Ezrahite'**. There are several men named **Ethan** in the Hebrew Scriptures, but this man is mentioned specifically in 1 Kings 4:31 as someone who was famous for his wisdom – yet surpassed by Solomon's greater wisdom. This means he was likely a contemporary of Solomon and was also alive during the reign of David.<sup>2</sup>

The psalm is split into two main parts. The first part (v1-37) is a reflection on the positive nature and glory of God. The second (v38-51), a lament that paints God as someone who has not only forgotten the house of David but who seems to have relented on His promises to His chosen people.

V52 ends the psalm with a quick; **“Praise be to the Lord forever! Amen and Amen.”** Almost as if the psalmist is offering a quick 'apology to God' for even daring to think and write his words of angst.

Dr. W. Robert Godfrey, a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow and both president emeritus and professor emeritus of church history at Westminster Seminary, California explains;

“The first words of the psalm in Hebrew, after the title, are “I will sing of the steadfast love of the Lord forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations” (v. 1). The psalm begins with the steadfast love and faithfulness of God, celebrating those key attributes of God. We are encouraged to remember and meditate on those characteristics. God is unfailingly steadfast in His love. “Steadfast love” is one word in Hebrew (*hesed*), and it is somewhat difficult to translate.

In the King James Version, it was usually rendered “lovingkindness” and is sometimes translated into Greek as “mercy.” I have liked to think of it as “covenant love.” Here it is paralleled with faithfulness. God is always loving and reliable. He does not change in His care and commitments. He is the same forever. Indeed, “forever” is one of the frequently repeated words in this psalm. Regardless of

how we may feel during our present crisis, God remains the same. God is always absolutely reliable, trustworthy, and unchanging.

These truths about God are not only eternal, but they are also displayed in history. God speaks in verse 3: "I have made a covenant with my chosen one." The ESV adds the words "You have said" so that we see clearly that God is speaking, not the psalmist. The psalmist quotes the words of God so that we remember the covenant that God sovereignly established with David and his offspring. This covenant, like the character of God, is forever and to all generations. So the psalm has opened with its great themes: the steadfast love and faithfulness of God and His covenant with David and his house."<sup>3</sup>

In v15-18 the psalmist goes on to praise God and acknowledge that it is God who has made Israel Holy. And that is something that we have to learn to do: <sup>15</sup>**"Blessed are those *who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence.*"**

"The privilege of worship has become particularly precious to us in these days as many of us are not able to gather with our congregations for worship. We are experiencing the pain expressed by the psalmist in Psalm 42 as he is deprived of worship. But as we wait for the restoration of public worship, we still can experience the light of God's face through the study of His Word and through prayer."<sup>3</sup>

So as we wait and wonder, remember "that everything said of Israel's king points in one way or another to Jesus as our King."<sup>3</sup>

In summary, take comfort from the fact that both the psalmist and John are singing from the same hymn sheet and saying to us all that God's covenantal love; His steadfast love; His never changing love; His always available love is with us all ... always. Virus or no virus.

\*\*\*\*\* **Jeremiah 28: 5-9** \*\*\*\*\*

In the fifth decade of exile in Babylon, the prophet Hananiah says to Jeremiah, the priests and the people; <sup>2</sup>**"This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. <sup>3</sup>Within two years I will bring back to this place all the articles of the Lord's house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon.'**"

That's a big call to make if you turn out to be a false prophet.

Despite Hananiah's claim, Jeremiah wishes him well with his prophesy before saying; <sup>7</sup>**"Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: <sup>8</sup>From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. <sup>9</sup>But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true."**

We could confuse ourselves here if we were to think that prophesying about war, disaster and plague was without penalty if we were wrong; but it reads as if prophesying about peace comes with a penalty if we are wrong. But that is not what this biblical message is about.

The real message is about the will of God. God caused the Israelites to go into slavery in Babylon because of their disobedience and failure to act as His chosen, covenantal, people. It was their

punishment, and their call to come back into line as God's chosen people. Their task was to rediscover their faith, show humility and follow God's lead until such time as God decided to restore them to their freedom and land.

Which leaves us asking ourselves; 'Where did Hananiah get the idea that he could outsmart God and get away with such a fanciful prophecy?'

The chapter finishes with the following words from Jeremiah; <sup>16</sup> **"Therefore this is what the Lord says: 'I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die, because you have preached rebellion against the Lord. <sup>17</sup> In the seventh month of that same year, Hananiah the prophet died."**

Now take a moment and think about the world in its current virus and debt ridden state. Is there a message for us here?

Then think of yourself ... as a disciple of Christ.

- Someone who is seeking The Truth.
- Someone who has accepted explicit standards to live by.
- Someone who, like the psalmist, is praising God on the one hand, and possibly lamenting your misfortune on the other.
- Someone who, like Hananiah, may not be seeing *the truth* that God is trying to show you and thereby not following God's wishes with humility and patience.

Truth!....

"What is truth?" retorted Pilate. (John 18:38)

\*\*\*\*\* **Matthew 10:40-42** \*\*\*\*\*

This week both our Matthew and Romans readings continue from where we left off last week.

You will recall that as Jesus prepared to send out the twelve on their Apostolic missions he tells them to take <sup>10</sup> **"no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff,"** and continues with; <sup>16</sup> **"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves."**

It's a wonder that there were any applicants for the role of 'disciple' even if you had been given **"authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness"**; and you possessed the necessary interpersonal skills of being; <sup>16</sup> **"as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."**

But they did;

... and there were millions of applicants for the position of disciple ...

... and there still are millions of applicants ...

... and you, as a Christian, have also been chosen to be a disciple of The Anointed one.

On the plus side we are told; <sup>40</sup> **"Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. <sup>41</sup> Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous**

**person will receive a righteous person's reward. <sup>42</sup> And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward."**

Which brings us to some really interesting, but difficult questions.

Now, I'm quite sure that we have all entered into contractual agreements where we thought we knew what the contract meant, only to discover at some later date that our inept and hasty interpretation came up a little short of the contractual truth.

With that in mind, what do you think a prophet's reward is?  
Or for that matter, a righteous persons reward?

Are they different? If so, how and why?  
That's an enigma for you to ponder over on a long prayerful walk.

Fortunately for us, we have a clue in v42 to help set us on the path to truth. Jesus tells us that if you give the slightest, most menial bit of love such as a cup of cold water to a new believer, or a fresher disciple for that matter, you are vicariously demonstrating and acting out God's love for that person.

Even though the cold water is God given and costs you nothing, you are doing exactly as Jesus teaches; <sup>40</sup>**"Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."**

Jesus is teaching his disciples, and thereby us, that we do not need money to make a difference. We need love.

Samuel Wells in his insightful book "A future that's bigger than the past" writes this; "The biggest act of charity disciples do isn't the way they give away their money, it's with whom they chose to be in a relationship."<sup>4</sup>

That's pretty close to exactly what Jesus was saying.

\*\*\*\*\* **Romans 6:12-23** \*\*\*\*\*

You will recall that last week Paul was explaining to us that more sin does not equal more forgiveness; <sup>1</sup>**"Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup>By no means! "**

In this week's reading Paul continues to explain what this means using language loaded with hortatory meaning as he attempts to answer this question: 'In what sense are Christians to consider themselves slaves who owe obedience?'<sup>5</sup> ... an interesting topic for current times!

Before we look at the text, we must remember that when Paul wrote this letter, slavery, in the true sense of the word, was commonplace amongst the Greeks, Romans and Jews. Indeed some people even sold themselves into slavery as this was the only means of paying off their debts and surviving.

So, in some ways, the Jewish laws could be admired as they did at least give the slaves some hope for a future and a few legal rights, including release after seven years as described in the ancient Abrahamic texts. It's not hard to imagine that some might even consider 'slavery' a better choice

than starvation, just as people do today when they choose poorly paid positions provided by the equivalent of modern day slavers.

If you could, you might ask Paul; “Me? Slave? Slave to what?” Righteousness would be his reply. The problem is this. As we have already been forgiven our sins, does a person who walks by the Spirit do so by himself, or does he do so because of what God’s precepts demand, and because the Spirit is pointing the way for him?’

In other words, are we, as believers, slaves of God?

Paul continues; <sup>16</sup>“Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?”

The key therefore seems to lie in the definition of ‘righteousness’.

Bible Study Tools explains that; “Jesus and The Spirit are and will be righteous because they are in a covenant relation with the living God, who is the God of all grace and mercy and who will bring to completion what he has begun in them by declaring them righteous for Christ's sake.”<sup>6</sup>

So if you want to be a disciple who benefits from God’s forgiveness and you choose to follow God’s precepts and The Spirit, can you be considered a slave even though you are “free”, albeit under the <sup>20</sup>“**control of righteousness?**”

Answers on a postcard please!

**Amen**

### **To finish, a short prayer.**

Lord Jesus, hear my prayer,  
Our Father, who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Help me to have the patience and humility of Jeremiah;  
Help me to understand that the pride and impatience of Hananiah are not the ways of God.  
Guide me in the ways of Jesus’ Gospel teachings,  
And help me to learn from the faith and understanding of Paul.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen

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1. All biblical passages from the NIV.
2. <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/psalm-89/>
3. <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/psalm-89-promise-struggle-and-reality-2020-04/>
4. Samuel Wells. 2019. ‘A Future that’s bigger than the past’ Canterbury Press. p98.
5. Fitzmyer, J. A., S. J. (2008). [\*Romans: a new translation with introduction and commentary\*](#) (Vol. 33, p. 444). New Haven; London: Yale University Press
6. <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/righteousness/>