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The Power of the Psalms – Col 3:16

Introduction – We are about to begin another series through a number of the Psalms; and again we will start here with an introductory message on the power of the Psalms. Charles Spurgeon's commentary on the Psalms is entitled, *"The Treasury of David,"* and like a discovered gold mine, there is much digging and discovering to be done. Far too many are satisfied with knowing Psalm 23 and a favorite snippet here and there in the rest of the Psalms. There is far more to be found.

How well you pray may be somewhat linked to how well you know the Psalms.

Athanasius said (paraphrased), *"Most of Scripture speak to us; the Psalms speak for us."*

Eugene Peterson comments that the Psalms are where Christians have always learned to pray – until this age.

John Goldingay writes, *"My own impression is that on the whole neither the Christian church nor Christian individuals have accepted the invitation to learn from the Psalter's teaching, though occasionally groups or individuals have recovered the enthusiasm of the Psalms praise, the witness of their thanksgiving, and the freedom of their protest."*

John Calvin called the Psalms, *"An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul"* and said, *"there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror....In a word, whatever may serve to encourage us when we are about to pray to God, is taught us in this book."* Finally, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, *"Whenever the Psalter is abandoned, an incomparable treasure vanishes from the Christian Church. With its recovery will come unsuspected power."* It is the power to revive both your own soul and the church of Jesus Christ as well.

Richly Dwelling (Col 3:16) – When Paul commands us to let the Word of God dwell in us richly, he has the singing of the Psalms in mind. Through singing the Psalms we are taught and we teach. The work of learning the Psalms, both in singing and in our study, is for our own personal benefit and for the benefit of the body of Christ. This is the power of the Psalms.

The Peace of God (vv15-17) – It may be that Paul is expanding on v15 with vv16-17 (note how both end in thankfulness). If so, dwelling on the Psalms is key to letting the peace of God rule in your heart. This is the power of the Psalms.

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs – We use the term psalms to distinguish from what we call hymns, and that is fine. We just have to remember that Paul did not have our distinctions in mind. Psalms (like psalm 3), hymns (like psalm 55), and odes (like psalm 122), are terms pointing to the 150 psalm Psalter. These were regularly chanted and sung in the Jewish OT synagogue and the Gentile, NT church. This has been the powerful hymnal of the covenant people of God.

Word of Christ – How is *"the Word of Christ"* connected to the Psalms? There are many Psalms that we know prophetically speak of Christ and His ministry (i.e. Psalm 2, 22, 118). But remember that Jesus is "the Word of God" and all of the Word of God, Old and New Testament, is the Word of Christ. Also, many of the Psalms have the phrase, "of David" in their title. Some were definitely written by David, but others (and the Hebrew grammar is flexible here) may have been collected by David, written for David, or to David. And some may be pointing not simply to David, but to the Davidic, Messianic King. *"David"* was a prophetic title of sorts, pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ (i.e. Exek 37:24-25, Jer 30:9). Sometimes the Psalm is our cry to God, sometimes it is the Son's cry to the Father (22:1), or the Father speaking to us or to His Son (2:7-9). Sometimes, the Son seems to join with us in praise to the Father (22:22) – and all of this is breathed-out by the Holy Spirit. We are joining together in a holy, Trinitarian conversation over the future of the world (98). This is the power of the Psalms.

No Holds Barred – This is the title of a book on prayer and the Psalms by Mark Roberts. In it, Roberts thesis is that the Psalms teach us to pray to God in ways we are not at all comfortable to do, and yet in ways that reach deep in our souls in gut-wrenching honesty. The Psalms teach us (show us) to pray to God with everything – every emotion, every doubt, every confidence, every thankfulness, everything. This has certainly been our experience as we have spent the last ten years growing in our singing of the Psalms. As we study them together, you are invited to grow in them and all they have for you more and more. We haven't begun to discover all of the treasure, nor all the power.

Changing the Way We Pray and Sing – The Psalms change us, reform us, and our prayers and our manner of singing. They teach us to call out for God to rise up, to ask God simply, repeatedly, and boldly (17). They teach us to pour out our feelings before God (42, 47, 63). They teach us to pray with remembrance over God's mighty acts (78, 105, 106). They teach us to pray and sing covenantally (45). They teach us to sing with a holy silence (46, 62, 131) and with a holy shout (47) and unending praise (145). They teach us to pray when we doubt (13), when we are broken (51), and when we are in despair over our enemies (137), they teach us how to sing against them (76). They teach us how to identify with Christ in His crucifixion and resurrection (22). It goes on and on, which is why Calvin called them, *"the Anatomy of All the Parts of the Soul."*

Filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:17-21) – This passage is extremely similar to Col 3:16-17. Where Paul had said in Colossians to let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly, in Ephesians he says to be filled with the Holy Spirit – controlled by the Spirit as contrasted to spirits of drunkenness. In both passages this is accomplished and/or evidenced by singing the Psalms and doing so to one another. Do you want to “*understand what the will of the Lord is*” (v17)? This is why we will give ourselves to the study and the singing and the power of the Psalms.

Dave Hatcher – July 29th, 2007