

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
First Quarter 2024: *The Book of Psalms*
Lesson 7 “Your Mercy Reaches Unto *the* Heavens”

Read for this week’s study

Psalm 136; Psalm 51; Psalm 130; Psalm 113; Psalm 123.

Memory Text

“I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing to You among the nations. For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens, And Your truth unto the clouds” (Psalms 57:9, 10, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. His Mercy Endures Forever
- III. Create in Me a Clean Heart
- IV. If You, Lord, Should Mark Iniquities
- V. Praise to the Majestic and Merciful God
- VI. Forget Not All His Benefits
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Jon Paulien

1. The lesson for this week coins a new genre of psalms, “mercy psalms”. The lesson collects some “psalms of confession” and combines them with some “psalms of praise” to create a fresh approach. The over-riding theme is the contrast between the greatness of God and the frailty of humanity. Human beings have nothing in themselves that would recommend them before God, they are fully dependent on God’s mercy. So, these psalms celebrate the fact that God’s mercy is everlasting. (Sabbath Afternoon’s Lesson)
2. Read Psalm 136. This psalm invites God’s people to praise the Lord for His mercy. On what grounds are they invited to praise God? What does the psalmist mean by calling Yahweh the “God of gods”? How does that picture differ from the New Testament view of God? (Sunday’s Lesson)
3. Read Psalm 51:1-5. Why in this passage does the psalmist appeal to God’s mercy? In what sense is it appropriate for him to say that his heinous crimes against Bathsheba

- and her husband were committed against God alone? Read Psalm 51:6-19. How is forgiveness of sin portrayed here? What is the goal of divine forgiveness? If sacrifice isn't the main thing with regard to forgiveness, why did God require it in the first place? (Monday's Lesson)
4. Read Psalm 130. How is sin described in this passage? What do you make of the concept of "marking iniquities"? What does it mean that God does not do that? What does it mean to you that God does not "mark iniquity"? (Tuesday's Lesson)
 5. Read Psalms 113 and 123. The lesson paired these two together in an interesting fashion. What two different aspects of God's character are depicted in these psalms? When it talks about the "name of Yahweh", what is the significance of a person's name in the Hebrew culture? What does it mean that God "humbles Himself" (Psa 113:6)? What is to be gained by a strong focus on the majesty and power of God that you find in Psalm 113? What is worship? (Wednesday's Lesson)
 6. Read Psalm 103. How is God's mercy portrayed in this psalm? Read Exodus 34:6-7. In what way does verse 8 recall Exodus 34:6-7 and how does that relate to God's actions in behalf of individuals? How would you respond to someone who feels verse 18 undercuts all the talk in these psalms about God's mercy? What does the word "blessing" mean? How is it possible for us to "bless God"? Why does God call us to worship Him? Is it some sort of ego trip? (Thursday's Lesson)
 7. How do the expressions of God's mercy in the New Testament fit with those in the Psalms (Ephesians 2:4-5; 1 Timothy 1:16; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 4:16)? (Friday's Lesson)

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Lou: It's part of our problem, then, that we are taking models from our legal system here and trying to apply them to God.

Graham: That's a very good point, very much so.

Lou: The "substitutionary," that comes in, say more about that. The "vicarious."

Graham: Ah. He died in our stead. He died as the substitution. In a way, it's very true. I mean, either He dies or we die. However, that's where the comparison ends, because if God has let you and me and all other sinners die, all it would have done is prove the truthfulness of His warning, "If you sin, you will die." And God could say to the universe, "Was I right? I said sinners would die, and look, they're dead." But the universe would not have had answers to questions two and three that I just mentioned. When Jesus died, there was no doubt in the minds of the universe that God was not killing His Son. They were clear about that. And the death of Christ answers all those three questions. So it's not either us or Him. His death was infinitely more significant than ours. But had He not died, then what else could God do but leave us to reap the

consequences and we all would have died. So in a sense, yes. He died in our stead, but beyond that there's no comparison.

Lou: But not as a payoff. It's not one or the other.

Graham: It's not His death is equal to all of ours. His death is infinitely more significant than the death of every sinful man or angel who has ever lived. The death of angels and men would not have answered the questions.

Lou: What you're saying then, is that just a simple "satisfaction" idea doesn't encompass what's involved at all, does it?

Graham: Oh, it makes it much too small. I think it puts God in a very bad light, and it doesn't answer the questions of the Great Controversy. Many folk who prefer those understandings of the plan of salvation do not understand there has been a universe-wide great controversy over the character and government of God. And do you remember at our first meeting, I brought along the evidence that even Luther, hero of the Christian world that he is, could not conceive of these larger issues because he couldn't include the book of Revelation—let alone Hebrews, James and Jude. And this has been the pattern through the years. Not many have seen the sixty-sixth book picture of a universe-wide controversy over the character and government of God. And so they have seen the death of Christ as primarily a plan just to save you and me, for which we are very grateful. It's just that the larger view makes the cross much more significant. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #8 with Lou Venden, "The Most Costly and Convincing Evidence" recorded March 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/8MMCAG>

I think that when he said this, he showed himself way in advance of many modern theologians, who beg for forgiveness, but don't ask for the clean heart and right spirit. Nobody's going to be saved without the clean heart and the right spirit. Forgiveness doesn't get us into heaven. That's legalism. Heaven will not be peopled with pardoned crooks, but with people who have new hearts and right spirits; and we don't have to use just this verse, but how about what Jesus said to Nicodemus? He didn't say, "Nicodemus, unless you be officially pardoned, you'll not get into the Kingdom." He said, "Unless you have a new heart and right spirit, and be reborn, you'll not see the Kingdom." That runs all through the Bible. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 – 2 Samuel, recorded November 1983, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

*Audio links to the West Covina series recorded in 1983:

<http://pkp.cc/15MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/16MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Lou: A question came in last week that really touched my heart. This person wrote, “How are we who have been raised as Seventh-day Adventist Christians, and have been taught to fear God and His judgments, to change to a love relationship? When you asked last Friday night, ‘Would you be comfortable if the Father walked in?’ I hesitated to answer, and then I said, ‘I hope so.’ I am afraid! How do I dispel this fear?”

Graham: Oh, I know the One who would love to hear that question, would be God Himself. If you would look at God and say, “God, I hesitate to tell You this, but I’m scared.” And I wonder what He would do. Would He say, “I appreciate that”? Or would He say, “I think maybe I’d better not talk to you any longer, you’re so scared. I’ll send for My Son.”

Well, in practicality I think the solution is to become convinced in Scripture that the One who came is fully God. We’re not afraid of Jesus. But to realize the One who was with us is no less than God! And that’s what the Sabbath reminds us of, that gentle Jesus—who was afraid of Him? He is the Almighty Creator. And then if we could just come to the place where we would truly accept what we call the “testimony of Jesus.” The ultimate testimony of Jesus is, “Do you want to know what My Father is like? If you’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the Father.” We find it hard to believe that. So I think we need to read it over and over and come to the place where we really are convinced. You want to know what God is like? Look at Christ, for Christ is God. And as we think of it, number one, it seems incredible, for it takes a little time. And number two, the enemy is opposed to our knowing this, so he will throw up every roadblock he can to keep us from believing this incredible truth. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #10 with Lou Venden, “The Reminder of the Evidence” recorded March 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/10MMCAG>*

Further Study with Ellen White

Love was the element in which Christ moved and walked and worked. He came to embrace the world in the arms of His love. . . . {SD 147.2}

The heart of God yearns over His earthly children with a love stronger than death. In giving up His Son, He has poured out to us all heaven in one gift. The Saviour’s life and death and intercession, the ministry of angels, the pleading of the Spirit, the Father working above and through all, the unceasing interest of heavenly beings,—all are enlisted in behalf of man’s redemption. {SC 21.2}

The heart of Infinite Love yearns after those who feel powerless to free themselves from the snares of Satan; and He graciously offers to strengthen them to live for Him. “Fear thou not,”

He bids them; “for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee: yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness.” . . . {CC 235.4}

God does not employ compulsory measures; love is the agent which He uses to expel sin from the heart. By it He changes pride into humility, and enmity and unbelief into love and faith. {MB 76.3}

God does not deal with us as finite men deal with one another. His thoughts are thoughts of mercy, love, and tenderest compassion. {SC 53.1}

It is no part of Christ’s mission to compel men to receive Him. It is Satan, and men actuated by his spirit, who seek to compel the conscience. Under a pretense of zeal for righteousness, men who are confederated with evil angels sometimes bring suffering upon their fellow men in order to convert them to their ideas of religion; but Christ is ever showing mercy, ever seeking to win by the revealing of His love. He can admit no rival in the soul, nor accept of partial service; but He desires only voluntary service, the willing surrender of the heart under the constraint of love. {AA 541.1}

In every human being He discerned infinite possibilities. He saw men as they might be, transfigured by His grace—in “the beauty of the Lord our God” (Psalm 90:17). {AG 223.3}

But forgiveness has a broader meaning than many suppose. When God gives the promise that He “will abundantly pardon,” He adds, as if the meaning of that promise exceeded all that we could comprehend: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” Isaiah 55:7-9. God’s forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness *for* sin, but reclaiming *from* sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart. David had the true conception of forgiveness when he prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” Psalm 51:10. And again he says, “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.” Psalm 103:12. {MB 114.1}

The plan of redemption is not merely a way of escape from the penalty of transgression, but through it the sinner is forgiven his sins, and will be finally received into heaven—not as a forgiven culprit pardoned and released from captivity, yet looked upon with suspicion and not admitted to friendship and trust; but welcomed as a child, and taken back into fullest confidence. {7BC 950.6}

It is God’s glory to encircle sinful, repentant human beings in the arms of His love, to bind up their wounds, to cleanse them from sin, and to clothe them with the garments of salvation. {PK 668.3}

The love which Christ diffuses through the whole being is a vitalizing power. Every vital part—the brain, the heart, the nerves—it touches with healing. By it the highest energies of the being are roused to activity. It frees the soul from the guilt and sorrow, the anxiety and care, that crush the life forces. With it come serenity and composure. It implants in the soul, joy that nothing earthly can destroy,—joy in the Holy Spirit,—health-giving, life-giving joy. {MH 115.3}

Our Saviour's words, "Come unto Me, . . . and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28), are a prescription for the healing of physical, mental, and spiritual ills. Though men have brought suffering upon themselves by their own wrongdoing, He regards them with pity. In Him they may find help. He will do great things for those who trust in Him. {MH 115.4}

When the soul surrenders itself to Christ, a new power takes possession of the new heart. A change is wrought which man can never accomplish for himself. It is a supernatural work, bringing a supernatural element into human nature. The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is impregnable to the assaults of Satan. {DA 324.1}

The truths of God's word are not mere sentiments, but the utterances of the Most High. He who makes these truths a part of his life becomes in every sense a new creature. He is not given new mental powers, but the darkness that through ignorance and sin has clouded the understanding is removed. {CT 452.2}

When Jesus speaks of the new heart, He means the mind, the life, the whole being. To have a change of heart is to withdraw the affections from the world, and fasten them upon Christ. To have a new heart is to have a new mind, new purposes, new motives. What is the sign of a new heart?—A changed life. {OHC 159.5}

To be pardoned in the way that Christ pardons, is not only to be forgiven, but to be renewed in the spirit of our mind. The Lord says, "A new heart will I give unto thee." The image of Christ is to be stamped upon the very mind, heart, and soul. The apostle says, "But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). {3SM 190.2}

The great plan of redemption results in fully bringing back the world into God's favor. All that was lost by sin is restored. Not only man but the earth is redeemed, to be the eternal abode of the obedient. For six thousand years Satan has struggled to maintain possession of the earth. Now God's original purpose in its creation is accomplished. "The saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever." Daniel 7:18. {PP 342.1}

Christ's favorite theme was the paternal character and abundant love of God. This knowledge of God was Christ's own gift to men, and this gift He has committed to His people to be communicated by them to the world. {6T 55.1}

Christ came to reveal God to the world as a God of love, a God of mercy, tenderness, and compassion. By the world's Redeemer the thick darkness with which Satan had enshrouded the throne of the Deity was swept away, and the Father was again manifest to men as the Light of life. . . . {HP 8.3}

The Saviour in His miracles revealed the power that is continually at work in man's behalf, to sustain and to heal him. Through the agencies of nature, God is working, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, to keep us alive, to build up and restore us. When any part of the body sustains injury, a healing process is at once begun; nature's agencies are set at work to restore soundness. But the power working through these agencies is the power of God. All life-giving power is from Him. When one recovers from disease, it is God who restores him. {MH 112.1}

Sickness, suffering, and death are work of an antagonistic power. Satan is the destroyer; God is the restorer. {MH 113.1}

Satan had clothed the Father in his own attributes, but Christ represented Him in His true character of benevolence and love. In the character in which Christ presented Him to the world it was as if He gave a new gift to man. . . . {LHU 36.4}

Jesus came into the world to illustrate the character of God in His own life, and He swept back the misrepresentations that Satan had originated, and revealed the glory of God. It was only by living among men that He could reveal the mercy, compassion, and love of His heavenly Father; for it was only by actions of benevolence that He could set forth the grace of God. The unbelief of men was deep seated, and yet they could not resist the testimony of His God-like example, and His deeds of love and truth. {SD 139.3}

But those who follow Christ are ever safe under His watchcare. Angels that excel in strength are sent from heaven to protect them. The wicked one cannot break through the guard which God has stationed about His people. {GC 517.2}

The heavenly intelligences, angels that excel in strength, are waiting, obedient to His command, to unite with human agencies; and the Lord will interpose when matters have come to such a pass that none but a divine power can counteract the satanic agencies at work. When His people shall be in the greatest danger, seemingly unable to stand against the power of Satan, God will work in their behalf. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. {2SM 373.1}

To us also the promise of Christ's abiding presence is given. The lapse of time has wrought no change in His parting promise. He is with us today as truly as He was with the disciplines, and He will be with us "even unto the end." {8T 17.1}

The Lord is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who serve Him than parents are to give good gifts to their children.—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 50. {ChS 251.2}