

Stewards Trust in God, Not in Man or This World

5th Sun. after Epiphany – 02/04/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Psalm 147:1-11 Pastor Keith Besel

Introduction

- ✘ Today we are in the “middle leg” of our 2024 *People With A Purpose* journey; opening our ears to the second of three “Epiphany Psalms of Stewardship” and submitting our hearts and minds to the important truths that our Lord desires to apply into our lives here today.
 - ➔ Today’s Psalm; Psalm 147 begins innocently enough, “Praise Yahweh! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.” And why are we directed to sing our praises to Yahweh? because, verse two says, “Yahweh builds up Jerusalem; He gathers the outcasts of Israel.”
- ✘ That’s the clue we need to understand the back-story for this song of praise. This hymn reveals to us that God’s people are at the joyous end of a very long and difficult period in the history of God’s people.
 - ➔ It hasn’t been easy for them, but now they have learned their lesson; they hit the lowest of lows; they endured the severe consequences that they brought upon themselves; they witnessed the extreme, undeserved mercy of God and now He has blessed them with a great honor.
 - ➔ And that is why they are singing these praises; why you and I are singing these praises with them here today, because God has blessed us; He has bestowed upon us the very same honor of being His stewards; His caretakers of the bountiful gifts that He has for all people of all times.

I. Yahweh Gathers His People

- ✘ But things between Yahweh and His people were not always as good as they were when this Psalm was written. As verse two says, the people of Israel were “outcasts” – the very opposite of being blessed.
 - ➔ It was somewhere around 130-150 years earlier that Yahweh had finally had enough of His people’s rebellion and sin. Over and over again they turned their backs on God – worshipping idols and themselves. They thumbed their noses at God, in spite of His many warnings and they abused His trust – trusting in the horses and chariots and armies of their pagan neighbors like Egypt and Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, and Damascus (Jer. 47-49) instead of God to protect them from the threat of invasion from the king of Babylon.
 - ➔ And so God let them have their rebellious way, and they paid the consequences dearly. Jerusalem was overrun by the Babylonian army, the Temple of God as well as the city walls were leveled and the majority of God’s people were taken away to Babylon as slaves.
- ✘ Their punishment was 70 years in exile, just as God had prophesied. Yet, even the mighty kingdom of Babylon, is nothing of course, in comparison to Yahweh – the one who not only created the stars and “gives to all of them their names”, as verse four says. He knew of the people’s sorrow over their sin. He heard their renewed confession of faith and so He moved the King of Babylon to release His people from slavery and He gathered them back to Himself in His holy city of Jerusalem.
 - ➔ Still it took them 90 years to first rebuild the Temple, and then the city with its walls and gates. And all the while Yahweh provided food for them and showed that even without walls and gates He would keep them safe; He would always keep them as His own!

✘ We see in verses three and five that God, as only He could do, had healed their sin-broken hearts and bound up the wounds in their relationship with Yahweh so that now they had been both humbled and matured significantly in their faith; singing out, “Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; His understanding is beyond measure.”

→ That there is one of the hardest first steps for any of us in our relationship with God, isn't it? To put aside our ego and pride – which our world says we must nurture and flaunt and trust in above all else; to put that aside and boldly proclaim with Isaiah 40:28 that Yahweh, He and only He “is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; His understanding is unsearchable.” As Yahweh tells us Himself in Isaiah 55:8-9, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways... For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

II. He Lifts Us Up to be Stewards

✘ Knowing that, my dear friends, is crucial for you and me today, just as it was for the people of old in our text. For we too need to be brought face to face with our sinful and rebellious ways; with the countless times since birth that we have placed ourselves and the things of this world before God.

→ Yes, if you and I lived back at the time of this Psalm, we would have deservedly been taken away as slaves, because we too have trusted more in our bank accounts or our retirement plans or our government for help and protection instead of the Creator of the ends of the earth.

✘ Yet we now know that He is God and we are not! Our guilt and our sin has absolutely burst our egos and we have been wholly humbled by God's truth. But, just as verse six assures us, “Yahweh lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked (i.e. those unwilling to repentant of their sin) to the ground.”

→ This imagery is a common one in the Bible that left alone with our sin, we are not only cast to the ground, but we end up in the miry pit of condemnation with the devil himself.

✘ Yet God has mercifully sent us His Son, Jesus to suffer and die in our place; to be buried and to descend into the deepest depths so that now with Psalm 40:2-3 we joyfully confess that “He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. (So that) many will see and fear, and put their trust in Yahweh.”

→ Did you catch the mind-boggling progression of God's saving work there? Of course it's wonderful beyond expression that God has lifted you and me up from the pit of sin and destruction so that we are now forgiven and saved; so that we are now His beloved people for eternity!

→ But that's not the end game for God and His ultimate plan here. He lifted us up; He saved us for an even grander purpose. In His perfect wisdom God has seen fit to turn us sinners into His stewards; His proclaimers; as Psalm 40:3 just said, so that many others “will see” what God has done with and for us and then because of that, they will “fear” the Lord in faith “and put their trust in Yahweh” as well!

✘ That was the role that God had for the people that He gathered back into Jerusalem and the role He has for you and me today as well; to be stewards of the truth regarding God's salvation work for us!

→ This means that He has made each one of us to be an active part in the ministry of His Church.

- ⊗ But before we can do our part in showing and telling others about God’s work, we need to of course make sure that we are aware of the various ways He has “lifted us up” and gifted us first. I can think of four primary blessings off the top of my head:
 - #1 – He blesses us in and through the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. It is in our baptism that Titus 3:4-6 says, “When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.” And Martin Luther says of the Lord’s Supper in his Large Catechism that “we receive a great treasure: the forgiveness of sins where our Lord’s words assure us that this treasure is passed along and made our very own when we receive His body and blood” (LC V 29), and “it brings with it God’s grace and the Spirit with all His gifts, protection, shelter, and power against death and the devil and all misfortune” (LC V 70).
 - But that’s not all. The 2nd blessing is that He gives us the Holy Scripture which 2 Timothy 3:15-16 says alone is “able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture,” it says, “is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...”.
 - Why? Well that’s the 3rd blessing. Verse 17 continues in 2 Timothy 3 that we have God’s Word so “that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”
 - You see, God doesn’t just baptize and save us, only to feed us His body and blood and teach us His perfect Word so that now we can stand around and look at each other and think, “What a good boy; what a good girl am I!” No. As I already mentioned, the 4th blessing is that He fully “equips” us with His gifts and with our own unique talents and treasures so that we are now fully incorporated into the Gospel-spreading work of His Church. In Ephesians 4:12-16 Paul says that God “equips” us “for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes”, but instead with Christ as our head then He with the rest of us, “when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

III. Stewards Serve and Trust in Yahweh

- ⊗ So, every single believer in Christ, because he/she is a part of Christ is therefore a crucial part of His body; the Church. Then the final two verses of this morning’s text in Psalm 147 speak to our role as the caretakers that God has made us to be as His people.
 - The world wants you and me to believe that it’s all up to our own determination and talent; our own self-confidence and superior knowledge to impress God with our stewardship prowess. And if by chance we say, “No, I trust in God first to guide me and make me capable”, then the devil quickly chimes in to try and embarrass us, “No, that’s not right. Trusting in God is only a crutch; it’s only a sign that you are weak.”
 - When that happens, friends, you be sure to point the devil to 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 where the Lord told St. Paul in his weakness, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” “Therefore...,” said Paul, “I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” in the Lord!
- ⊗ As verse 10 reminds us, “God’s delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor His pleasure in the legs of a man”. In other words, we can’t impress God with our works or deeds, nor can we influence Him with even the mightiest of earthly powers. “But,” says verse 11, “Yahweh takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope (that is ‘trust’) in His steadfast love.”

→ Proverbs 3:5 says, “Trust in Yahweh with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.” And Proverbs 16:3 says, “Commit your work to Yahweh, and your plans will be established.” You see there, God is the one who sets our priorities and our plans in place, not our feelings; not our selfish desires; not our friends or neighbors. And God is the one to whom you and I must commit ourselves and all things first, last and always!

✘ This is why next Sunday, as we do each year on Consecration Sunday, we encourage each other as fellow stewards here in Christ’s Church, to prayerfully, faithfully and intentionally fill out and make your commitment, both on a Time and Talent form and on a confidential pledge card of how you believe the Lord has led you to use the gifts and treasures He has placed in your care for the Gospel and the caring ministry of His Church here at Mt. Calvary.

→ But as you spend some time this week considering your commitment, remember what this Psalm has taught us here today. Our role as God’s Stewards is not about trying to impress God or influence Him in some way. Everything we have already belongs to Him. He’s got it all. But instead we are the ones who are blessed by Him when we place our trust in Him as His stewards; when we freely give the gifts and the treasures and the time that He has placed in our care back into His ministry and Gospel work of saving souls for eternity.

✘ May the Lord bless us all in this, His blessed work; as His *People With A Purpose*. Amen.