



**COLLEGE HEIGHTS  
BAPTIST CHURCH**

# *Hymn Theology*

Daily Scripture Readings for  
July 20 - August 23

Our new series starting today is “Hymn Theology.” Last month, I asked our Sunday Morning Bible Study classes and on Facebook about your favorite hymns. From that list, I chose the hymns picked most and that is the basis for the next five weeks. Some weeks have one hymn, others have two depending on the theme that week. Please note that each week will not be devotions or sermons based solely on the hymn. The hymn is a beginning point which points to Scripture, and then our studies will focus on those Scriptures. “Hymn Theology” is first and foremost the study of God using the Bible. The hymns serve as a great companion in learning of the nature of God. Since these are your favorite hymns, I expect these themes are the themes with which you related to God most. Let us begin with the most chosen song by you.

## **WEEK 1: IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL - THEME: CURRENT PEACE AND COMFORT**

### **Monday, July 20 - Mark 4:35-41**

Most of you likely know the origins of the 19th century hymn *It Is Well with My Soul*. Written by Horatio Spafford in 1873, the verses are the words of Spafford’s heart after losing his four year old son in 1871, losing his savings in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, and losing his daughters in a shipwreck from America to Europe. He wrote the words of this hymn while crossing the Atlantic to comfort his grieving wife, who survived the shipwreck.

The theme that I think we can see in this hymn is peace and comfort in moments of difficulty. That when “the storms of life” are raging, it can be well with our souls because “Christ has regarded my helpless estate and has shed his own blood for my soul.” The peace Jesus can give is one of a kind.

Our passage today focuses on this peace. The storm was raging. The disciples were afraid. They wake up Jesus believing they were about to die. Then Jesus calms the storm. He calms the storm in a calm manner. This storm was not a big issue for him. It was easy to control. The concerns we have that are too big for us to handle can be handled by God easily: if we let him be in control.

We need Jesus to calm the storms of our lives. I am very guilty of not giving things to God. I must confess that to you. I try to take care of things on my own and then out of anxiety, I cry out to God about why he doesn't care about me sinking. He might as well respond by saying "why don't you trust me? Why didn't you call on me sooner?" God can give us peace and calm our troubles if we call upon his name. I am reaffirming my commitment to going to God first. Will you join me?

## **Tuesday, July 21 - Mark 5:25-34**

I heard a story once of a pastor having a conversation with a man in his seventies. The man told the pastor "After a certain age, you are never really well. Just less sick." Maybe you have felt that way or feel that way right now. The woman being healed in our text today can identify with this statement. She suffered from her condition for twelve years. Her doctors had given up hope of healing her. She had exhausted all treatments and likely paid a hefty amount of money for no help.

But she has heard about Jesus. She believes that if she can just get close enough and touch him, she will be healed. Lots of people were touching Jesus in that crowd. None of them (that we know of) were healed like this woman was. The physical touch was not what was important, but it was the woman's faith that Jesus could heal her.

If we are talking about current peace and comfort this week, we need to understand this as well. We must have faith that Jesus can take care of our difficulty. This is NOT where I say "if you only had enough faith, Jesus would heal you of all of

your ailments.” That’d be nice, but these bodies were made to break down. They are not made for eternity. But even in your difficulty, God can give you peace about the struggles. You can have peace only if you have faith. God cannot give you peace if you don’t accept that he can give you peace. It can only be well with your soul, if you let God make it well with your soul. Are you letting him work inside of you?

### **Wednesday, July 22 - Psalm 72**

Psalm 72 is a prayer for the king of Israel. It along with Psalm 127 are the only two psalms which are ascribed to Solomon. The two main themes of this psalm are longevity for the king and expressing the king’s role as chief carer for the poor and oppressed. Does the psalm connect these two themes? Is the prayer for longevity connected to the role he takes in “judging people with righteousness?” How can a psalm of Solomon and ruling Israel compare to modern-day countries and leaders? Should it compare to current-day leaders? Let’s explore these questions tonight. I will leave you with this. Pray for your government leaders. Whether you agree with them or not; whether you like them or not, the Bible calls you to pray for them. Spend time today praying for government leaders from all parties and asking for God’s protection and guidance for them.

### **Thursday, July 23 - Revelation 19:1-10**

The more I read Revelation, the more convinced I am of a certain interpretation of the apocalyptic book. The book is originally written to first century Christians and then subsequently read by Christians of all generations as a reminder to stay strong in their faith and that Jesus will come again to vanquish evil forever. The book is written to encourage Christians “to conquer” in the face of persecutions and that better days are ahead because the Lamb is coming soon. That’s the plain and simple message of Revelation.

Our passage today is the moment of celebration the earth and its inhabitants have been waiting for. It is another beautiful worship scene that we find in Revelation and the wedding of the Lamb is happening. “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” The invited ones are the righteous ones, the ones who have conquered, the ones who have held steadfast to God through all of life’s difficulties.

Whenever you are going through the trials, temptations, and tribulations of this life, stay strong in the Lord. Even if it seems like the Evil One is winning now, it is promised that Jesus is returning and wins in the end. Do you believe that? I hope so. Pray for perseverance today. Pray for patience awaiting Christ’s return. Pray for your friends and family who are not ready for Jesus’ return. He will come “like a thief in the night” so we all must be ready.

### **Friday, July 24 - Romans 8:28-30**

These verses can easily be misinterpreted. Some suggest that Romans 8:28 means that everything that happens to you is good because God did it. I can hardly look at the world and believe that a good, loving God *wills* all of the evil in the world. That goes directly against who God is.

In Romans 8:29-30, some will say that God has chosen a select few to go to heaven and he already knows who they are, and everyone else born into this world is destined to hell and there is nothing they can do about it. Again, that doesn’t sound like the loving God I read about throughout the Bible.

So what does Romans 8:28-30 tell us? How can it give us current peace and comfort? It can help us to remember that the early Christians considered the community first and individuals second. So when they read a passage such as this, they considered it a message to the entire church, not just them. So when phrases like the “elect,” “predestined,” “called,” or the like, it was not a message to one person, but

the entire church. It was a message of comfort that salvation could not be pulled away, that the church was God's people, and through the New Covenant of Jesus, God would never leave them nor forsake them. What we see in these verses is that Christians need not worry about illnesses, tragedies, or being removed from the love of God. As Romans 8:38-39 says "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." I think that about covers everything.

It can be well with your soul knowing that nothing in this world will take you away from God. As a Christians who chose to make Jesus your Lord and Savior, you are part of God's chosen people. No matter the trials you have today, you can have peace in your heart because nothing can take you away from God.

#### **Saturday, July 25 - Ephesians 1:11-14**

These four verses are a great definition of being a child of God. There are elements that God elected the community of believers, while also an explanation of our choice to believe and be marked with the Holy Spirit. This argument of election of the community and salvation of the individual is clear from the usage of "we" in verses 11-12 and "you" in verses 13-14. Make no mistake. One must choose to be a follower of Christ, a child of God. One is not destined from birth to heaven or hell.

Maybe an example is in order. In a normal year, it is pre-determined that children of a certain age will be at school. At the same time, it is up to individual families to actually have their children attend school. That's what it is like for salvation. It is pre-determined that the church will be children of God. It is up to the individual to join God's people and be one of his children.

#### **Sunday, July 26 - Psalm 56:1-4**

Are you weary and broken? Are you afraid? Trust in God. Let it be well with your soul.

## **WEEK 2: I'LL FLY AWAY - THEME: FUTURE HOPE**

### **Monday, July 27 - 2 Timothy 4:6-8**

Paul recognizes he is at the end of his life. He is likely imprisoned while writing this letter to Timothy and awaiting the day of his execution. The Bible doesn't say that Paul was executed, but sources outside the Bible suggest that Paul was beheaded by Emperor Nero in the late 60s AD. This letter seems to be written during that time. But in typical Pauline fashion, Paul isn't downtrodden about his condition. He is looking toward the future with hope. He knows that a crown of righteousness is waiting for him. He knows he has given everything, including his personal freedom and his life, to spreading the good news of Christ to the world.

I hope we all desire to declare what Paul is. At the end of our lives, I hope we can confidently say there is a crown of righteousness awaiting us in heaven. I hope we can say we have fought the good fight. That we are like athletes running that last one hundred meters with every ounce of strength we have left. Let us hold firm to the call which God has called us to. A call to be righteous and persevere until the end. Some glad morning, when this life is over, we will fly away. A home on God's celestial shore is awaiting us and that future hope can give us confidence in living today.

### **Tuesday, July 28 - Philippians 3:12-17**

A 19th century hymn *Higher Ground* begins its first verse with "I'm pressing on the upward way..." Written by Johnson Oatman, Jr., *Higher Ground* is a hymn which describes our desire to not remain here. It is our desire to continue to grow closer to

God and then when we die, we will be on the highest ground and in heaven with our heavenly father. That is our future hope.

Philippians is considered one of Paul's prison letters. Much like 2 Timothy yesterday, Paul is in prison awaiting his fate, but has not lost hope. In fact, I would say the main message of Philippians is having joy in the midst of suffering. Joy is mentioned 18 times in this 108 verse letter. While these verses do not mention joy, the spirit of joy surrounds these words of pressing on toward the prize. Even Paul says he hasn't finished the race yet. That he is still "working out his own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). He is running the race. He is filled with joy at those who have joined with him and are imitating him. He is joy-filled at what lies ahead of him. He has hope for the future despite his current circumstances.

Are you joining Paul in his encouragement to imitate him? Are you of the same mind as him in forgetting the past and holding on to the promise of the future? We are not there yet, but we press on toward the prize which lies before us. Have joy and confidence in your future.

### **Wednesday, July 29 - 1 Corinthians 9:24-27**

We are taking a one week summer break from Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting and Bible Study tonight, so today's reading continues the theme of a future hope. Paul uses another running/sports metaphor in our passage, like the ones we have already read this week. The sentence I gravitate to when reading this passage is at the end of verse 24: "run in such a way that you may win [the prize]."

I am a crazy competitive person. Some of you may have seen that side of me when we have had game nights at the church. If I play a game, I want to win. I don't play just to have fun. I play to win. Paul says this is the way we should live our lives. Live life so you win at the end. Live today with the prize of heavenly salvation as the goal. Of course, we know it is through Christ who can give you this prize. It is having

him be the Savior *and* Lord of your life. We like the Savior part. It's much harder to have him be your Lord. Making him the Lord of your life means having self-control. It is self-control (or really God-control) that submits yourself to the rigors of a spiritual life. This is the type of life which can give you a future hope when this life is over. Do not live life aimlessly. Live with purpose and "run to win."

### **Thursday, July 30 - Jeremiah 31:31-34**

Our Scripture today was written 600 years before Christ was born. This new covenant that is mentioned is the covenant that can give us life forever with God, while on this earth and after we face earthly death. Jeremiah 31:31-34 is quoted at length in Hebrews 8. Jesus is the mediator of this new covenant. The Old Mosaic Covenant is obsolete because this New Covenant came through Jesus and that allows us future hope. There are three things that are stressed from this new covenant seen in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The first is that the Law will no longer be written on stone tablets, but this law will be on the hearts of God's people. The Old Covenant was broken by Israel. The New Covenant cannot be broken by God's people because it is written on their hearts and the law is part of who they are. We can see this as the law is God living inside of us. It is God living through us and that is how the law is not broken.

The second issue stressed is "they shall all know me." If you remember in Exodus, Moses was the one to encounter God on behalf of all of Israel. In the covenant that Jesus inaugurates, all have the opportunity to know God in an intimate way. Jesus is the mediator of this covenant and no other mediator is needed. The third thing in this New Covenant is forgiveness of ALL sins. In the Old Covenant, there were sins which were unforgivable. There were mistakes and transgressions made which were not able to remedy by sacrifice or service.

None of this is to say that the Old Covenant was faulty. God does not make mistakes. The fault was with the people who were unable to keep the Old Covenant.

Because God is love, he created a new covenant which, while there are still conditions upon God's people, allows all people to have a relationship with God if they chose to do so. That relationship can give us future hope of a heavenly home.

We do not have to live in the time period when Jeremiah says "the days are surely coming." We live in a time where the time came and the New Covenant is here. Tell your friends! Tell your neighbors! Tell the people you don't like! There is forgiveness of sins. There is a way to heaven. There is a reason for future hope. And that reason is Jesus.

### **Friday, July 31 - 1 Corinthians 15:12-34**

We will close out this week of looking at passages which give a future hope by reading most of 1 Corinthians 15 today and tomorrow. The basic message is this: as descendents of Adam we are destined to die; if we choose to be brothers and sisters in Christ we will be made alive again. And while we eagerly await the day where all are resurrected and reunited with our heavenly Savior, we are not there yet. Christ's resurrection has put the wheels into motion and the evil powers are in the process of being defeated (the writing is on the wall!), but we are not there yet.

*I'll Fly Away* has been our hymn for this week. A hymn to remind us of the future hope we have after this life. Modeled after a secular song called *The Prisoner's Song*, Albert E. Brumley got the idea for this song while picking cotton on his father's farm in Oklahoma. When published in 1932, the song instantly found success throughout gospel circles.

The prison analogy works well related to 1 Cor. 15. When we are born as humankind, as descendents of Adam, we have a death sentence upon us. Whether this death sentence of sin is our own doing or part of the human condition is not our concern today. One man has taken our place. Not only that but he conquered death

and rose again. We have a grand opportunity to accept this grace and escape the death sentence upon us. Who are you going to tell about this opportunity today?

### **Saturday, August 1 - 1 Corinthians 15:35-58**

A few weeks ago for family movie night, we watched an animated Disney movie *Coco*. It is a movie that centers around the Mexican holiday *Day of the Dead*. While originating in Mexico, this is a day when Latin Americans in several countries remember their family members who have passed away. In the movie, it shows the family members who have died “in spirit form” visiting their alive relatives on this one day (I don’t have to tell you that this doesn’t happen in real life right?). These dead family members looked the same as they did the day they died. I found this incredibly unfair. So a man living to 100 is left with his 100 year old body forever, but a 40 year old keeps the 40 year old version of himself forever?

You may have wondered before what our bodies will be like in heaven. You are in good company because it seems the early Christians in Corinth had the same questions. What Paul says is this: earthly bodies are for earth and heavenly bodies are for heaven. It will be unlike anything on this earth. This is such a great promise given the aches and pains associated with our earthly bodies. These bodies were meant to wear out; our heavenly bodies will be forever.

I told you yesterday about the origins of *I’ll Fly Away*. While Brumley wrote the song we all know in 1929 and published it in 1932, the theme of “flying away” had been sung in slave songs throughout the 19th century. One such song can be quoted “I’ll fly away to glory; I’ll fly away to my heavenly home, And I’ll shout glory.”

This understanding of a future hope leads us to exclaim much like the end of 1 Cor. 15. “Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?” We know where our future lies. We know that while this life presents difficulty, it is only temporary. The glory of heaven and our heavenly lives will be forever. Death cannot defeat us because

Jesus gives us victory. Therefore because of this future hope “be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that your work in the Lord is not in vain.”

### **Sunday, August 2 - Psalm 57**

Your steadfast love is as high as the heavens. O God, let your glory fill this whole earth! Look for God’s glory in this earth today!

### **WEEK 3: AMAZING GRACE! HOW SWEET THE SOUND!**

### **Monday, August 3 - 2 Corinthians 12:7-10**

These four verses are a beautiful example of Paul’s humility and a way we should imitate him. Paul is being oppressed in some way. He may have an illness, an adversary, or a roadblock of some type. Whatever it is, it is hurting him and frustrating him. He has asked God to take it away from him, but God has said no. Instead, God wants him to rely on God’s strength in his weakness. That word from God has led to a new outlook in Paul’s life. Instead of being frustrated at his circumstance, he will boast in that circumstance because now he knows that God will work through him.

The grace that God gives us is more than the conditions we face in this world. Let us be content concerning the problems we endure on this earth. For where we are weak, God will work through us, thus making us strong. However, I am not content just leaving it at this because there’s an explanation we need to understand. This is not a statement to seek out awful conditions. This is not a call to hurting oneself or purposefully seeking demoralizing relationships.

Instead, what we read in verse 10 is a fact of humanity. If we think we are strong, if there is nothing going wrong, if all is right, we think we are the ones who are strong. We think we are the ones making our own decisions. We believe we are the masters of

our fate, captains of our soul as the poet William Ernest Henley says in his poem “Invictus.” But when we have imperfections in our life, when we are shocked out of our normal routines, that is when humans turn to God. And it is in that repentance that we rely on God’s strength instead of our own.

In your prayer time today, do something different. Write down the things you have learned in days of weakness. In the past, how have you grown closer to God when the days were difficult? Then, as you pray, thank God for those difficult days. Yes, thank him for weaknesses! Ask for God to give you his strength in your times of weakness today. It is when we are weak, then we are strong because God’s strength can pull us through.

## **Tuesday, August 4 - Ephesians 1:7-10**

The song on which we base our theme of grace this week is John Newton’s 18th century hymn *Amazing Grace*. The song comes from Newton’s own experiences. He grew up outside of religion, but while he was in the British Navy on a night of a great storm, he cried out to God for mercy. Newton survived and this began a spiritual awakening in his life. He eventually entered into Christian ministry as a priest for the Church of England. He wrote *Amazing Grace* as an illustration for a sermon in 1773 describing his life. How God’s amazing grace can save even a wretch like him. He was once lost, but now he was found. He was blind, but now he sees.

Ephesians 1:7 tells us that we have been redeemed and forgiven because of the riches of grace that God gives us. Maybe you don’t have a spiritual experience like John Newton. Maybe the change in your life wasn’t as stark as no religion to follower of Christ. You may have not had a story before salvation like Newton, but we were all sinners falling short of the glory of God. The only reason salvation and redemption are available to any of us is God’s grace.

I love how verse 8 explains that God gives us an overflowing amount of grace. Have you ever baked chocolate chip cookies? Of course you probably have. When the recipe calls for a certain amount of chocolate chips, do you put exactly that amount in or do some extras (or a lot of extras) end up in the mixing bowl? That's how I envision God giving us abundant amazing grace. He doesn't short us on the chocolate chips! We have an overflowing amount of grace. It is truly a grace greater than all our sin! Praise be to God for this wonderful grace.

### **Wednesday, August 5 - Psalm 73**

One of the most difficult questions we face when it comes to life on this earth is "why do bad things happen to good people?" Sometimes though, we ask the opposite question: "why do *good* things happen to *bad* people?" The psalm we read for tonight's Bible Study is a psalm asking this question to God. Let's explore this question and then also how this psalm fits in with the psalms around it tonight.

### **Thursday, August 6 - Romans 5:18-21**

On Tuesday, we read how God gives us an overabundance of grace. Some may suggest a rebuttal of "but you don't know how much I've messed up?" Today's passage makes it clear: "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (if this suggests to you that you should sin more, please read Romans 6:1-2). I alluded to the early 20th century hymn *Grace Greater Than All Our Sin* on Tuesday. In that hymn, written by Julia Johnston, it reads "marvelous infinite matchless grace. Freely bestowed on all who believe." What a beautiful expression of God's love for his people.

Our passage today says that whereas one man's disobedience brought sin into the world (Adam), one man's obedience gives us righteousness (Jesus). And it is matchless grace which gives us this opportunity for righteousness. If you are reading this, I imagine that you know Jesus as your Savior and Lord. Do you know anyone who

needs to hear this message of forgiveness today? Do you know someone who needs to hear that going to heaven is not about doing more good than bad? Do you know someone who needs to hear that salvation is only through Jesus' obedience on the cross? If you know someone like that, I pray that you take the opportunity today to share that message with them.

### **Friday, August 7 - Jonah 3:10-4:3**

It's a really good thing none of us are God. We would be very stingy with grace. Jonah is a terrific example of this. He did not see any reason for Nineveh to get another chance. He preached his message then left the city waiting for God to destroy the Ninevites. But as we know, God did not destroy the city. The people repented of their sin, and God chose to not go through with his initial plan. And this made Jonah angry. Silly Jonah.

Ah, but wait. How often are we Jonah? "No God," we say. "That person has had too many chances. His bed has been made. Nothing can save him now." But how much grace does God give? What would the world look like if we all gave each other the same amount of grace God gives us? We can't change the world, but we can change our corner of the world. May you abound in grace to other people today. Take time to ask forgiveness from God for times you have not been gracious to others. Pray for the strength and patience to extend grace even when it is difficult.

### **Saturday, August 8 - 2 Corinthians 5:16-6:10**

I think amphibians are fascinating animals. These types of animals, which are 90% types of frogs, have a metamorphosis of sorts from one type of animal to another over the course of their lives. A frog begins his life as a tadpole swimming in water, complete with gills to breathe under the water. Then, the tadpoles grow lungs, legs,

mouths, and lose their tails and gills to become frogs. It's like they start off as one creation, but when fully grown resemble something else entirely.

When you receive the grace of God, when you have accepted the gift of salvation, you are a new creation. Your old way of life is gone. You do not go back to your old habits, but start afresh and new. That is what we are to do as a child of God. 2 Corinthians 6:1 urges us not to accept the grace of God in vain. Don't waste God inside of your life. Whether you've been a Christian for decades or only minutes, what old habits need to die today? Acknowledge to God that these habits need to die. Ask God to break these habits from you. And then call a trusted friend who you can confide in and ask for accountability from them. Today is a new day, and you are a new creation in Christ.

### **Sunday, August 9 - Psalm 59:16-17**

Even when we are in difficult days, we must always sing about God's love and strength. I hope you will join us to worship God this morning.

## **WEEK 4: THE OLD RUGGED CROSS & VICTORY IN JESUS**

### **Monday, August 10 - Hebrews 12:1-4**

We turn to the cross this week. It is worth a reminder that while we have turned the cross into a decorative item, an item we wear around our necks, and a symbol set up in a place of importance, it was a execution tool. It was shameful to be executed on the cross. Historians tell us that Roman citizens were protected from this type of death because of its excruciating pain. In fact, the word "excruciating" was first used to

describe death on a cross. It was so bad that people had to invent a new word to describe it!

It is this type of death that Jesus bore. And in Hebrews 12:1-4, it describes this death as an example of enduring the difficulty of this life. That Jesus is our ultimate example of faith, the pinnacle of perfection after a long line of faithful men and women described in Hebrews 11. When we are faced with the decision to make the right choice and face difficulty or make the wrong choice and gain worldly praise, let us look to Jesus who disregarded the shame of the cross for all of our sakes. “Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.”

Christians seeing the cross in a different way from the world makes me wonder how else we should be unlike the world? Let’s revisit that idea tomorrow. Today, pray a prayer of thanksgiving for what Jesus did on the cross. Pray that you can follow him and imitate him in your life. Pray for your fellow church members to stay strong and “run the race with perseverance.”

## **Tuesday, August 11 - 1 Corinthians 1:18-25**

The Christian life makes no sense to the non-Christian. The world loves conquerors. Non-Christians worship heroes who are successful, rich, powerful. It is often said that history is written by the winners. That means that in the world’s eyes, it is unacceptable to worship “a man” who claimed to be “a god” and yet didn’t even save himself when being crucified. In the world’s eyes, this makes no sense.

Then it comes to being part of a church. “You mean I have to take time out of my week and money out of my pocket to support other people who aren’t in my family?”

Why would I do that?” “I have to wake up on one of my days off from work? Bleh.” Obviously, the non-Christian doesn’t get it (and Christians are still learning as well). It is not that “we have to give our time and money to serve others or have to attend church.” Instead of *having* to, we *get* to worship God and willingly give our resources to his purposes. We are not a part of a church because of simple obedience to God, but instead it is because we love God.

The love of Jesus Christ and love of other believers doesn’t make sense to the non-believer. The bond that Christians have with each other, no matter the differences according to society, is confusing. People who wouldn’t be part of the same groups outside of the church are equals in the church and love each other (well, ok, we are supposed to be. We are still working on that).

The Kingdom of God and our relationship with Jesus is an upside down world. We are strong in our weaknesses because God makes us strong. We worship a King who died for his subjects and did not force his subjects to die for him. The message Jesus shared with the world on the cross is foolishness to those who do not have God inside of them, but to those of us who have allowed God into our lives, the Holy Spirit helps us understand that the cross is the beautiful, powerful, saving power of God.

### **Wednesday, August 12 - Psalm 123**

To finish our time in the book of Psalms, we will spend the next three weeks in the Psalms of Ascents. These Psalms are found in Psalm 120-134. Many think that these psalms were sung as Jews made their journeys to Jerusalem for the different festivals throughout the year. What we have lost as Christians in recent generations is the praying of the Psalms. For most of Christian history, the Psalms were used in worship as prayers of the people. The Psalms of Ascents are great psalms to do this with.

Tonight, we will study Psalm 123, a prayer for mercy and protection from enemies. This protection comes from God who is above while we are below. We are to realize we are his humble servants. Our lives must be a life of service to God. Let's explore the idea of service and how this Psalm informs our life tonight on Facebook. I'd encourage you to pray Psalm 123 at different times today reflecting on the meaning of this prayer of mercy from your Master and Lord.

### **Thursday, August 13 - Revelation 5:4-14**

Read these verses like don't know the story of Jesus. Verses 4-5 read like you'd expect. John is distraught that no one can open these seals to read the scroll. But then, an elder takes him by the shoulder and says "Don't worry, the Lion took care of this and had the power to do this. He's from King David's family." A sense of relief. The conquering hero is going to take care of it. But then in verse 6, this creature looking like a sacrificial lamb shows up. Bloodied and beaten, this does not look like a conquering, devouring lion; this is the exact opposite! But then, you start to notice the elders and the angels and living creatures all starting to stare mesmerizingly at the Lamb. John starts to realize that this lamb is the lion. That the one who conquered is actually the one who sacrificed himself. Through his sacrifice, he is worthy to open the seals and he receives power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing (obviously seven attributes, the number of perfection).

O victory in Jesus! My Savior forever. He sought me and bought me with His redeeming blood. He loved me ere I knew Him and all my love is due Him. He plunged me to victory beneath the cleansing flood.

The victory of Jesus is found in violence, bloodshed, and conquering which is normal when waging a war and winning. The only difference is that the violence is against Jesus, the blood was his own, and it is through this he conquered and allows

us the opportunity to conquer the grave. As the living beings do in Rev. 5, let us sing our praises to the One on the throne and to the Lamb. Let us sing here today, while also joyfully expecting to sing to the Lamb in heaven one day.

I heard about a mansion he has built for me in glory. And I heard about the streets of gold beyond the crystal sea; about the angels singing, and the old redemption story. And some sweet day I'll sing up there the song of victory.

### **Friday, August 14 - Isaiah 35:5-10**

Verses like today's give me hope. Good news is fleeting these days. A small amount of good news about success of a new medicine or a breakthrough in ongoing talks of peace and reconciliation is like a drop of water in a vast desert.

The promise of these verses is that there will come a day where there is no more violence or pain; those who have chronic conditions will be healed. A day will come when there is eternal joy and sadness will be gone forever.

That day will only come for those who have been ransomed by God. Those who have trusted Jesus with their salvation as opposed to trusting themselves. Those who believe in the old, old story of the old rugged cross. A cross despised by the world, but has a wondrous attraction for us. Then one day we will replace our confidence in the cross for the reward of the peaceful Holy Way and a crown.

Read these verses slowly again. Picture yourself on this road. Notice the sights, the sounds, the smells. Taste the water, feel the breeze and perfect weather. Be in the presence of the restored, perfect home that awaits you one day, your home far away, where his glory forever you will share.

### **Saturday, August 15 - Mark 2:1-12**

We have spent a lot of time this week talking about our future home and the victory Jesus gave us over death so that we can spend eternity in heaven. However, if all we focus on is a future pardon from hell then we are missing a great victory for life today! This story today helps us to understand this. The priorities for Jesus are clear: eternal salvation is most important and that is what Jesus takes care of first in this passage. But the paralytic man is also healed from his physical infirmity in this encounter as well.

Jesus did not come just to give you eternal salvation, but he allows us salvation for today as well. His presence is with you as you go about your schedule today. He is with you protecting you. Jesus' victory on the cross is not just a future ticket to heaven, but it is a present opportunity to be safe with him today.

Pray for God to be with you today. Release your cares to him and know he is with you.

### **Sunday, August 16 - Psalm 60:11**

Human help is worthless. Give us help today O Lord!

### **WEEK 5: HOW GREAT THOU ART - THEME: THE GREATNESS OF GOD**

### **Monday, August 17 - Exodus 34:6-7**

Mercy, grace, patience, love, faithfulness, forgiver, judge. These seven attributes are given to God in Exodus 34:6-7. These verses are quoted at least in part in Numbers, Nehemiah, Psalms, Joel, Jonah, and Nahum. It's the most quoted Old Testament passage in other parts of the Old Testament.

These words of the Lord tell us in God's own words what type of God he is. All of the actions that God takes from Genesis through Revelation should be read in light of this description of God. He's merciful; he's gracious. He's patient; he's

loving. He's faithful; he's forgiving. He's judge. All are positive and only one can be detrimental.

Even when God is "not clearing the guilty," his mercy is seen. The punishment lasts to the third and fourth generation, while God's love will be shown to "a thousand" generations. Now, let me ask you a question. If one generation is faithful, this leads to love for a thousand. And if another generation is unfaithful, it leads to three or four generations of punishment. What happens when those times overlap? For example, you are faithful. But then your grandchildren are not faithful. Are your great grandchildren punished because of the sins of their parents, or are they shown steadfast love because of your faithfulness?

I belabor this point for a reason. I don't think the reward/punishment found in these verses is supposed to be prescriptive law. Instead, it is descriptive of a God who is more loving and merciful than punishing. Will he punish? Absolutely. He is just? Of course. But the nature of God is to shower his people with love and his nature is to be slow to anger first. Praise God for who he is today. Worship him because of his steadfast love and mercy toward you. Pray for those in your family who have not asked for forgiveness and are in danger of being punished by God.

## **Tuesday, August 18 - Romans 11:33-36**

These four verses leave me in awe of God. Romans 9-11 is an exceptional section of Paul's letters describing the purposes of God. Much ink has been spilled writing about these three chapters. At the end of these chapters is Romans 11:33-36. After discussing deep theological truths trying to convey to the church at Rome who God is and what his purposes are in this world, finally Paul just says "I can't describe it! God's ways are mysterious; God's wisdom is deeper

than I can comprehend. To completely figure out God is impossible. God truly is wonderfully great.” I am in awe of this statement because even Paul did not discover the full mystery of God. There is an inherent mystery of God that we will never comprehend. Any study of who God is should start with that. Knowing that, you must be willing to base your relationship with God on faith, not reason.

Faith is believing in things unseen (Heb. 11:1). No matter how intelligent you think you are or how long you have been a Christian, you will never figure out God. You must continue to have faith in the one who remains unseen. We can see the effects of God, but we do not see God. I don't understand how God works in this world, but I am glad he does. I am in awe of his handiwork, his creation. “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever, Amen.”

### **Wednesday, August 19 - Psalm 131**

In *The Treasury of David*, Charles Spurgeon writes that this psalm “is one of the shortest to read, but one of the longest to learn.” The theme of this psalm is to be humble. Eugene Peterson calls this psalm “a maintenance psalm.” A psalm to use to check how you are doing in your relationship with God? The first verse is a warning to guard against unbridled ambition and selfish pride in your life. The second verse is a warning to guard against lazy dependency on others. Meditate on this Psalm today and let's talk about the Christian characteristic of humility tonight on Facebook.

### **Thursday, August 20 - Habakkuk 3**

While originally written in Swedish in the late 19th century, *How Great Thou Art* did not become popular in English until Cliff Barrows and George Beverly Shea started singing it during Billy Graham crusades in the mid-20th century.

Today, it has become the most recorded gospel song of all time, recorded by at least 1700 different musicians according to Manna Music, the owners of the copyright to the English translation of the song. Why is this song so popular? Billy Graham is quoted as saying “The reason I like 'How Great Thou Art' is because it glorifies God. It turns Christian’s eyes toward God, rather than upon themselves.”

Turn our eyes toward God instead of looking at ourselves. Being humble servants of God instead of haughty rulers of our personal kingdoms. Habakkuk 3 is a prayer meant to be sung/spoken by the congregation during worship. It is a prayer that recognizes the greatness of God. It recognizes the power of God as seen in creation. I love the hope of the last three verses in Hab. 3:17-19. This part of the prayer states that even if God does not make the harvest come when he has the power to do so, even if there is famine and all the livestock die when God has the power to give life, I will still rejoice in the Lord.

The reason we should still rejoice in God even if our section of the world does not turn out like we would expect is that God is truly great. Read Habakkuk 3 again, out loud this time. What phrases of the power and greatness of God speak to you? Think over these phrases today and give thanks to God for how great God is.

### **Friday, August 21 - Hosea 11:1-11**

Being a parent means being filled with lots of competing emotions all at the same time. I'll give you an example from my house. We have house rules for the kids that serve one ultimate purpose: keep them safe. So we tell them “don't swing on this; don't jump off of that; don't squeeze yourself into this tight place because you will get stuck.” And then, you know what happens: they jump off that or swing on this or squeeze themselves into a tight spot and get hurt. And they scream and cry. And I want to console them in their moment of pain, scold

them for their disobedience, and have apathy thinking “well, I told you so” all at the same time.

You probably know Hosea for the use of the prophet and his wayward wife as a metaphor for God and the wayward Israel. Hosea 11 breaks from this metaphor to describe God and Israel as another metaphor: parent to child. In Hosea 11, God is running through these same emotions. He is punishing Israel for their disobedience, but continues to be with them because he is their Father. He has saved them from Egypt before, and now he will let Assyria conquer them. Punishment will come, but it will not be forever because God still loves them.

God still loves them. No matter how far you run away from God, God still loves you. Pray a prayer of thankfulness that God’s love will never give up on you. Thank God that you cannot lose God’s love like you’d lose money in the couch. God loves you and nothing can change that.

### **Saturday, August 22 - 1 Kings 19:11-13**

What is more impressive? Complete noise or stillness and silence? When I was growing up and would get in trouble (rarely happened, only once or twice), I would rather have my parents yell at me than them reprimand me softly and say they were disappointed. That tone and words would hurt more than any yelling or spanking could ever hurt. The silence was more impressive.

Elijah is not in trouble in these verses today, but the awesomeness of God shows up in the stillness of the air. The hurricane force winds which were splitting rocks were great in power, but not where God was. The terrifying, violent earthquake was not where God was. The ferocious fire came next, but was not where God was. But after the fire, there was absolute, complete silence. That was the presence of God. The silence is more powerful than any wind, earthquake, or fire. This is how God shows himself to Elijah on this day.

The majesty and greatness of God does not always show up in magnificent miracles for all the world to see. Instead, the awe of God can be seen in the small silent actions taken by a few of his followers. God's presence is not felt by millions seeing fire descend from the sky (though he could do that), but in the quiet of a house while we are alone with God. Spend some time in silence today. Listen for God's presence. It probably won't come as a violent wind, earthquake, or fire, but instead in a still small voice in your heart.

**Sunday, August 23 - Psalm 61**

Seek God's protection in your life. Cry out to him in your moment of need.