ANDREASCOURSE 4 ‘Who is God?’

Psalm 103



Intro

Psalms are reasonably well-known in our society. Psalm 23 ‘The Lord is my shepherd’ is often heard at a memorial service. People are also familiar with Psalm 100, ‘The Lord is God’, and Psalm 84, ‘The joy of worship’. Sometimes because they were taught by their parents or grandparents, sometimes because they came across them in world literature.

The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 songs. It is nearly incredible that these verses, some of them more than three thousand years old, should be so recognizable. The heights and depths of life, the common experience of all people of the world, are described in a poetic way. Especially when it comes to the relationship between man and God, and God’s relationship with people.

Enthusiasm and despair

Psalms sing of enthusiasm about God, but sometimes also describe periods of doubt. Sometimes they are real complaints and even accusations regarding God and fellow-people. There are psalms full of depression and despair, while others are full of trust and hope.
In addition, the goodness and benefits of God’s law are sung about in different psalms (Psalm 119: the longest psalm).
Furthermore, there are psalms that cry out for God’s vengeance on enemies. In short, it’s a combination of prayers, complaints, confessions, songs of praise, hymns on creation, and requests addressed to God to administer justice to the world. Out of 150 psalms, 73 are attributed to king David. Maybe more than 24 of them are versified by Asaph, a conductor who lived slightly later than David. Asaph directed choirs, mostly the descendants of Korach. The choirs lead the singing during temple services.

Great influence in history

The psalms have guided the Jewish people throughout history, even in Hitler’s concentration camps. Christians ‘inherited’ the psalms from the Jews.
Church father Augustine who lived around 400, wrote an autobiography (‘Confessions’), in which he relates numerous quotes from the psalms to his life.
Up to this day many people find solace in, and receive guidance from the psalms.

Psalm 103 is a hymn. We are going to think it over this week. How does God appear in this psalm? In which way is the psalm recognizable to us? You do know it has to do with the core of our existence: for whom or what do we exist?

Below the passages in the Bible for the next 6 days to reflect upon. That will provide enough things to talk about.

Day 1: Psalm 103: 1-5. *God: too great not to be talked about.*

- If possible, pray, try to ease your thoughts and feelings.
- Read and reread the passage, write down your own questions and views.

- Questions:

    - What reason can there be for the poet to praise the Lord? What do you think is 'the secret' of enthusiasm about God?

    - This text passage is about a lot of things God does (vs. 3-5). David has gone trough difficult situations and yet this is what he says. Can you imagine that?
      How realistic are things like 'forgiveness', 'healing' and 'being overloaded with beauty and happiness' etc. compared to your own life?

- If possible for you: end in prayer. For example compare the words from the text with your own life and present this to God.

Day 2: Psalm 103: 6-9. *God: righteous and loving.*

- Let the racket in and around you quiet down and pray if possible.
- Read and reread the passage, think over, making annotations migt help you.
- Questions:
    - As the poet ponders the path God has in mind for Israel, he mainly sees that God does justice. God can't bear what's crooked, untrue or inhuman. Surely you will encounter this yourself: injustice, indignity, intrigue. How does it affect you? Are you able to change it?
    - 'If you're not able to be angry, you won't be able to cherish'. Do you agree? Try to write down verse 8 and 9 in your own words.
- Closing prayer: Maybe you want to express some of your longing for justice and love, or ask God to show you love and justice in your life.



Day 3: Palm 103: 10-14. *Incomprehensible forgiveness.*

- Ask God for calmness, new points of view.
- Read, think, write.
- Questions:
    - Sin, blame etc. are not popular words. But they do play a part in our lives. Soaps, films and documentaries are witnesses. But is that real? Do you need forgiveness yourself? And where can you find it?

    - Just to think about: This part of the text is full of promises, about what God does, despite of what He knows about us. We don't get what we deserve.
- If possible end in prayer. Besides a standard prayer, you can take the matter of forgiveness to God in your own prayer: maybe you feel the need of healing, or maybe you have to forgive someone yourself.

Day 4: Psalm 103: 15-18. *Human fragility.*

- Bring to God what bothers you.
- Let this passage of text sink in. Put imaginary exclamation- and question marks in the text.
- Questions:
    - We're invited to think over our human fragility and vulnerability. In which part of the psalm is it highlighted?
    - What do you expect of God's faithfulness? Does God's faithfulness depend on living up to his commandments (vs. 18)?
- Think about the question: what does God expect from me? You can also write your prayer down if you find it difficult to speak out loud.

Day 5: Psalm 103: 19- 22. *God's throne is established.*

- Maybe you can say thanks for being able to come into His Presence, away from the bustle.
- Read and 'ruminate'.
- Questions:
    - As King, God rules over everything (vs. 19). That's a statement of faith. Would you repeat the poet? Why would you or wouldn't you?
    - Everything and everyone is summoned to praise God. Enthusiasm about God is contagious. Does this enthusiasm effect on you? In what sense?
- Would you like to ask God to show you some signs of His Kingdom in your life? Maybe you want to pray for new or renewed enthusiasm about God.

Day 6: Psalm 103: 1- 22. Review: *God's greatness is in his steadfast love.*



- Pray, bring back to God what kept you occupied today.
- Questions:
    - 'Count your blessings' is what people say sometimes. That's what happens in the psalm. Which list of things to be grateful for would you make? What would you like to thank God about?
    - There are a lot of things mentioned to thank God for. At the same time God wants something from us. Can you name anything from this psalm? What does God want, and what is your response to this?
- Verse 5: 'He satisfies you with good'. Well, that is something! Maybe you have a completely different experience. What would you like to be fulfilled? Can you pray for it?