

Listen to God – A Prayer
Study Outline – Grace Bible Chapel
Psalm 81:1-16
Sunday – March 12th, 2017

CONTEXT of Psalm 81: - The Psalms of Asaph (Psalm 73-83) fit together in a chain. Israel is the peculiar people of God. No other people on the earth have had the privileges & promises made to them like Israel. As a result the instruction, within the bounds of this context, is conducive & instructive to all who love God for all time.

The introduction (Vs. 1-5) summons the priests & people to a joyful festival, commemorative of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, but also setting forth the lessons the deliverance teaches. The Feast of Tabernacles has been widely accepted as intended, chiefly on the ground that the first day of the month in which it occurred was celebrated by the blowing of trumpets, as the beginning of the civil year. The exhortations and promises of the latter portion (Vs. 6-16) are relevant to listening to God in the festival (Vs. 1-5). There is no more natural way of preparing for worship than to remember lessons warning against practical departure from God in the many activities and storms of life. The means to not depart is diligent effort in listening to Him. Similar application applies to us today, as it did to the Jews.

In verses 6-10 Israel is reminded of how God has cared for Israel and their covenant responsibility to live in listening obedience to Him for His promises of their on-going care. Finally, in verses 11-16 the Psalmist states that Israel has not listened to God, but the psalmist makes the prayerful plea with the gracious promise if they will, God will yet bring well-being to them in the most glorious manner. We are reminded today of the practical need to listen to God by being under the consistent counsel of His Word, and living our lives according to His promises and His warnings. If we have not been listening, than our listening needs to begin today!

Introduction:

- This prayer is about listening to God – it begins with listening to God thru worship music (Vs. 1-5) notice Vs. 5 “I heard a language that I did not know” – this language was associated with being in Egypt under a foreign tongue – how much better to be under the language or communication of God.
 - Vs. 8 - “Oh hear, & listen to Me!”
 - Vs. 11 – “My people did not listen”
 - Vs. 13 – “Oh that My people would listen to Me.”
- The Revelation speaks “he that has an ear, let him hear” (8 times). Only those who have “ears to hear” have the ability to be instructed.
- The phrase “not listen” is used 139 times in the Bible – look at 1 John 4:6 – the principle – only those of God (born again) truly listen with this kind of listening.
 - John 8:42-44 – “cannot hear” – they can hear His words, but they are meaningless to them. Same thing seen in 1 Cor. 2:14 “foolishness to him.”

Point: Regardless of our inability, God can & does make some able & willing to hear Him – the question is are we one of those listening to God?

I. Cherish worship (81:1-5)

- Vs. 1 - Begins “sing for joy” – Christianity as original Judaism is a religion of joy. The Psalmist is speaking of genuine gladness, delight, satisfaction – the place of worship should be the happiest place for you! Why?- we have the true God!
 - It is here you can express your love. Do you love God?
 - It is here you can meet around the truth. Do you love truth?
 - It is here you can be with God's people. It is a little taste of heaven on earth.

Point: This is the place of priority from the cradle to the grave – as long as one has ability to show up – this is the place of priority before God. This is an essential place.

- “shout joyfully” – this is the place for full expression – no holding back.
- “God of Jacob” – the true God, the only God, the covenant God.
- Vs. 2-3 – notice he brings in the instruments used by skillful musicians of that time to make the purest / sweetest God honoring sounds.

- “trumpet at the new moon” – this was obviously a festival – a time of joy, and particularly a time for thanksgiving. The festival’s were the Jewish thanksgivings to God.
 - “feast day” – some think this to be Passover, others the feast of tabernacles.
 - Regardless, it was a prescribed festive day to praise and thank God.

Point: Today our days of thanksgiving are when we gather to worship, and we meet around the table of the Lord symbolically reminding us of His dying on behalf of sinners, and rejoicing in His great salvation.

- **Vs. 4** – “statute for Israel” – this means it was a formal agreement, special to Israel, and that which is lasting & valuable.
 - Who was this for? “an ordinance of the God of Jacob” – ordinance is an established ceremony perpetually done for honor to the object of the ordinance – the object is God Himself in thanksgiving.
- **Vs. 5** – “He” – that is God established it.
 - “for a testimony in Joseph...land of Egypt” – the idea of using Joseph (see 80:1) is because of what God did thru Joseph in sparing His people. Joseph here represents God’s care for Israel.
 - “I heard...did not know” – he is referring to Joseph in Egypt & how they were present in a country that spoke a language unfamiliar to them. God spared them there & delivered them (Acts 7:6 Stephen’s sermon).

Point: There is a correlation to our status as Christians in a foreign land (Phil 3:20) – our thinking, speech, and language is therefore foreign to those of the world.

II. Consider history (81:6-10)

- **Vs. 6** - “burden” is the terrible task of making bricks as slaves (Ex 1:11-14; 5:4-17), & the basket was that used to carry the bricks. I remind you they were commanded to make bricks without straw, & they worked under these conditions 7 days a week – the very purpose God gave them a new law with a 7th day rest – the Sabbath was a blessing of God’s kindness by comparison to Pharaoh.
- **Vs. 7** - “you called in trouble” – God rescued – He delivered them from Egypt.
 - How long did it take – 400 years, but He delivered. God does not work according to our time schedule, but according to His. It is always the end result that matters.
 - “hiding place of thunder” – (Ex. 19:17-19) - he gave a real reply - to their prayer - at Sinai, when he gave them his law & recognized them as his covenant people – no small thing– the chosen of all on the earth (Deut 7:6-7)!
 - “proved...waters Meribah” – (Ex. 17:5-7) – He proved His glory, power, and concern for them when Moses under God’s power and command brought water from a rock – a glorious miracle.
- **Vs. 8-9** – This is the key verses – the command is - listen to God – listen here means more than ears mechanically receiving the vibration of noise, but taking what God says to heart so that the person reacts to the Word of God in trusting obedience – hearing, changing, following, being obedient.
 - What God requires of them is found then in Verse 9 – there must be no idolatry. Ultimately, this is no different than the commands of Deut 6, & the NT commands to “love God.” God must be first & only love as Lord.
- **Vs. 10** – the reason you are to listen & obey – He is the only God, the delivering God – knowing Him, trusting Him, living for Him makes all the difference.
 - “Open...fill it” – this is a great picture & promise – like a little bird being fed. We need God, & He is willing to bless innumerable – we must serve Him.

Point: Although these were covenant people – the principle is still present today – we need to live for God, obey Him, serve Him, & He will take care of His own!

III. Catastrophe for not listening (81:11-12)

- **Vs. 11** – Here is the catastrophe – they did not listen, & because they did not listen they did not obey – you cannot obey without listening - both are under the definition of this type of listening. Listening & obedience go together.
 - “My voice” – in those days the Lord spoke to the people through prophets.
- As a result – “gave them over” – should remind us of Romans 1. This is a form of removal of God’s care or daily grace. God gave them over to:
 - 1st – “the stubbornness of their heart” – they got to indulge in their own wrong directed wishes, like a child who thinks they know more than their parents.
 - 2nd - “to walk in their own devices” – this is the height of arrogance & idolatry. It is thinking one does not need God or His wisdom. God would allow them to act contrary to Him & wisdom & was therefore not the author of their sin; he left them to the lusts of their own hearts and the counsels of their own heads; and their blood upon their own heads.

Point: Nothing is more tragic than those who purposely leave God out of their life, decisions, & trust really in themselves above God – it is idolatry, self-destruction, & irrational suicide.

IV. Cry to Listen & Return (81:13-16)

- Here is the last plea, & again a principle of the long-suffering patience of God & His willingness to forgive & restore.
- **Vs. 13** – “Oh” expresses the desire of God (Ezk. 18:23). God is gracious – He offers blessing & well being, but man in their stubbornness naturally rejects God’s offers.
- **Vs. 14** – What would happen if Israel would simply turn to the Lord? By-the-way the history of Israel shows this very thing. When Israel would turn to God, God always acted in glorious grace (2 Kings 22:18-20) God’s response to Josiah.
- Under the covenant of God – what would He do for Israel:
 - “Quickly subdue their enemies”
 - “turn My hand against their adversaries”
- **Vs. 15** – difficult passage.
 - Even if it were possible for those who hate the Lord to be obedient – if that were possible, their time would be forever. In other words, if those who really have no respect or love for God would still be obedient, God would act in grace toward them indefinitely (He is not addressing eternal life – but their time on the earth).

Point: God is addressing His commitment to the covenant – whereby He made promises to bless Israel if they would act in obedience to Him (Deut 28-29). He is saying, even if your heart was not really right, but somehow you were still obedient I would bless you.

Point: This is a principle I believe holds true today. Those who may for reasons other than a saving relationship with God who do morally well, and follow biblical principles of right & wrong will have a better life than those who engage in reckless corruption.

- **Vs. 16** – What is God’s willingness to Israel? His arms are wide open to them, and to us today! The problem of unwillingness is not with God, it is with man.
 - “I would” – the blessings promised from simple faith & submission to God cannot be counted – how illogic it is to rebel against our creator.
 - Going back to verse 13 – blessing begins with listening to God & following Him in obedience. This was true of Israel under the covenant, but it is also a reality today. The difference between having Christ Jesus & not having Him is the difference between everything & nothing – glory or hell!

Closing: (Discussion)

- **What caught your attention in this passage?** God’s willingness in relation to man, God’s stipulation to be heard & worshipped. God’s willingness to bless!

- ***What does this passage tell us about God?*** He desires to be worshipped. He desires & hears our prayers. He desires us to hear Him. He will not ignore or brush over disobedience, idolatry, and the hateful actions of man.
- ***What does this passage say about mankind?*** People will not naturally listen to God even after receiving His blessings. People are naturally stubborn of heart.
- ***Based on this passage, what should you & I do?*** Worship God. Be in His Word continually (listen to Him). Don't pretend or feign allegiance to God – be instead in total allegiance to God. This requires continuously taking in His Word, being people of prayer, and choosing His way over our way.