

Week 27—Learning Joy in Service

Psalms 42-45; 84; 87

Summary and Goal:

The Psalms written by the Sons of Korah give us an encouraging ending to a depressing story. The Sons of Korah turn away from the wicked deeds of their ancestors by accepting their role as servants who lead others to worship the Lord. From their Psalms, we can learn what it means to see the beauty of the Lord, seek to be in His presence, and place our trust in Him.

Main Passages:

Psalms 42-45 (*Chronological Bible July 4th, pg. 810-814*)

Psalms 84 (*Chronological Bible July 5th, pg. 817-818*)

Psalms 87 (*Chronological Bible July 5th, pg. 818-819*)

Session Outline:

1. Worship the Lord by Recognizing His Goodness
2. Worship the Lord by Desiring to Be in His Presence
3. Worship the Lord by Placing Trust Only in Him

Session in A Sentence:

We do not have to repeat the sins of those who came before us. We can find joy in serving the Lord when we worship Him and place our trust in Him.

Kingdom Connection:

God's Kingdom requires all kinds of people to accomplish His purposes. One of the most important things that any one of us can do in life is to discover the gifts and the purpose that God has assigned us, and to obediently do those things. When we are walking in God's calling for our life, we find joy, meaning, fulfilment, and we come to see the beauty of His kingdom.

Introduction:

Fyodor Dostoevsky is one of the greatest writers in the history of literature. His most well-known works were *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *Demons*, and my favorite *The Brothers Karamazov* (I highly recommend reading this book if you have the time on your hands). *The Brothers Karamazov* is a gut-wrenching story about three brothers wrestling with the fallout of growing up under selfish, greedy, and lecherous father. The oldest son Dimitri, while kindhearted, finds himself falling into some of the same sensual and hedonistic habits of his father. The second son, Ivan, is a brilliant man who sees the suffering of the world (not least the suffering caused by his father) and becomes cynical about God and the world that He created. The youngest son, Alexei, holds a deep faith in God that sustains him as he helps his brothers deal with the messy problems that come as a result of their thoughts and actions. The brothers wrestle and struggle immensely to find meaning, purpose, and joy, all because their father set such a terrible example for them.

Many of us have experienced the painful reality of dealing with the fallout from the sin of those who came before us. Many children have been harmed by the foolish habits of their fathers and mothers, forcing them to make the choice of whether to let those sins overtake them or to run away from them. This week we are reading from the Psalms that are attributed to the ‘Sons of Korah’. They, like the brothers in *The Brothers Karamazov*, were affected greatly by the sins of their ancestors. Numbers 16-17 tell us the story of their ancestor, Korah, who sinned greatly before God and Moses. Korah and his family, the Kohathites, were a sub tribe of the Levites. The Kohathites were one of the groups in charge of leading the people of Israel toward worshiping the Lord. In particular, the Kohathites carried the holy things of the Temple on their shoulders as the Israelites moved from place to place.

Korah was unhappy with the job of his family, and he was unhappy that Moses and Aaron had such a high place of esteem with the Lord. He was jealous, so he took a group of men and said to Moses and Aaron, “*You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?*” Korah in his arrogance thought that he was just as holy and important as Moses and Aaron, and he cynically thought that they were hogging power and esteem for themselves at the expense of other worthy men, namely himself. Korah thought that leading others to worship was an instrument of power and prestige, and he did not understand that Moses and Aaron were in their positions because they were set apart by the Lord. He was not only rejecting Moses and Aaron, but he was rejecting the plan and purposes of God. God punished Korah and his fellow rebellious friends by having them swallowed up into the Earth as an example. In spite of this, the children of Korah were not punished, and they continued to serve as gatekeepers to the Tabernacle. Later, King David arranged it so that the sons of Korah would be the gatekeepers in the Temple when it was finally built.

The Psalms that come from the Sons of Korah show us the worship of people who had learned from the arrogance and the sin of their ancestor. Reading and understanding their Psalms can help us understand what it means to truly worship the Lord and find our hope in His presence alone.

1. Worship by Recognizing the Goodness of God

⁶ Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;

A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.

⁷ You love righteousness and hate wickedness. Psalm 45:6-7

¹¹ For the LORD God is a sun and shield;

The LORD will give grace and glory;

No good thing will He withhold

From those who walk uprightly.

¹² O LORD of hosts,

Blessed is the man who trusts in You! Psalm 84:11-12 (Chronological Bible, July 5th, pg. 817-818)

What does it mean?

The first thing that the Sons of Korah came to realize is that God is truly good. His plans are good, His character is good, and He is the only one who is truly righteous and Holy. Korah's problem in Numbers was that He did not understand the goodness of God. He thought that leading the people in worship was an act of power, influence, and prestige. In reality, we worship the Lord because of His attributes. God is worthy of worship because He is pure in motive, He is kind, and He is patient. God is powerful, but His character is not defined by the use of raw power, it is instead defined by the perfect love, wisdom, and community that He experiences in Himself. If Korah had truly understood the goodness of God, then he would have been content with the lot that God had given to him as one who leads others into the worship of good and Holy God.

The sons of Korah understand the goodness of God, and they worship Him for it in their Psalms. They recognize the righteousness, the justice, the grace, and the glory of the Lord. The Lord is good, and He is worthy to be praised.

Application:

When we read the rules and requirements that come from the Bible, it can be easy to think that God has given us a bunch of arbitrary rules in order to make life harder. The truth is that God's commands for us are not put in place to make life harder, but instead to allow us to flourish. God's nature is good, and He wants us to experience joy and fulfillment. God calls us away from sin because He wants us to live, and He wants us to avoid the pain and destruction that come when we walk away from Him. Any time that we don't understand what God is doing or why He is doing it, we must remember that God is good, and His plans for His people are good. Learning to trust in the goodness of the Lord makes life much more enjoyable and manageable, even in the most difficult times.

2. Worship by Desiring to Be in God's Presence

How lovely is Your tabernacle,

O LORD of hosts!

² *My soul longs, yes, even faints
For the courts of the LORD;
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.*

¹⁰ *For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.* Psalm 84:1-2; 10 (*Chronological Bible, July 5th, pg. 817-818*)

*As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So pants my soul for You, O God.*

² *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?* Psalm 42:1-2 (*Chronological Bible, July 4th, pg. 810*)

What does it mean?

Another tragic element from the story of Korah is that a man who was tasked with handling the holy things of God missed the importance of what he was doing. By delicately handling the holy things from the tabernacle (the ark of the covenant among them), the Kohathites were supposed to display to the people of Israel the importance and the weightiness of God's presence. Because of his greed, selfishness, and ambition, Korah reduced the presence of God to a simple act of power that he could exploit for his own gain. The Sons of Korah did not take on this same quality of their ancestor, and they approached their job of keeping the Tabernacle gate with great joy. In reading their Psalms, we see an intense desire from the Sons of Korah to experience the presence of the Lord.

In Psalm 84, the Sons of Korah express that the house of the Lord is a beautiful and lovely place. They tell the Lord that they long to be in His presence, because even being a servant in the House of the Lord is better than being a king in the tents of wickedness. In Psalm 42, the Sons of Korah use the metaphor of thirst to explain their desire to be with the Lord. Spending time in His presence is the thing that sustains and keeps them alive.

Illustration:

In Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Book I, lines 263), Satan utters one of the most famous lines in all of Western Literature. He says "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven". This line gives an apt description of the state of our hearts when we turn away from God. When we sin, we are essentially declaring that we want to place ourselves in the place of God. Korah was dissatisfied with his role as a servant among the rest of the Levites, and he wanted to be great in the eyes of the world like Moses. This attitude of wanting to escape serving the Lord leads us straight to the same place as Satan in *Paradise Lost*, Hell itself. Many people rebel against God and His laws and statutes because they want to be free; however, true freedom is found when we find our place in Him. Sitting at the feet of the Lord in His presence is where we find joy, freedom, love, and purpose.

3. Worship the Lord by Placing Trust Only in Him

*¹¹ Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God;
For I shall yet praise Him,
The help of my countenance and my God. Psalm 42:11 (Chronological Bible, July 4th, pg. 810)*

*¹ We have heard with our ears, O God,
Our fathers have told us,
The deeds You did in their days,
In days of old:
² You drove out the nations with Your hand,
But them You planted;
You afflicted the peoples, and cast them out.
³ For they did not gain possession of the land by their own sword,
Nor did their own arm save them;
But it was Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your countenance,
Because You favored them.*

*⁶ For I will not trust in my bow,
Nor shall my sword save me.
⁷ But You have saved us from our enemies,
And have put to shame those who hated us.
⁸ In God we boast all day long,
And praise Your name forever. Psalm 44:1-3; 6-8 (Chronological Bible, July 4th, pg. 811-812)*

What does it mean?

Recognizing the goodness of the Lord and desiring to be in His presence are two internal aspects of coming to the Lord in worship. The place where the rubber meets the road is the act of trusting only in the Lord. Korah obviously placed his trust in achieving greater notoriety among the people of Israel. He placed his trust in his own worthiness, his own pride, and his own greed. Because of this, he was swallowed up by the Earth. The Sons of Korah did not follow in the footsteps of their ancestor; they placed their trust only in the Lord. In their Psalms we see moments of worry because of their enemies, but even so they placed their hope, trust, and confidence in the provision of the Lord. They listened to the stories of God's actions in the past, they believed in the power and the goodness of the Lord, and they placed their trust in Him.

Application:

For thousands of years, humans have been making the same mistakes repeatedly. One of the roots of these mistakes is that we tend to look for security, fulfillment, happiness, and satisfaction

from things other than God Himself. This is always a losing proposition. People have always tried to find meaning and purpose through wealth, pleasure, approval from other people, power, and a whole list of other futile endeavors. If you find yourself putting your trust in something else other than the Lord, whether it is your family, your country, your political party, your social situation, or anything else, then turn away from that as quickly as possible, because it is always a dead end.

God Speaks His promise of a King who is God, whose throne will last forever.

God Acts for His people by listening to their prayers, being their shield and lifting their downcast souls.

God Reveals His faithfulness, mercy, and generosity as He brings redemption, joy, and a new legacy for the sons of Korah.