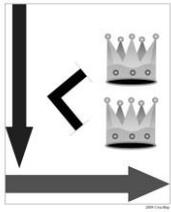


Week Twenty-seven: The King's Singers—Learning Joy in Service - Psalm 84; 87; 42-45



Overview

The roots of today's lesson go back 700 years. In the **Exodus Era**, God had assigned each tribe its camping space around the Tabernacle—Judah to the east, closest to the Tabernacle entrance, with other tribes arranged in armies, clockwise in order (Num. 2). None of the tribes lived in direct contact with the Tabernacle, however; God reserved that honor for the Levites. The sub-tribe of Gershon camped to the west (3:23), behind the Tabernacle; Kohath to the south (3:29); Merari to the north (3:35); and the sons of Aaron to the east, in front of the entrance (3:38).

Each Levite group had a distinct area of service as the Israelites carried the Tabernacle from place to place in the desert of Sinai. Before breaking down the Tabernacle, the sons of Aaron would enter and cover the articles inside the Tabernacle with special wrappings, to protect them from being seen or touched, so that the Kohathites, who would carry them, would not die (4:1-15, 17-20). The Kohathites carried the holy things on their shoulders (7:9). Outside of these duties, the Levites were to serve and assist the sons of Aaron in the duties of the Tabernacle (18:1-4). In return they would receive the tithes of Israel and special cities and fields throughout the land of Canaan.

The Levites' work may not have been glamorous, but it was necessary, helpful, and honorable—except according to Korah. Numbers 16-17 records his attempt to usurp Moses and Aaron's positions before God. Korah, a Kohathite, rebelled against Moses' authority, claiming that all Israelites were equally holy and worthy to lead. In a miracle of judgment, God opened the earth to swallow him and the men who had joined his mutiny. "Nevertheless," God's Word says, "the children of Korah did not die" (26:11). According to 1 Chronicles 9:17-19, they served as gatekeepers to the Tabernacle and later to the camps of the children of Levi living in Jerusalem.

Four hundred or so years later, recorded in 1 Chronicles 25-26, as David was arranging for the building of the Temple, he also assigned duties to everyone who would serve in the Temple. Guess who became gatekeepers? The sons of Korah (1 Chron. 9:22-31; 26:1)

Now, around 716 BC, Hezekiah reigns. He has had the Temple cleaned and repaired for service, and he has reestablished the service of all of the Levites in the same responsibilities David had assigned them. He has reestablished the Passover, which has not been celebrated since the days of Solomon (2 Chron. 30:26). He has returned to his roots.

Hezekiah's passion for God also includes compiling the Scriptures. Proverbs 25-31 represent a collection of Solomon's sayings that Hezekiah's scholars have put together (Solomon had spoken 3000 proverbs and written 1005 songs—1 Kings 4:32). Hezekiah also returns to Israel's songs—which include psalms of the sons of Korah.

Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to identify aspects of the ministry of the sons of Korah that allowed them to learn to serve not merely with obedience but with joy.

Key Truths

God's plans are not just for today; they are for generations. Man, however, sees only today.

God's intention for service is that people learn things about Him by obedience—things they could never learn otherwise.

Today's faithful, joyful service touches generations far into the future. God's economy wastes nothing.

God redeems people from a legacy of faithlessness and gives them a new purpose, a new identity, and a new legacy as they serve Him.

Lesson Outline - Psalms 84; 87; 42-45

The Sons of Korah have come a long way from their father's legacy. Seven hundred years after Korah's rebellion, his sons *still* aren't priests—but they have never mutinied. Instead they have learned a holy perspective, a habit of prayer, and a heavenly promise. Their psalms ring out with their joy in serving God.

1. **A Holy Perspective (Ps. 84, 87).** Korah could not grasp the beauty of serving God in the duties God had given him. He missed out on so many blessings His sons, faithful in their duties, experience something Korah could never have fathomed.

- A hunger for God: "My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (84:2). These men see God's house from the perspective of gatekeepers. God's tabernacle is "lovely," and His courts are worth fainting over—but the best thing about God's house is God himself, and these men practically hurt for His presence. They call blessings on those who dwell in His house, because they get to praise Him (4). They call blessings on those who come as pilgrims to experience God's presence in Zion (5-7). As gatekeepers, all of the people who come to meet with God in the Temple pass by them. They have a unique perspective on the worship of God as they see the joy of His worshippers and the beautiful atonement provided in His sacrifices.
- Deep contentment in God's presence: "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" (10). Korah and his fellow mutineers dwelt in the tents of wickedness in the desert. How much better, Korah's sons reflect, to spend *just one day* in God's house than any three years elsewhere. The presence of God has added a phenomenal richness to their lives. They have also learned something of God's character: "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" (11). Because God does not withhold good things from those who follow Him, the sons of Korah can trust Him when He lets them be gatekeepers instead of priests. They experience His goodness as gatekeepers, and they can assert, "O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You" (12).
- Identity based on God's love: "The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob . . . and of Zion it will be said, 'This one and that one were born in her; and the Most High Himself shall establish her.' The LORD will record, when He registers the peoples: 'This one was born there'" (87:2, 5-6). What is so special to the sons of Korah about Zion? God's love. What better place could there be, to be born and to live, but in the place of God's love? To the sons of Korah, this is better than to live anywhere else in Jacob (2), and it is something to be boasted of before the nations (4). The sons of Korah could identify themselves by their jobs, as many people do, but their deepest foundation of identity is that they are loved by God.

2. A Habit of Prayer (Ps. 42-44). One of the beauties of the Psalms is the sheer range of emotion they express. These writers were real people; they shared struggles common to us all. And what did they do with these struggles? They learned how to pray:

- In times of discouragement (Ps. 42-43) - The refrain of these two psalms is, “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” (42:5, 11; 43:5). Psalm 42 records several aspects of discouragement: a parched soul (1-2), a mournful spirit (3a), others’ misunderstanding or lack of sympathy (3b), and a loss of joy in worship (4). The writer also expresses common questions: “I will say to

God my Rock, ‘**Why have You forgotten me?** Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?’” (9, emphasis added). He learns to dwell on what God has done in the past (6), though he experiences a deep inner desolation, well past words (7). As all believers do, the writer walks through the dark valley between feeling and promise. He speaks of the future, when “the LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me—a prayer to the God of my life” (8), and looks forward to the time when God’s light and truth restore him to glad worship (43:3-4). “I shall *yet* praise Him,” he concludes, for God is still “the help of my countenance, and my God” (43:5).

- In times of doubt (Ps. 44) - the writers pray from the canyon between promise and deliverance. Psalm 44:1-3 records what the sons of Korah have *heard* from their fathers: God’s deeds in the past (1), His casting out the nations and planting His people (2), and His favor, evidenced by powerful action on His people’s behalf (3). Verses 9-22 record severe confusion as the sons of Korah try to reconcile what they’ve heard that God has done with what is happening in their land. It looks to them like God has “cast [them] off and put [them] to shame” (9); they even accuse God of sleeping (23). This prayer does not end with a clear, sweet resolution, but it is desperately real in its interaction with God.

3. A Heavenly Promise (Ps. 45; Heb. 1:8-9). Had the sons of Korah shared in their father’s legacy of rebellion, they too would have perished in the wilderness. God spared them, however, because He intended to add them to a much greater legacy—people who had received promises about the redemption to come. Messianic promises tend to run along two tracks—the Suffering Servant or the Coming King. The wedding song of Psalm 45 beautifully records the latter in a joyful proclamation. “My heart is overflowing with a good theme,” the psalmist says (45:1). What rapturous joy he experiences as he begins to recite poetry about the greatest King the world has ever known. Not all descriptions of kings are good, but for *this* King, the psalmist sings, “My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.” How do we know that this is about Jesus? The writer of Hebrews quotes Psalm 45:6-7 when talking of the Son’s superiority to all of the angels: “But to the Son He says: ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore

God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.” What a privilege, to bear such a prophecy

Conclusion - When Korah rebelled against Moses’ leadership in the wilderness, Moses asked him, “Hear now, you sons of Levi: Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, **to bring you near to Himself**, to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; and that **He has brought you near to Himself**, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you?” (Num. 16:8-10, emphasis added). From an earthly perspective, Korah’s service did not look like nearness to God; because he rejected the task that

God had given him, he never got to experience that nearness. God spared the sons of Korah, however, because He had a plan to bless Israel, Judah, and every believer through their songs. Because they were obedient at God’s gates, they experienced God in a special way. As they served God faithfully, God indeed brought them near to Himself, and He touched generations through them—we sing their songs today.

Application - What does this lesson teach us about God? Man? Sin? Redemption? *God’s call to service may never look glamorous, but obedience always results in knowing Him better. Faithfulness opens the door to joy as we see Him act.*

It is easy to focus on the task God has given someone else, to want the place of prominence, or to assume we could do it better. When we seek God’s will and serve where He has put us, however, we learn His character in a deeper way—and open the door to bless generations after us.

God does not withhold any good thing from those who fear Him. Those who follow God can live in genuine contentment, not because they have things, but because they genuinely trust God to give them what they need—or not to give them what they don’t need.

God’s presence in life makes all the difference for the believer’s perspective. God’s children find their worth and identity in His love.

Summary

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.

Discussion Questions

What do the sons of Korah learn about God in their time of service? What do you think they saw in the Temple as they kept its gates? What happened there on a daily basis?

How did the songs of the sons of Korah affect Israel? What messages did Israel receive from God through their ministry?

What can the psalms of the sons of Korah teach us about praying through times of depression, disappointment, and fear?