**Know God’s covenant love** 23/7/23 dkm

Read: Psalm 25, Romans 12

Text: Psalm 25

Psalms: 146, 25:1-7, 111:4-10, 72:17-19

The OT is written in Hebrew, as chapter 1 of the Westminster Confession reminds us. If you want to start reading Hebrew one of the first words you may want to learn is ‘*chesed*’. This word occurs 240 times in the OT, most often in the Psalms. In Psalm 25 it occurs three times. This word is variously translated as steadfast love, loving-kindness, mercy, or faithfulness, although the translation I like is covenant love. One scholar wrote, ‘The entire history of Yahweh’s covenant relationship with Israel can be summed up in terms of ‘*chesed*’.

God has always related to his people in terms of a covenant. We relate to one another in covenant terms in marriage; we vow to love and be faithful to the other person, whatever happens in life. The covenant the Lord makes with us is not a covenant between equals of course. The Lord calls us to himself and promises to be our God and make us his people on his terms. Having brought us into this covenant relationship with himself, the Lord does require fidelity and obedience from us.

God delivered his chosen people out of Egypt; he set his love upon them by divine choice, not because of anything attractive in them (Deut 7:7). But having chosen them and delivered them from slavery in Egypt, he gave through Moses covenant commands to obey. These commands governed their relationship to the Lord and to one another. Breaking a command of God is called sin. In this psalm we hear David referring to his sins and asking the Lord for forgiveness (25:7, 11).

David, the king of Israel, wrote this psalm, as indicated in the title. It is what is called an acrostic in which every line begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet- with some modifications. It is called a psalm of lament and of penitence, but is also a psalm of trust in the Lord, trust that the Lord will be faithful to his covenant promise. The opening verses are a prayer that God not remember his sins but delivers him from his enemies. He speaks of being lonely and afflicted (25:16-18), but gives no specifics. David had many enemies who were ready to gloat over any affliction which he suffered.

In the second portion of the psalm he tells us a number of attributes of God, in particular his covenant faithfulness, and reminds us of our covenant obligations. In the third section he returns to prayer: ‘Turn yourself to me and have mercy on me’ (25:16). David does not tell us if the Lord answered his prayer but he ends in a positive spirit of waiting with hope upon the Lord.

In his death on the cross, Jesus established a new covenant with us in his own blood (Luke 22:20). Like David, our salvation is of grace, not of ourselves; it is the gift of God (25:5, Eph 2:8). We are justified by grace alone through faith alone. But the new covenant, like the old, involves covenant obligations: ‘If anyone loves me he will keep my words’ said Jesus (John 14:23). David understood the covenant relationship the Lord had established with him, and so must we. We can learn from this psalm some important features of this relationship.

**1. Trust**

This psalm begins, ‘O my God, I trust in you; let me not be ashamed’, and it ends with similar words (25:1, 20). Trust is based on knowledge as well as experience. You trust your spouse because of what you learned about him/her, maybe from other people, before you entered into marriage, and your trust has deepened based on your ongoing experiences of love and trustworthiness. In our very salvation we learned a lot about the God of our salvation. Since the just and holy God gave himself in his Son to die for our sins we can hardly doubt his love for us.

Our sins made us enemies of God yet he overlooked our sin to make us his friend. Actually, he did not overlook our sin but took the penalty due to us upon himself so as to be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom 3:26). God remained holy and just even as he removed our sin from us, washing us clean in the blood of Jesus Christ. David did not make light of his sin. He knew his sin was serious and asked forgiveness ‘for your name’s sake’ (25:11). Sin is against God and dishonours his name even more than our own name. David pleaded that his enemies not bring shame upon his own name, but especially not upon the name of the Lord (25:2, 3). Covering up sin and refusing to confess dishonours the God who has made the most wonderful provision for forgiveness in the blood of his only begotten and beloved Son.

David knew that the Lord knows everything, past, present and future, yet asks the Lord not to remember the sins of his youth, but to remember his mercy and covenant love. We tend to remember the faults of others but God chooses to forget our faults. He does so by remembering that we are dust, and by remembering his covenant love (Ps 103:14). In his love he drew us to himself and made us his children. What father focusses on the faults of his children?

‘Do not put your trust in princes; mortal man who cannot save’- these are the words of the metrical version of Psalm 146:3. David was a king with every reason to trust in his own sword and his army; but no, he put his trust in the Lord. No sword, no mortal man, no riches, and no good works, can save a soul from death. David experienced God’s help time and again during the many years he spent on the run from King Saul. He refused to take matters into his own hands but trusted himself into the hands of the Lord. ‘Good and upright is the Lord’ (25:8).

David’s role within the covenant was to fear the Lord, not man (25:12, 14). The Lord confides in those who fear him. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Ps 111:10). With those who fear the Lord he will show his covenant (25:14). Relationships are not static. Relationships either grow or deteriorate; how is your relationship with the Lord? The more we trust in the Lord and the more we fear or reverence his holy name, the more we will know and appreciate the wonderful covenant love of the Lord. ‘My eyes are ever towards the Lord’ said David (25:15). If you only have eyes for your spouse your relationship will flourish. The psalmist said, ‘Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides you’ (Ps 73:25).

David’s trust in the Lord resulted in patience, in patient waiting upon the Lord. He knew God is faithful to his covenant promises and to his covenant people, so he chose to wait upon the Lord; ‘On you I wait all the day’ (25:5, 21). Waiting is not easy. Recall how Saul gave up waiting for the prophet of God to show up when he felt threatened (1Sam 13). David confessed his loneliness and the pain arising from his affliction but he did not give up. At the end of the psalm he is still waiting on the Lord. To wait we must adopt a positive attitude, an attitude of hope. Hope is a wonderful covenant blessing. To be without God is to be without hope (Eph 2:12). Those who have this blessed hope in the Lord, the hope of the resurrection, are able to wait upon the Lord like David (1Cor 15:19).

**2. Guidance**

Another of the blessings that come to us from being in this covenant relationship with the Lord is that of guidance. In this aspect the relationship is more like father and son than husband and wife. David prays, ‘Show me your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me’ (25:4, 5). David was in difficulty and needed help or guidance. Maybe it was sickness or maybe it was running from Saul and not knowing what to do next, or maybe it was after he sinned and his son conspired against him- although he seems to have prayed less in those days. I am sure you have been in situations where you did not know what to do next or who to turn to for help. Maybe you are in such a situation now. Are you praying the words given by the Lord here in this psalm?

When Jesus went through the towns and villages of Israel preaching the kingdom of God and healing the sick, he saw people as harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Mat 9:36). Before the Lord saved us we were such people, lost and helpless men and women. Sin cuts us off from God who is wisdom, who is our guide and our helper. When we believed in Jesus we were given the Spirit of truth to guide and help us (John 14:16-18). God by his Spirit guides us in the way of truth and steadfast love (25:10).

Under the new covenant we have the benefit of seeing the Son of God walking in perfect obedience to the will of God; which is why David, like Abraham, ‘saw my day and was glad’ (John 8:56). We are told that God has a good, acceptable, and perfect will for us (Rom 12:2). What is God’s will for us? Paul does not elaborate in this verse but in Thessalonians he writes, ‘This is the will of God, your sanctification’ (1Thess 4:3). He goes on to speak about moral imperatives. God’s will, first and foremost, is that you obey his commands. Moreover, ‘Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever’ (Shorter Catechism Q1).

David knew God had a will for him, especially as king of Israel, and that God’s will was perfect. He asked God whether or not he should go into battle and the Lord answered him, even giving him strategies to follow (2Sam 5:19, 23). It is right to ask the Lord to guide us about major decisions in life like careers, jobs, marriage, travels etc. But we must be walking humbly before him and in obedience to his commands when we ask. ‘The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way… to such as keep his covenant’ (25:9,10). Note that in verse 4 it is written ‘ways’ and ‘paths’ in the plural so God’s guidance is not necessarily with detail in minor matters. Being humble is not a minor matter because God opposes the proud, so do not expect his guidance without humbling yourself before him. The Lord teaches those who fear him and walk in his way (25:12).

In order to walk in the ways of the Lord or walk according to his will we must firstly know his will. The Lord is ready to reveal this to us if we are ready to listen and obey (24:14). Paul says we must renew our minds and stop thinking in the way of the world. Too often Christians have pre-determined how they will walk and come to the Lord seeking his approval. This is not how it works! The Lord calls upon us to approve or test his will; in other words to search the Scriptures and pray; do not be looking for visions or dreams. We need to be patient and wait for the Lord, but let us never doubt that he has a good pleasing and perfect will for us (Rom 12:2); it took five years for the Lord to get us on the mission field!

Knowing God’s will is one thing; doing it is another. If we have humbled ourselves before the Lord we will be wanting to do his will, but may need his strength to do so. For instance, it is God’s will for us to forgive one another, as Jesus makes clear in the Lord’s Prayer, but we need strength to do so, and mean it! His strength comes, at least in part, from remembering that God in Christ has forgiven us our sin. It is essential that we remember mercy and truth and covenant faithfulness as we walk in the path or the way God has set before us in the Lord Jesus Christ.