

1. Let me give my title first: "What is the most important thing God wants us to know about worshipping Him?" If you want the answer to that question, you've come to the right place. ☺
 - a) First let me say that we are about to finish the third of the five books of the psalms.
 - i) This third book focuses specifically on how God is to be worshipped. Therefore that question of "the most important thing about worship" becomes relevant here.
 - b) As I studied the three psalms in this lesson, I kept asking myself, why did the psalm writers have these three as the last ones for this book? Are they just accidentally arranged in this order, or is there something God wants us to learn by having these last three here?
 - c) I am one of those Christians who argue that nothing in the bible is an accident. I do believe the structure and words of each book in the original manuscript is inspired by God and therefore, I do believe the psalms are arranged in a specific order for us to study.
2. With that little speech stated, let me come back to my title. I do believe the whole book of psalms is about focusing on our relationship with God. I also believe the third book of the Psalms (which again we are currently finishing with this lesson) specifically focuses on how we are to worship Him. If that is true, what is the "last things" the psalm writers want us to remember about the topic of worshipping God? To answer that, let me explain the significance of three psalms:
 - a) Psalm 87 focuses on the City of Jerusalem as the center of God's worship. A key point is that it is not about the actual location of that city. The point is that God is not only god of the Jewish people, but of the whole world. While the unsaved refuse to acknowledge that fact, it doesn't prevent it from being true.
 - i) It makes sense that one of the final psalms would be to focus on who it is we worship and where that worship is centered, which is symbolically Jerusalem.
 - b) Psalm 88 is considered by scholars to be the most depressing of all the psalms. Scholars also say it was written when Israel being attacked during the reign of Rehoboam (David's grandson). This psalm has an "everything is going wrong and where is God" theme.
 - i) There is nothing positive in this psalm. There is no happy ending or even a reminder that God will come one day to rescue them.
 - ii) So why have such a "downer" of a psalm as the second to last one in this book? Yes, one can apply this psalm to the unsaved and their ultimate fate. That would explain why nothing positive is stated. However, the psalm seems to be focusing on a believer at a horrible time. The idea is to remind us that God is still there, despite any lack of sense of His help during such a horrible time.
 - c) Finally we have Psalm 89. It is a long one at that. This psalm asks the question in effect of "What about God's promises when life is falling part?" After acknowledging God's existence (Psalm 87) and wondering where is God, (Psalm 88) the final question is then, "Well God if you are not going to help us at this bad time, what about those unfulfilled promises that You made to us? How will they happen if You have abandoned us?"
 - i) The main point I see here is that the end of life without God is "futile". Even in our most dark moments, when we don't sense God working He is still there.
 - ii) Further, we can still trust in God to keep His unconditional promises to us as well as to the nation of Israel no matter how bad the current situation is around us.
 - d) This leads back to my lesson title: What is the most important thing about worshipping God? It is that He exists (Psalm 87); He is still working when we don't sense His presence (Psalm 88) and yes God will still keep His unconditional promises to us (Psalm 89). There are times where we don't sense Him in our lives, but that is when we must trust that He is still there and does desires to lead our lives. The rest is the details.
 - e) On that positive note, we can now begin the details of each of these psalms.

3. Psalm 87, title: Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm. A song.
 - a) In the last lesson I discussed whom this same author was, and why he mentions the psalm is a psalm and a song. For the sake of the newcomers, the word "psalm" means that we are to contemplate its meaning. The word "song" just means it is meant to be sung, even though the original music is long gone. The "Sons of Korah" were a division of the priests who wrote under this title and they were in charge of taking care of the temple.
 - b) OK, that covers the "who's and what's" of the title. At this point it is better just to start Verse 1 and see how this psalm is relevant to our lives.
4. Verse 1: He has set his foundation on the holy mountain; ² the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.
 - a) The "He" of Verse 1 refers to God Himself. The point here is that the center of worship is in Jerusalem and specifically on a place called "Mount Zion". For those who know the geography of Israel, this mountain is more of a big hill than it is a great mountain.
 - b) Among all of the locations within Israel, this mountaintop is where the God's Temple traditionally stood and a second temple stood that existed centuries later at Jesus' time.
 - c) I heard an interesting question posed here. Of all the great spots of beauty on earth, why did God pick this spot to be His "headquarters"? I am convinced God picked the nation of Israel to be where it is, simply because it is a natural land bridge to three continents and that makes the land of Israel a great location for a group to be God's witness to the world. I suspect God picked Jerusalem as it was high on a hill and we could "look up" to Him.
 - d) OK John, I believe that God exists, He worked through the Jewish nation and I believe that Jerusalem was the headquarters of worship. The question becomes, why emphasize all of this for us to study? The point is not that we have to physically go to Jerusalem to find God. It is that the same God who rules over the world did choose this specific piece of real estate to teach us in effect, "This is the center location of my worship on earth".
 - i) So does this mean I have to pray towards Jerusalem or something like that? No. It simply teaches us the basis of our faith in terms of an actual location.
 - e) Let me try this one more way: Verse 2 says that God loves this specific place more than anywhere else within the nation of Israel. The rest of the land of Israel is what is meant by the expression "dwellings of Jacob". The point is that God wants people to draw close to Him. That means to come to Him with every aspect of our lives to trust in Him.
5. Verse 3: Glorious things are said of you, O city of God: *Selah*
 - a) Verse 3 has one of those "Selah's" at the end. That means pause and consider this. This leads to the question, "what are the glorious things said of this city?"
 - b) If you know anything about this city, there are no natural resources that make this a desired place to have a city. So if there is nothing "naturally great" about Jerusalem, what does the psalmist mean by the phrase "glorious things are said of you"? It is special simply because God choose this location to be special and it is acknowledged as such.
 - i) Think of terms of our salvation: There is nothing special about us that God chose us to be saved. (From God's all-knowing perspective, He always knew we would be saved) We should just be grateful that He picked us.
 - ii) In a similar way of thinking we should be grateful that God exists, that there is a central place where He is worshipped and in the sense that God makes Himself known to man, we should respect the City of Jerusalem.
6. Verse 4: "I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me-- Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush-- and will say, 'This one was born in Zion.' "
 - a) Some explanations are needed here: Rehab appears to be a reference to Egypt. Philistia and Tyre were great powers to the north of Israel. Cush is an ancient name for Ethiopia, which is located to the south of Israel. Babylon is to the north.
 - i) The point is that despite all of the great powers that surround Israel, Jerusalem is still the place that God choose as His central location of His home on earth.

7. Verse 5: Indeed, of Zion it will be said, "This one and that one were born in her, and the Most High himself will establish her." ⁶ The LORD will write in the register of the peoples: "This one was born in Zion." *Selah*
- a) If we are going to emphasize God being based out of the land of Israel (that is in effect what "Zion" means), we have to analyze that phrase: "who was born to her?"
 - i) Yes, we are dealing with God the Son. The point is this location (the nation of Israel) is where the Messiah became human with the dual purpose of dying for our sins and one day in the future, to rule over the world.
 - ii) Some Christians argue that the second aspect only occurs in heaven when Jesus rules over all believers at that point in time. Others like me argue that a day is coming when Jesus rules over the entire world from Jerusalem.
 - b) With that theological speech out of my system, let us go back to Verse 5. The text says, "this one and that one were born to her". Notice Verse 6 alludes to a single entity that was born in Zion (nation of Israel). Also notice Verse 5 alludes to more than one person who was born in this location. OK John, is the text describing one person or more than one?
 - i) I'm pretty positive Verse 5 does not allude to any specific Jewish person as much as it alludes to all of us who believe in God and trust in Him for our salvation. Verse 6 focuses on a single entity, which is the Messiah who we call Jesus.
 - ii) The point is believers in Jesus have a spiritual home in Jerusalem as the center of where God is located. It has nothing to do with actually traveling there. It has to do with believing in the God we trust and knowing that He has established Himself (i.e., He has made Himself known to us) on earth.
 - c) So John, if we don't have to actually go to Jerusalem to get close to God, why have a psalm that emphasizes this city? It is to know that God dwells amongst people in that we trust in His existence. We trust that He is guiding our lives and we trust that He has sent His Son to pay the price for our sins. To get close to God in terms of our trust with Him is being compared to a specific city. To draw close to Him is like traveling to this city.
8. Verse 7: As they make music they will sing, "All my fountains are in you."
- a) OK, who is making music in this verse? If you study the entire bible carefully, one would notice that the bible never mentions angels and the singing in the same sentence. I hold the view that singing to God is a privilege only given to believers.
 - i) The point is, if we understand how God has rescued us out of this world. If we know the joy of salvation, that should get us to sing praise to God.
 - b) This surprisingly leads me to the second part of this verse ""All my fountains are in you."
 - i) That is not a particular song to learn. The idea of a fountain is about something that is "bubbling up". Think of water bubbling up out of the ground.
 - ii) The idea is that if we do trust in the God of the bible, then that concept not only brings us "new life", it should spread out from us like a water fountain that is centered inside of us. Think of when Jesus told the woman at the well that if one believes in Him, one would have living water in their lives. (See John 4:10.)
 - iii) In other words, this verse is describing the joy we should have as believers.
 - a) As I like to teach, biblical "joy" is a different concept from happiness. If we get some great news or receive a special gift, we may be happy at that moment, but that is different from the concept of joy.
 - b) True joy is something we have no matter what our circumstances. True joy is about knowing that we are forgiven of all sins, past present and future and there is nothing we can do to earn God's favor. That feeling of joy that one can have of knowing that no matter what happens in this life we are saved, should make us "bubble up" like the water spring as described.
 - iv) That "internal fountain" is the joy God wants us to have in our lives.

9. Psalm 88, title: A song. A psalm of the Sons of Korah. For the director of music. According to *mahalath leannoth*. A *maskil* of Heman the Ezrahite.
- a) Here we have the last of eleven psalms by the Sons of Korah. One last time: This is a family of priests that worked in the temple, that wrote psalms under this name.
 - b) The title also says that this psalm was given to the "director of music", (whoever that was) to be played in their worship service.
 - c) This psalm mentions an untranslated term: "mahalath lennoth". The Amplified Bible translates this term as "The Suffering of Affliction". Scholars suspect this term means that giving the depressing tone of this psalm, that title reflects what the psalm is about.
 - i) I stated in the introduction that scholars consider this psalm is to be the most depressing of all the psalms. There is no happy ending or even a verse of hope in this psalm. Some suggest it describes a time where one is in so much pain that one does not see anything positive coming out of the situation.
 - d) The specific author of this psalm also gives his own name, which is "Heman the Ezrahite". Why the author gives his own name is not stated, but I have a theory when we get to the next psalm as Psalm 89 has an author with a similar name.
 - i) Maybe the specific author just wanted us to know that he was feeling the sense of depression that accompanies this psalm and not the whole family of Korah's.
 - ii) Let's just say for the moment God wants us to connect the similarity of the names. OK, it's time to get depressed and start Verse 1. ☹
10. Verse 1: O LORD, the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you. ² May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry. ³ For my soul is full of trouble and my life draws near the grave.
- a) Whatever is going on in the life of the psalm writer, it is not good. He is convinced he is dying and the writer is crying out to God for relief.
 - i) Most of us are well cry out to God for relief when we are in tremendous pain. That is what the psalmist is doing here, but he is not getting any relief.
 - ii) The psalmist is looking for answers from God as to why He is allowing all of this pain to occur in his life.
 - b) A good point to remember here is that God is not required to give us explanations for whatever we are dealing with at the moment. The bible promises God will see us through rough times, but not that He will explain why those things are happening.
 - i) So if that is true, why cry out to God when we are in pain? The short answer is that He loves us too much to leave us alone. I do find that God does offer us comfort through bad times and helps keep our eternal perspective right.
 - ii) It is worth the trouble to seek God in difficult times even if we don't get any physical relief, because seeking Him gives us the eternal perspective in focus.
 - c) Meanwhile, this psalm is not going to get any happier as we read the rest of it.
11. Verse 4: I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am like a man without strength. ⁵ I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care. ⁶ You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths.
- a) One can already sense the hopelessness in this psalm. The author feels like God has given up on him and in effect, "I'm dying and there is nothing God can do to change this."
 - b) So is the writer blaming God, or just stating the facts of his current situation? I believe the writer is just stating that whatever he is dealing with, he feels like he is beyond help.
 - i) I suspect that when one gets this low, one has to remember that one's hope is in eternity with God and not this lifetime. This psalm is about reminding us of the reality of eternity verses the relatively much shorter lifetime of whatever suffering the writer is dealing with at this point. That is how we can have joy (by keeping the eternal perspective) through any tough situation we are dealing with.

12. Verse 7: Your wrath lies heavily upon me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves. *Selah*
- a) The author is saying that whatever is actually happening to him, it feels like the wrath of God is dominant over his life. When the text says, "waves" visualize one being in so much pain it feels like that pain is coming over us in powerful waves.
 - b) I recently read a book about a pastor who went through tremendous pain recovering from a very bad car accident. My point is that often we don't know the reason why God allows us to go through such pain until many years later. That experience helped him to let others minister to him and later helped him minister to others who had similar pain.
 - i) Know that we aren't entitled to the reasons God allows us to go through really bad times. Often for the believer, we do learn of a reason down the road. Even if we don't live through such times, God may be teaching others by our situation.
 - ii) During such pain can feel so overwhelming it can feel like God has abandoned us, and that is what the psalmist is feeling here. The only joy one can experience in times of great pain is by keeping the eternal perspective in focus.
13. Verse 8: You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape; ⁹ my eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, O LORD, every day; I spread out my hands to you.
- a) When one is very depressed, others don't want to be around all of that negativity. If all we do is complain about how bad things are, our friends will eventually give up trying. One of the hardest things to learn is to let others actually minister to us and help us, even if we don't want their help. Most people like to be of help to others, but at the same time hate feeling helpless themselves.
 - i) People want to feel needed. Sometimes the best thing we can do even in pain, is let others do something for us. That too, is a form of worship of God.
 - b) So what do you do when you don't feel God relieving you of pain? One trusts that God is still there and trust in the fact He has a purpose to allow us to go through such times.
14. Verse 10: Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you? *Selah* ¹¹ Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction? ¹² Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?
- a) The psalm writer is saying in effect, "What good will I be if I am dead"? I don't believe the issue is salvation as much as it is how does one be a good witness for God if one is dead.
 - b) Another way to view these verses is to ask, "How can I be a good witness for God if I am in so much pain right now and I am on the verge of death?" The answer is to let others into our lives and let them take care of us without complaining about their efforts.
 - i) Getting back to the concept of worship, one way we do worship God is to let others help us just as much as we may want to help others in their needs.
 - ii) Yes, it can be too late and we can drive people away from us because our misery from the pain makes us miserable to others. Remember that just because we are in pain does not mean we should spread that misery to others.
 - c) Let me reverse the situation: What if we have to take care of someone who is so miserable that all they do is complain about how miserable they are?
 - i) We have to remember that it is the "pain" talking and not the people. By being a good witness to them at such times reminds ourselves that we are servants of God no matter what the situation is that we have to face with others in their misery.
 - ii) One has to reconcile the concept that we can't fix those who don't want to be helped with the idea of helping someone who needs help. All we can do is pray for guidance as what God wants us to do in such situations.
 - d) Meanwhile I left the psalmist wondering what he could do if he was dead? In terms of helping other living people, nothing. The issue is not salvation, but being a good witness to others even when we are suffering. The idea is to be willing to let others help us and remember that they are trying to help us through our difficult situations.

15. Verse 13: But I cry to you for help, O LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you.
¹⁴Why, O LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me?
 - a) Notice that this is a prayer of someone who believes in God but doesn't understand why God is allowing Him to go through such pain to begin with.
 - b) Many years ago, I heard pastor Chuck Swindoll teach that when we get to heaven, the only words we will get out of our mouths in God's presence is the word "oh".
 - i) What Chuck Swindoll meant was if we ask God why He allowed this or that to happen, when God answers that question, all we can say is "Oh, that's it."
 - ii) Remember that God is not obligated to share His plans with us. That is one of the great underlying points of the book of Job, that people (including the ones in pain) are not guaranteed the privilege of knowing His plans for our lives.
 - c) Meanwhile back to the psalmist and his suffering. Does this mean that God rejected him because that writer is in such pain? Of course not. It just means that God has a purpose for that suffering and as of that moment, the writer is not privileged to that information.
16. Verse 15: From my youth I have been afflicted and close to death; I have suffered your terrors and am in despair. ¹⁶ Your wrath has swept over me; your terrors have destroyed me. ¹⁷ All day long they surround me like a flood; they have completely engulfed me.
 - a) Verse 15 teaches us that whatever the writer is going through, he has suffered through that condition since his youth. Whatever it was, the pain was very long term in his life.
 - b) OK John, too bad for the psalmist. He lived millenniums ago. How does this affect me?
 - i) I believe the reminder to us is to be willing to let others help us in such tragic times and be willing to be "ministered to". I believe the reminder is that God is still there, even though the pain can be overwhelming. I believe the reminder is that God still loves us despite the tragedies we may be dealing with.
 - ii) OK, enough optimism. ☺ It's time go back and finish the misery of this psalm.
17. Verse 18: You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend.
 - a) The psalmist finishes the psalm by stating that there is no one left to help him and the darkness of his pain is all that he has left. Notice the "You" to start this verse. The writer is saying it is God who allowed our friends to leave us in our darkest times. The truth is that is usually our bad attitudes that allow others not to minister to us at such times.
 - i) Here is the psalmist on the verge of death, or at least believing he is at that point. He feels like all he has is the "darkness" and there are no people left to help him.
 - b) So here is my question: If this psalm of praise to God, why is it so negative and why is this psalm considered a "praise psalm to God" in the first place?
 - i) Again notice there is nothing happy or uplifting in this psalm. This final verse here just seems to end at a point of death with no one else there to comfort him.
 - ii) I believe the underlying point of this psalm is that the ultimate end of this life is darkness and being alone. The good news is that God promises us a wonderful eternal life in His presence after this life. Such salvation only requires we trust in His free gift of salvation.
 - iii) Think about why it was so necessary to have the bible story of Jesus dying and rising again: God could have instead, just made some sort of grand appearance and said in effect, "If you believe in me, you will live forever". One reason for the Gospel story is to show us that there is an escape from the reality of death.
 - a) This reminds us that when our lives are "dark and alone" we can (big emphasis on can) trust in God to be there with us through our suffering and trust that He will guide us to Him through that time of suffering.
 - iv) So does that mean we should desire suicide now to be with Him? Of course not. It is God's business when our time is up. Our job is to trust in Him through our suffering and remember that He is in charge of us through good and bad times.

18. Psalm 89, title: A *maskil* of Ethan the Ezrahite.
- a) Remember that "Heman the Ezrahite" wrote Psalm 88. Although I cannot prove it, I suspect the writer of Psalm 88 and Psalm 89 are related, based on the similar names.
 - i) The purpose of this final psalm is to praise God for all of the good He has done in our lives. It is almost as if the writer of Psalm 88 is complaining about how bad life can be without God intervening in our lives while the related author of Psalm 89 is saying how glorious life can be when God does intervene.
 - ii) The issue is not actual relief, but perspective. It is about trusting God to see us through both the highs and lows of our lives and remembering He is always there.
 - b) Also remember that "maskil" simply means for us to contemplate the psalm's meaning.
 - c) OK so what is this psalm about and as you like to ask, why should I care?
 - i) This psalm appears to be written around the time of the Israelites were taken away in the Babylonian captivity. The psalm seems to be asking the question, "Hey God, what about the promise that a descendant of David will rule forever? How will that happen, given what is happening currently to our country (Israel)?"
 - ii) Yes of course, it ties to the fact that Jesus, a descendant of David, will rule over all of us who choose to follow Him. The related point is about trusting God despite all that is happening around us. This final psalm of Book Three is the reminder that God will rule over us and we must trust Him through all we are dealing with.
19. Verse 1: I will sing of the LORD's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. ² I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself.
- a) The psalm starts off happy enough, by stating that the psalmist desires to sing of God's love forever. With that happy thought stated, the point is if we believe in our salvation, we should not be silent about it. The joy God gives us should naturally want us to share it and praise Him for it.
 - b) So, doesn't that get boring after awhile? After we spend a few moments saying how grateful we are to God for His salvation, isn't that enough?
 - i) Praising God is not just standing there saying "Thank You". Praising God is about living our lives to make a difference for Him out of the gratitude of our salvation.
 - ii) So what about heaven? Are we just standing there all day long telling God how grateful we are for His salvation? I don't think so. The bible is fairly silent on what the next life is like, but I truly doubt it will be boring in any way.
20. Verse 3: You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, ⁴ 'I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.' "
Selah
- a) If you haven't noticed by now, the psalms spend a lot of time commenting on the fact that David and his descendants will reign forever. Religious Jews to this day will argue that the coming Messiah (who they don't believe has come yet) is a descendant of David.
 - i) My question to such religious Jews is "How will you prove who is the Messiah?" The records of David's family were destroyed with the last temple in 70AD.
 - ii) Their response is in effect, "That is God's problem".
 - b) OK John, the bible does teach that the Messiah will be a descendant of King David. (See 2nd Samuel 7:13 as a cross-reference here.) Why is that so important to state it here?
 - i) Remember again that at this time, the Israelites were being taken away into captivity. The psalmist is saying, "What about the descendant of David who will rule over? The answer is God is still working on that plan but that plan is being interrupted due to the disobedience of the nation of Israel.
 - c) Now notice the word "firm" in Verse 4. The point is that God made a promise that a descendant of David would rule forever. If we trust that God is perfect then we can trust that promise of God is "firm" and Jesus will rule over us forever.

21. Verse 5: The heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness too, in the assembly of the holy ones. ⁶ For who in the skies above can compare with the LORD? Who is like the LORD among the heavenly beings? ⁷ In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him.
- a) To understand these verses, one needs to understand the Jewish concept of "the heavens":
 - i) The first heaven refers to atmosphere (air) that exists above and around the earth.
 - ii) The second heaven refers to the stars in the sky and what is beyond reach.
 - iii) The third heaven refers to the throne room of God. Paul himself wrote that at one point in his life, he was caught up to the third heaven. (See 2nd Corinthians 12:2.)
 - b) With that said, the psalmist is asking who in any of these heavens can be compared to God? (Remember that other cultures around Israel worshipped what could be seen in the sky.) The point is that the God of the bible is greater than any of "made up" gods.
 - i) I see this as being about avoiding the temptation to worship things other than God. One of the 10 commandments warns against the danger of looking up in the sky and worshipping other things in the heavens. (See Deuteronomy 5:8-9.)
22. Verse 8: O LORD God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you.
- a) This verse asks the question "Who is mightier than God"? The psalmist is stating that despite all of the tragedies around Him, God is still on the throne, He is still working on His timing and His promises to the nation of Israel and (us Christians) will still happen.
23. Verse 9: You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them.
- a) To understand this verse, visualize being in a bad storm. The point is God is "bigger than that" and despite whatever tragedy is around us, God can see us through such times.
 - b) When I read this verse, I think about Jesus calming the sea. (See Matthew 8:26 or Mark 4:39). Jesus is teaching us that no matter how bad the situation is all around us God is bigger than that and can guide us through whatever we are dealing with at that moment.
24. Verse 10: You crushed Rahab like one of the slain; with your strong arm you scattered your enemies.
- a) As I mentioned earlier in this lesson, the word "Rahab" refers to a great power, and it most likely ties to Egypt. At the time of this psalm, the Israelites are being slaughtered by the Babylonians. The psalmist is recalling how God gave the Israelites a great victory over the Egyptians many centuries earlier before this psalm was written.
 - i) The idea that when things are going wrong, it helps to remember God has done great things in the past. The point is the same God who has worked in the past is the same God who does care about our lives and wants to work with us today.
 - b) If God loves us so much, why did He allow the Israelites to go into captivity and why does He allow tragedies in our lives? God at times allows tragedies for greater purposes:
 - i) Sometimes it is punishment for disobedience, which is the great lesson of the Babylonian captivity. Whatever the reason, we need to remember that God is still there, working through our lives for His glory.
25. Verse 11: The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth; you founded the world and all that is in it. ¹² You created the north and the south; Tabor and Hermon sing for joy at your name.
- a) Let me explain each of these references: Verse 11 states the fact that God created the entire world. Verse 12 mentions the "north and south". This is a reference to the great powers that exist to the north and south of Israel. At the time of this psalm, Babylon was the great power to the north and Egypt to the south. The idea is that as great as these powers were, God is greater and still watching out for His people.
 - b) Finally the psalmist mentions "Tabor and Hermon". Those are two mountains within the land of Israel. The idea here is that these two places are visible as they rise up from the ground and just as these mountains stand out in Israel, so God stands out among the powers of this world (think of Babylon and Egypt) at that time.

26. Verse 13: Your arm is endued with power; your hand is strong, your right hand exalted.
¹⁴Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you. ¹⁵ Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD.
- a) The psalmist is reminding himself (and us) that despite whatever is happening, the God we worship is strong in power and He will take care of those who harm us on His timing.
 - b) Let me try this another way: Why is it fair to have billions of years of punishment for the sins of this lifetime, or billions of years of blessing in eternity for being loyal to God now?
 - i) The answer is that everyone gets for eternity what he or she wants. If one chooses to reject the God of the bible now, that rejection continues forever.
 - ii) The point is in effect that God gives us what we want forever. If one chooses to spend their entire lifetime rejecting God. Then He honors that desire to continue ignoring Him for all of eternity.
 - iii) As for children who die young, I let God decide deal with such things.
 - c) This leads to Verse 15. There are blessings for the believer despite whatever is happening at the moment, as those blessings last not only for this lifetime, but for eternity.
27. Verse 16: They rejoice in your name all day long; they exult in your righteousness. ¹⁷ For you are their glory and strength, and by your favor you exalt our horn. ¹⁸ Indeed, our shield belongs to the LORD, our king to the Holy One of Israel.
- a) The point here is that despite the circumstances of that suffering, those who trust in God, well still do that: They will still exalt God despite the suffering they are going through.
 - i) It always amazes me to watch people who do trust in God go through amazing suffering, and yet they still have a contagious set of joy to their lives. It is an inspiring thing to see if one ever gets the opportunity.
 - b) I was trying to think of the most extreme example of suffering: What popped in my head were both the Jewish Holocaust and even some of the recent killings of Christians in countries that are dominated by Muslims. At such times, one can wonder where is God?
 - i) This psalm reminds us that God is still on the throne despite such issues. We may never understand why God allows such tragedies to happen. All we know is that He is still in charge, and that eternity is a lot longer than this lifetime.
 - ii) To put it another way, if there was no judgment day, living the life of trusting God is not worth the trouble. If there is a judgment day coming, then we have to still trust in Him through our difficulties that He has some greater purpose for them.
28. Verse 19: Once you spoke in a vision, to your faithful people you said: "I have bestowed strength on a warrior; I have exalted a young man from among the people. ²⁰ I have found David my servant; with my sacred oil I have anointed him. ²¹ My hand will sustain him; surely my arm will strengthen him. ²² No enemy will subject him to tribute; no wicked man will oppress him.
- a) Speaking of trusting God for the future, that is what the psalmist is doing here. Among the promises to the Nation of Israel is that a descendant of David will rule forever.
 - b) Remember at this time, the nation of Israel is being taken into captivity. The writer is asking in effect, "What about the promise of the Messiah? How can that happen if we (Israelites) are not in this land?" The answer is that it will still happen on God's timing.
 - c) It may help at this point to recount an interesting fact about history. In world history, there has never been a nation that was conquered, scattered and then came back together again to form that same nation. The only exception is Israel. Twice in their history they were conquered, scatted and a long time later, came back to become a nation again.
 - i) My point is despite the tragedies to the Nation of Israel at different points in their history; they can count on God's unconditional promises to them coming true.
 - ii) That same principal applies to His unconditional promises of our salvation. By our trust that Jesus died for our sins, we too have unconditional promises that can help get us through the worst of times in our lives.

29. Verse 23: I will crush his foes before him and strike down his adversaries. ²⁴ My faithful love will be with him, and through my name his horn will be exalted. ²⁵ I will set his hand over the sea, his right hand over the rivers. ²⁶ He will call out to me, 'You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Savior.'
- a) Remember what the psalmist is doing. He is recounting God's promises to the Nation of Israel at a time of horrible tragedy. The point is that God is still there, still in charge and His promises will still happen on His timing.
 - b) Among the promises of God is that His chosen Messiah (Jesus) will be exalted over the entire world. When Verse 25 says "his hand will be over the sea and rivers", it is a colorful way of saying He will rule over the entire world.
 - i) Verse 26 states that this Messiah will call God the Father "my father, my God, my Rock (i.e., exalted over all others) and my Savior (i.e., protector from death.)"
 - ii) OK John, we have the advantage of living about 3,000 years since this event took place and we can see how Jesus was a descendant of King David and we suspect that that Jesus considers God the Father all of those titles mentioned here.
 - iii) So why do so many people refuse to see Jesus in this role? The short answer is they want to prove their own worth to God and not accept the idea that God Himself must pay the price for our sins or that God will rule over their lives.
 - iv) The reason these verses are here for us is to remind us in our own difficult times that God is still there and He still rules despite our tragedies.
30. Verse 27: I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.
- a) The word "firstborn" requires an explanation. This is a title, and does not mean that God literally gave birth to lots of sons. As an example Joseph's two sons were Manasseh and Ephraim. They were born in that order. (See Genesis 48:14.) Yet, the bible calls Ephraim God's firstborn in Jeremiah 31:9. That is not an error. The descendants of Ephraim were a dominant tribe in Israel and therefore God gave the title of "firstborn" to Ephraim.
 - i) Notice that Verse 27 says that this entity (the Messiah) will be "appointed" as my firstborn. That is another clue that the word "firstborn" is a title.
 - b) The other point here is that the Messiah, who we call Jesus will be exalted greater than any king (or president) that has ever ruled over the world. That has literally come true.
 - i) I remember reading about the great French emperor Napoleon. Near his death he considered the fact that millions who have never seen Jesus worshipped Him to a far great degree than all of the worship Napoleon had received in his lifetime.
 - a) It is possible that idea convinced Napoleon that Jesus was God.
31. Verse 28: I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. ²⁹ I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure.
- a) These verses state in effect that the love between God the Father and His Messiah (Jesus) will exist forever. Recounting the promises that God's Messiah ruling forever is a source of comfort when one's world has turned upside down due to the pain of the moment.
 - b) I can't help but think of one of my favorite lines from the movie and play "Fiddler on the Roof": A young rabbi asked the older rabbi when their world was falling apart: "Wouldn't this be a good time for the Messiah to come?" The older rabbi replied, "Maybe we should go wait for the Messiah somewhere else".
 - i) That in effect is a summary of this psalm: God's promised Messiah will still come despite the current problems and we should still wait for His promises to come.
32. Verse 30: "If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes, ³¹ if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, ³² I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging;
- a) OK, who are the Messiah's sons? That is a title of all believers. The point is if we believe that God's Messiah rules over our lives, we are like sons (and daughters) to Him.
 - b) The other point is that God will still punish those who trust in Him if and when we are disobedient. Our desire should be to do His will and yes we can suffer for disobedience.

33. Verse 33: but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. ³⁴ I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered.
- a) Verse 33 is one we should personalize. Yes it refers to the fact that God will never take away His love from the Messiah, but more importantly it means that despite whatever punishment we may receive from God for our sins, He never stops loving us.
 - b) So when we go through a tough time, how will we know if it is God punishing us?
 - i) The answer is to examine our lives and see if what we are going through could be the result of some sin in our lives. The truth is, we can't know the cause of all of our suffering. All we know is that God loves us and promises to see us through such times. That is the "faithfulness" of God in these verses.
34. Verse 35: Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness-- and I will not lie to David-- ³⁶ that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; ³⁷ it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky." *Selah*
- a) The psalmist is reminding us of the promise that God literally made to David: Remember that the nation of Israel was going through a real painful time and the question is in effect, "Can we still trust in God's promises to come true?"
 - i) One of the hardest things for a Christian to do is to still trust in God when the world around us is falling apart. God is saying at such times, "Yes I know what you are going through and yes, I am still there guiding you". That is the point of these verses and one of the main points of this whole psalm.
 - b) Let me comment on "his line" from Verse 36. That does not mean the Messiah (Jesus) literally had children. It means David's descendants would rule forever. Yes the line of Jewish kings did end with the Babylonian captivity. However, Jesus, a descendant of David does rule over believer's hearts now and will literally rule over the world one day.
35. Verse 38: But you have rejected, you have spurned, you have been very angry with your anointed one. ³⁹ You have renounced the covenant with your servant and have defiled his crown in the dust.
- a) OK, how could God be angry at His "anointed one" if that refers to Jesus? Yes it can refer to God putting all of the sins of the world on Him, but I think it is more than that.
 - b) I believe in this context, "the anointed one" refers to all of us who trust in God. We are anointed in that we believe in how God has picked us for salvation. The point here is God is allowing all of this suffering to believers despite the fact we are "picked".
 - c) So if God loves us so much, why does He allow all of this pain to occur? Sometimes it is necessary for God to go to extreme measures to get our attention back on Him. That is why God allowed the Babylonian captivity and that is why God allows tragedies in our lives in order for us to appreciate Him and watch Him work in our lives.
36. Verse 40: You have broken through all his walls and reduced his strongholds to ruins. ⁴¹ All who pass by have plundered him; he has become the scorn of his neighbors. ⁴² You have exalted the right hand of his foes; you have made all his enemies rejoice. ⁴³ You have turned back the edge of his sword and have not supported him in battle. ⁴⁴ You have put an end to his splendor and cast his throne to the ground. ⁴⁵ You have cut short the days of his youth; you have covered him with a mantle of shame. *Selah*
- a) These verses get back to the literalness of what the psalmist was seeing. It was about the defeat of the nation of Israel, the death of many and the survivors being taken away.
 - b) Yes I can give you the gruesome details of this time in history, but I would much rather explain how this affects us today: In the lives of believers there does come points in time where it appears like God has abandoned us. There can be so much suffering that we are sure He is for our enemies. That is the type of pain being described in these verses.
 - i) When we face such times, psalms like this remind us that God is still there, He is still guiding our lives and despite the tragedies, He is still working out our lives for His glory through such a time.

37. Verse 46: How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire? ⁴⁷ Remember how fleeting is my life. For what futility you have created all men! ⁴⁸What man can live and not see death, or save himself from the power of the grave? *Selah*
- a) These verses are a combination of complaining about God's wrath against His people and at the same time seeing how short our lives are in comparison to that wrath.
 - b) When Verse 40 says "hide yourself forever", the psalmist is asking how long will all of this bad stuff happen? Our lives are short and there does not appear to be an end to this.
 - i) God wants us to consider how relatively short lives compared to eternity. He wants us to be obedient to Him and if extreme measures are what it takes to drive us back to Him or closer to Him, God is willing to go to that measure.
38. Verse 49: O Lord, where is your former great love, which in your faithfulness you swore to David?
- a) The psalmist is saying, "You made promises about a descendant of David ruling, and we can't see those promises will be fulfilled now that we are going into captivity."
 - b) Let me put this verse in our terms: God where is the love You promised me now that I am suffering and there is no end in sight to my misery? The answer of course is that God still will keep all of His promises and yes, He is still working through our situations.
39. Verse 50: Remember, Lord, how your servant has been mocked, how I bear in my heart the taunts of all the nations, ⁵¹ the taunts with which your enemies have mocked, O LORD, with which they have mocked every step of your anointed one.
- a) One way to appeal to God is for "His name sake". We should not appeal for God's mercy because we are good people, but because His reputation is at stake when we are hurting.
 - i) The psalmist is complaining how the enemies of Israel are mocking their tragedy. At such times we may pray, "Dear God, end this, if not for our sake, then at the least for the sake of Your reputation as our God and the God of the world?"
 - ii) Yes that is a great way to appeal to God. Sometimes God will answer if we appeal to Him simply based on His reputation. Moses himself loved to do that.
 - iii) The related point is God is not obligated to answer us even if we do ask the right way. God is still working through us, His way and on His timing.
 - b) To go back to what Chuck Swindoll said, the only words we will get out of our mouths when God explains to us why He allows so much suffering, is the words "oh" as in "OK God, now that I am in heaven and see things from Your perspective I understand why all of that was necessary." In other words, I do believe God will answer our questions about suffering, but that answer comes on His timing, not ours.
40. Verse 52: Praise be to the LORD forever! Amen and Amen.
- a) Each of the five books of the psalms ends with praise to God. That is what we have here in the final verse of this psalm and the final verse of Book 3 of the psalms.
 - b) The purpose of the praise here is to remind us that despite our suffering, God is still in charge, God has a purpose for allowing such tragedies to happen, and yes God will provide us comfort (think joy) through such times despite what we are dealing with. That is why we worship Him. It is the fact that He is in charge despite all we deal with in life.
41. On that happy note, I'll end this tough lesson in prayer. Father, we don't know why You allow such difficult times to occur in our lives. We read these psalms dealing with suffering and we wonder where You are in such times? We wonder where are Your promises when our lives get really difficult. Help us to remember that You are still in charge, You are still ruling over our lives and You will still guide us down the path that You desire for our lives. Help us through such times to still be good witnesses for You and trust that You are working in our lives. We ask this in Jesus' name Amen