

Psalm Forty-One

Happy are those who consider the poor;
the Lord delivers them in the day of trouble.
The Lord protects them and keeps them alive;
they are called happy in the land.
You do not give them up to the will of their enemies.
The Lord sustains them on their sickbed;
in their illness you heal all their infirmities.

As for me, I said, "O Lord, be gracious to me;
heal me, for I have sinned against you."
My enemies wonder in malice
when I will die, and my name perish.
And when they come to see me, they utter empty words,
while their hearts gather mischief;
when they go out, they tell it abroad.
All who hate me whisper together about me;
they imagine the worst for me.
They think that a deadly thing has fastened on me,
that I will not rise again from where I lie.
Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted,
who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me.

But you, O Lord, be gracious to me,
and raise me up, that I may repay them.
By this I know that you are pleased with me;
because my enemy has not triumphed over me.
But you have upheld me because of my integrity,
and set me in your presence forever.

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.
Amen and Amen.

Growing up, I loved to read. I inherited this love of reading, at least in part, from my father. He took to books as often and as eagerly as I did. Except that, as the owner and operator of a farm, he seldom had time to actually finish them. When he did have time to read, I recall him usually doing the same thing. He would make it just far enough into a book to get a sense of the plot, then flip to the last chapter to see how everything ended.

Psalm Forty-One is the last chapter in the first book of Psalms. It is a fitting place, perhaps, to bring this series of meditations to a close. I have committed to writing these reflections as long as we are not gathering in person. With outdoor services beginning soon for our church, that time is coming to an end. For the last time, we all hope.

The Psalms, of course, are not narrative texts. They at times relate to stories that are told in the Hebrew Scriptures and mention them at various points, but there is no storyline that connects them. They are poems, prayers and songs. All the same, it is worth turning to the end of this book, to see what the writer shares.

As we might do well to expect from a book, the collection concludes on a note of resolution. Those who are faithful and who care for the oppressed are blessed by God. They are delivered in times of trouble (v.1). God provides them protection, and preserves their lives (vv. 2-3). There is a prayer for restoration and shelter from enemies that is presented partway through, but God is said to hear, and provide healing and safekeeping (vv. 4-12).

In that same spirit, then, Psalm Forty-One ends with a blessing: “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen” (v. 13). As Waltner writes in his commentary, in the Psalms “we are led increasingly toward the praise of God as the final word.” That is how this book ends. That is where everything ends - with doxology.

Shortly after I left home to go to college, my father sold the farm and took a job as a truck driver. He began by shunting for a local manufacturing company. He often had to wait between loads, and (unlike his work on the farm) had days off, which meant that he now had time and could read books in their entirety.

Assuming that you’ve been reading them every week you’ve done the same, with the first of the five books of Psalms. No shame if you haven’t - maybe you’ve been as busy or tired as my father was, back in the days I first described. If you have, and feel so inspired, you might continue with the next four. In any case, thank you for your interest in this little project. As with everything pandemic-related, it extended much longer than I originally-anticipated. May you be blessed, and may God be blessed, through it. - NS