

Introduction, I

I am excited about these books we will be studying. I rejoice in what we will be able to learn from these books.

Let me tell you about myself. I was reared in a Christian home. It used to bug me that I had to say that because I thought it would be more exciting to be able to say, “I was on the streets, into drugs, doing this and that and then something really dramatic happened in my life and God saved me out of all of that.” It is wonderful when God saves people out of all of that, but it is a shame that people have to be in that. And I have since come to appreciate, as I have come to know myself, that it is a great miracle that I was not into all that stuff. Jesus teaches us to pray, “lead me not into temptation.” As I look back over my life, I was certainly tempted and did fall into sin, but God prevented me from getting into drugs and that life by keeping me out of temptation. And for that, I am eternally grateful.

I was reared in a strongly Christian home. My father was a pastor. As I was growing up, both my father and mother demonstrated to me the truth of His Word. Therefore I never doubted that His Word was true because I saw it lived out consistently in their lives. And when people would say that Christians are all hypocrites I knew that was not true. I knew there are hypocritical Christians, but I also knew that not all Christians are hypocrites because I had lived in a household of two parents who lived consistently, and I will always be grateful for that. However, as a teenager I was a conflicted soul, as are most teenagers. I had my doubts. I doubted if I believed enough to be saved. I was really helped one day when my father, sensing my distress, shared a story from his teenage days. When he was 18 years old, he was going through precisely what I was going through. He finally talked to a man who came to speak at the school he was attending and told him that he was not sure that he could believe enough to be saved. The man encouraged him in good ways, but at that point my father just said, “I give up. I am not sure I can ever believe enough. If I am ever going to be saved, it will be God’s doing.” And he just forgot about it. Then two weeks later he started thinking about it again and he said, “You know, my doubts are gone.” That really helped me because I was mistaking belief for intellectual certainty. I was asking, “Am I absolutely sure about these things? Can I be intellectually assured that God exists? How do I know? I cannot prove it. I cannot see Him.” But I then learned that true faith is trusting God. Intellectual certainty is something about which we cannot have many times. We can study, but to have that certainty of heart is not something that we can do much about. But we can put our trust in Someone. That is really what biblical faith is all about. In fact, the Greek word that we often translate in John 3:16 as “believe” could just as well and rightly be translated as “trust.” And so my conflicted soul found some solace in realizing I am called upon to trust—and that is an active thing. I am to live my life, trusting God to make me His. It is not so important to assuage all my doubts, but the important question is, “Where do I place my ultimate confidence? How do I live?” That was one of the most significant experiences in my life.

Another of the most significant experiences was, of course, when I married my wife Polly. She is the best thing that has ever happened to me. She is the best person God has ever brought into my life. As I learned from my parents the truth of His Word, I learned also from Polly the truth of God’s Word. I saw lived out in her life the truths that God has given us and the instructions that God has given us. Now we have been married a wonderful 23 years and have four children who attest to that and they as well are delights by God’s grace. I am very thankful for the blessings God has brought into my life. That is not where we all are. We are not all blessed in the same way. We do not all have positive experiences to report. That is another reason I am delighted that we will be looking at the Psalms and the wisdom books, which have much to say when we are rejoicing but also when we are hurting.

I have been a professor here at Covenant Seminary for 11 years. I went to Wheaton College and then to Gordon-Conwell Seminary. After that I went as a missionary to Germany with my wife, whom I married right before going to seminary. In Germany we spent some time teaching at the German Theological Seminary. Afterwards I pursued doctoral studies at the University of Cambridge and eventually completed that work and received a degree. It was sort of backwards to go from teaching to doctoral studies, but that was the Lord's timing. I have written a couple of books. The first is my dissertation on King Saul, entitled *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul*. The second is a book called *The Art of Biblical History*, which came out in 1994. I am an ordained elder in the Presbyterian Church in America and I am glad to be able to teach this course.

Having said all of that, let us begin by reading Psalm 111:

Praise the Lord.
I will extol the Lord with all my heart
in the council of the upright and in the assembly.

Great are the works of the Lord;
they are pondered by all who delight in them.
Glorious and majestic are his deeds,
and his righteousness endures forever.
He has caused his wonders to be remembered;
the Lord is gracious and compassionate.
He provides food for those who fear him;
He remembers his covenant forever.
He has shown his people the power of his works,
giving them the lands of other nations.
The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy.
They are steadfast forever and ever,
done in faithfulness and uprightness.
He provided redemption for his people;
He ordained his covenant forever—
holy and awesome is his name.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
all who follow his precepts have good understanding.
To him belongs eternal praise.

There are several reasons I like to begin a class with this psalm. I like the way it combines so many aspects of Scripture. It talks about God's mighty deeds. It talks about the words by which His deeds are remembered. It talks about His deeds and His words, and then it culminates in this motto of the wisdom literature: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. All who follow his precepts have good understanding." I like the way it begins and ends. It begins, "Praise the Lord. I will extol the Lord with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly." And it concludes, "To him belongs eternal praise." It is my prayer that all we do in this class will not be so we can fill our heads with knowledge and thus be glorified before men, but rather that we can learn about God and thus glorify Him in our lives of service to other people. Let us pray together.

Our Father God, we come to You with thanksgiving and praise on our lips and in our hearts. Not because life is always easy or because we do not encounter adverse circumstances nor because life is always good—and yet it is good as You carry us through it. We thank You that You have not promised that we will not go through hard times, but You have promised that we will never be going through them alone. We thank You that You have promised never to leave us nor forsake us. Father, I pray that as we embark upon this class that You would give us guidance. There is so much that we could learn from these books and there is so much material to cover. We ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would enlighten each of our minds and hearts and that we would be guided to those truths and those passages which would most speak to us about You. And we pray that at the end of this class and at the end of this course, we would be walking more closely with You than we are now that in our lives You may be honored and glorified, for You alone are worthy of glory. We commit this time to You. We thank You for Your Son who saved us, and it is in His name that we pray. Amen.