

The enthronement psalms (Psalms 93-100) come to a resounding conclusion with jubilant praise and thanksgiving, but the king's responsibility for assuring moral order in the city of God has not been forgotten. David is credited with this psalm and Psalm 103, the only two David psalms in Book IV. Psalm 101 reflects the young king's passion for righteousness. If the jubilation expressed in Psalm 100 is going to characterize the people of God then the righteousness and justice of God must be David's number one priority. Kings and politicians promise security and prosperity, but if they do not pursue God's moral-order living their legacy will be a disaster. In spite of critical moral failures throughout his life, David knew what was expected of a king who was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14).

The gated community of Zion excludes evil in all of its vile, perverse, arrogant, and deceptive forms (Rev 22:14-15). This ideal administration concentrates first and foremost on biblical integrity and social justice. In Psalm 101 there is no division between personal morality and public justice. The king's efforts "to lead a blameless life" and to conduct his administration "with a blameless heart" (Ps 101:) involve surrounding himself with those "whose walk is blameless" (Ps 101:6). The king must also be committed to separating himself and his people from "anything that is vile" (Ps 101:3) and from those whose heart is perverse (Ps 101:4). The categorical imperatives of this psalm leave little room for ambiguity and compromise. Against evil and its destructive ways the king is defiant, "No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence" (Ps 101:7).

Personal Commitment

*I will sing of your love and justice;
to you, Lord, I will sing praise.
I will be careful to lead a blameless life –
when will you come to me?
I will conduct the affairs of my house
with a blameless heart.
I will not look with approval
on anything that is vile.
I hate what faithless people do;
I will have nothing to do with what is evil.*

Psalm 101:1-4

Worship is not forgotten, but in fact emphasized in the pursuit of justice. The psalmist pledges to chant a melody, a praise song celebrating the Lord's steadfast love and justice. David's resolve to sing about God's covenant faithfulness is fundamental to the kingdom ethic that follows. This single verse speaks volumes, not only of the king's emotive commitment to justice, but of his theological understanding. It is the grace and holiness of God that undergirds the king's passion. Mercy and judgment originate with "the great King above all gods" (Ps 95:3). The psalmist knows that apart from the grace of God we would not know the will of God nor would we have

the power to achieve it. The king's theme song is a constant reminder that everything depends on the grace and mercy of God. This is equivalent to Beatitude-based belief in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount or Paul's justification by faith in Romans. This is the reminder that "it is God who works in [us] to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (Phil 2:13).

The king pledges to the Lord to lead by example. He is committed to working out his salvation "with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12). He longs for the imminent presence of God, for a vivid sense of God's intimate fellowship. The quest for social justice and moral order is always and only a corollary to the reality of knowing God. The rhythmic beat of Psalm 101 is set by the repetition of the psalmist's for-the-record, first-person, vowed commitments. An emphatic "I will" accentuates the determination and devotion of David's long obedience in the same direction.

By promising to "conduct the affairs of my house with a blameless heart" (Ps 101:2c), the psalmist is committed to integrity personally and publically. He melds "house" and "heart" in a unified grasp of ethical responsibility. He will rule others as he will rule himself. "House" has a range of meanings for the worshiper, from the house of David and the royal palace to the House of the Lord and the people of Israel. All believers are in some way instructed by David's example. The pledge of moral responsibility extends from the self to the family to the household of faith and to society. In every sphere, the commitment before the Lord is the same, to "a blameless heart."

The meaning of a blameless heart is illustrated in several ways. The psalmist refuses to be influenced or enticed by anything that is vile, meaning anything that is wicked and worthless.¹ He will not tolerate what faithless people do or put up with evil in any form. The intensity of the psalmist's repulsion is captured in the word, "hate," but this is not the raw emotion of hate that is expressed in Psalm 137. It is more a matter of spiritual discernment, the wisdom necessary to distance oneself from influences that cause harm. "Hatred is an important spiritual and moral virtue (Ps 139:19-22), as Jesus affirms (Luke 14:26).²

The psalmist's convictions are echoed in the apostles. The faithful will not "depart from the truth" (2 Tim 2:18), but will rather "abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against the soul" (1 Pet 2:11). Allusions to Psalm 101 can be found in Paul's spiritual direction to the church at Rome: "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good" (Rom 12:9).

The well known case of incest in the church at Corinth caused Paul to distinguish between associating with sexually immoral people who claimed to be Christians and people in the world who were not Christians. Paul said, "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave the world." Paul sought to preserve ethical integrity in the household of faith and evangelistic outreach in the world. In keeping with the psalmist, Paul made it clear, "You must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother

¹ Ross, Psalms, 201.

² Goldingay, Psalms, 143.

or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people” (1 Cor 5:9-11).

Some may read the urgency and intensity of psalmist’s vowed moral convictions as tantamount to Pharisaical legalism, but only if they fail to understand the meaning of life and the work of Christ. Jesus came not to abolish God’s law, but to draw out the significance of the law and to fulfill all that God intended through the law. Jesus came to establish the law, not undermine it; to complete it, not condemn it. By reducing it to an external religious activity and legal code, the Pharisees short-circuited the intended meaning of the law. They were guilty of missing the meaning of the law by substituting external religious conformity for heart righteousness. Jesus’ promise to fulfill the law and the prophets is inclusive of everything the Old Testament taught, symbolized, modeled, and looked forward to. Jesus fulfilled the covenant promises made to Abraham and David. He accomplished everything anticipated in the burnt sacrifices, Passover Lamb, and tabernacle. He exemplified the perseverance of Job and the faithfulness of Abraham. He embodied the goal of the law espoused by the prophets in his own righteousness. In every way – doctrinally, ethically, and ceremonially – the law finds its completion in Jesus. All this lies behind Jesus’ concise affirmation, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17).³

Public Administration

*Whoever slanders their neighbor in secret,
I will put to silence;
whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart,
I will not tolerate.
My eyes will be on the faithful in the land,
that they may dwell with me;
the one whose walk is blameless
will minister to me.
No one who practices deceit
will dwell in my house;
no one who speaks falsely
will stand in my presence.
Every morning I will put to silence
all the wicked in the land;
I will cut off every evildoer
from the city of the Lord.
Psalm 101:5-8*

The pursuit of justice in the king’s realm is his high calling and commitment. The challenge to root out the hidden crimes of secret slander and arrogance may impress us as nearly impossible. It is hard enough to prosecute overt evil, but the king pledges to go after “secret actions and inner

³ Webster, *The Easy Yoke*, 96.

attitudes.”⁴ He wants to remove people from public office who through their slander and arrogance cause division and discord. This level of justice in the ranks of government is unheard of, but “as head of the political machine and as the guardian of justice” the king vows to disqualify gossipers and patronizing egotists.⁵ The king has his eyes on people with character who are good from the inside-out. “The faithful in the land” are beatitude-based believers, with salt and light impact, whose heart righteousness chooses love instead of hate, purity instead of lust, fidelity instead of infidelity, honesty instead of dishonesty, reconciliation instead of retaliation, and prayer over revenge (Matthew 5:1-48).

The king’s desire to root out evil in his administration is a most worthy goal. Just imagine a king who pledges that he is committed every waking moment from morning to night to silencing “all the wicked in the land” and cutting “off every evildoer from the city of the Lord” (Ps 101:8). However, this should not only be the king’s desire but this vow of justice and righteousness should be on the lips of every parent, official, administrator, pastor, teacher, coach, and employer. We should be able to say, “I will conduct the affairs of my house [family, office, company, class, team] with a blameless heart” (Ps 101:2c).

Psalms 101 is associated with David, but we know the king did not live up to this high calling to personal and public righteousness and social justice. This psalm serves as an indictment against David’s will to power over Bathsheba (2 Sam 11-12) and his insistence on counting the fighting men (2 Sam 24:1-17). David’s confession, “I have sinned; I, the shepherd, have done wrong,” is a confession that we all have needed to echo over the course of our lives. David’s passion for righteousness and justice, along with his marked failure, serve to center our hopes and expectations on the one who “has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin” (Heb 4:15). Leslie Allen writes, “Ultimately the Christian will view the psalm in the light of Isaiah 11:1-5.”⁶ One greater than David has come, springing up “from the stump of Jesse,” who has the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord and “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:9). In his sermon to the Athenians on Mars Hill, the apostle Paul looked forward to the day “when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31)

⁴ Goldingay, Psalms, 143.

⁵ Kidner, Psalms, 359.

⁶ Allen, Psalms 101-150, 7.