

Psalm 50 • Meaningless Religion

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Psalm chapter 50 is a Psalm of rebuke and impending judgment on two sectors of Jewish society. And I think you'll see that these also apply to Christians. The first are those who are genuine believers, but who have become neglectful of a real, true, genuine relationship with God. And the second sector that we're going to look at is a group that doesn't care about God at all.

The first group, I don't know if you can relate to this or not. Have you ever met somebody who loves the Lord? Maybe you've been in these, in this position. You love the Lord, yeah, you really do. But your love has cooled. I think we've all been there. Your love has cooled. And you're just going through the motions of your Christian life and the things that you know are important, the things you know are necessary for you to grow as a believer and so forth and so on.

Well, the Jews back in the time when this psalm was written, some of them, and that's who he's going to address in this Psalm. Some of them were doing what they were supposed to be doing as far as fulfilling the requirements of the sacrificial system. But it was no longer heartfelt. There was nothing real about it. Do you understand?

Okay. In the previous Psalm 49, you remember how the psalmist said, I know that God will ransom my soul from the grave? That's what the sacrificial system was meant to remind the Jews of every single time they performed a sacrifice. It was meant to remind them there needs to be a sacrifice in my place. It's not me that's dying. It's this other, in this case, it's this animal that's dying. And there's a shedding of blood. There's a death. Right? For me.

And what God was teaching the Jews, was that the ransom that would be paid on their behalf, would be a ransom of life for life. And that's... It was meant to remind the Jews of that.

But like anything that we do with God, for God, whatever, it can become meaningless over time. And we... It can just become a carrying out of the motions, going through the motions, no real effort, no real reflection on our part or something like that. It'd be like someone coming to church today but they're just passionless. They're...

Have you ever been at a church where they confess their sin by reading a prayer corporately? I was actually raised in that sort of a situation. They would, we... During the service we would have this, and it was in the bulletin, we would have a time of corporate confession. And we would all read the same prayer. Aloud. At the same time.

And they would say, usually someone would say, okay, stand and we're going to read the confession. Okay, everybody stands up. And then in this low, droning voice you hear everybody going, dear Lord, I have not lived as I should... And I remember as a kid we were just reading words.

Now that doesn't mean somebody can't read something like that and really be genuinely touched to their heart. I'm not saying they can't. But it's so easy when you're doing things in that sort of a way, to just let it be part of the service. This is where we read that one prayer thingy. And you don't even have to be thinking about it. You can be thinking about the football game or dinner. All I got to do is just sit there and read it. All I got to do is... And then I'm thinking about something.

Have you ever read something and then realized, I don't have a clue what I read. I used to do that in school all the time. The teacher would say, read chapter 32. And I'd get done reading chapter 32 and I'd think, I was dreaming about something else the entire time. I have no clue what I just read, but I read the words.

It's possible to do that with the things of the Lord, where we just go through the motions. And that is what Israel is doing. And that is what the Lord is going to confront them with here.

The Psalm goes like this, verse 1,

"The Mighty One, God, the LORD, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

2 Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth." (ESV)

Why? Because out of Zion comes the law. And the law is the perfect expression of God's righteous decrees. The law, by the way, is flawless. Out of Zion comes the flawlessness of God's law.

And so he says in verse 3,

"Our God comes, he does not keep silence; before him is a devouring fire, around him a mighty tempest."

And by the way, these are expressions consistent with judgment. When you hear, when you see the word, fire related to the coming of the Lord, it's usually judgment. There's, it's usually talking about judgment. Because the holiness of God, is that fire of the Lord which burns through our lives. And what does it consume? Wood, hay, and stubble, right?

Now, there are things that fire cannot consume, and those are the works and the things that we do that are done unto the Lord. But that which is not of God, it is consumed by the fire of His presence. And so it says, our God comes, and with Him comes a devouring fire.

Look what he goes on to say in verse 4,

"He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people."

He's calling the heaven and the earth to witness. Only God can do that. Call heaven and earth to witness of these judgments that he's about to give.

And here's what he says. Verse 5,

"5 Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!"

"6 The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge!"

And here's where the LORD begins to speak,

"7 Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God."

8 Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me."

God says, I'm going to come; I'm going to testify before you; I've got a rebuke, but I want you to know it's not for your sacrifices. You guys are doing the sacrifices. I get it. And you're, in fact, you're doing them in the way that was prescribed as far as the detail and all that stuff.

But now He's going to go on to describe that you're doing it without a heart. And you're doing it because you think I need this. In other words, you're doing this for me. You're no longer doing this for you.

Have you ever met somebody that's doing favors for God? I'm going to go to church this week because God needs it. Or I'm going to pray, because if I stopped praying and believing in God, I'm not sure where He'd be. God needs my prayer. God...

Have you ever stopped to think about the fact that if every human being who ever lived on the face of the earth or who is living now, stopped believing in Him that it wouldn't change Him one iota. He would still be the almighty, all powerful, eternal God. He doesn't need you and He doesn't need me. And that's what He's about to say.

Look what he says in verse 9. Remember, the people think they're bringing sacrifices because God needs them. He says,

"I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds. (for that matter. He says,)

10 For every beast in the forest, is mine, (anyway. He says,) the cattle on a thousand hills. (They all belong to me.)

11 I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is (all) mine."

You are bringing me these animals because you thought I needed these. 12. It gets a little almost a graphic in a crazy way. He says,

"If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and it's fullness is, are mine.

13 Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?"

Is that why I've asked you to bring these things? Because I'm hungry? You see? Do you see where their heart has gotten? We got to do this for God. Do you know that was a pagan thought? The pagans brought sacrifices because the pagan gods needed it.

And God is saying, guys, I created the world. And I created everything in it. It all belongs to me. I asked you to bring sacrifices for you, so that you would understand the idea of substitutionary sacrifice. I wanted you to have in your

mind, the idea of a ransomed life. But you lost sight of that. You got to think and it was all for Me. It's for you.

He asked some questions that are almost crazy. Am I hungry? Am I thirsty? By the way, I think sometimes when we... I'm thinking about some New Testament corollaries, for the sacrificial system.

We don't obviously sacrifice animals anymore. That was under the old covenant. But just as the Jews began to trust the system, rather than the God who gave it, we can do the same thing. Do you know what I mean by trusting the system?

There's this idea, if I do what God tells me to do, then I'm okay. And for the Jews, that became the sacrificial system. I'm going to... It's like, I know I don't live the life I really need to, but, oh, I've got a goat, don't worry. I know I haven't been living like I should, but I got a couple of bulls in the pen. Let's give one of those.

So, rather than trusting God and His mercy. I'm trusting in the system. I got an animal, I'll go sacrifice it just like You told us to do, and everything will be all good. Don't worry about it.

What's the corollary to that here in the New Testament church communion? What was communion given to us to do, reflect and remember. Right? Jesus told us that. He said, "*...do this in remembrance of me.*" (Luke 22:19) He didn't say, do it to be saved. But isn't that what some churches have done?

They've made communion a means of salvation. Have you had communion? Well, if you haven't had communion, you're probably not a Christian yet. Trusting in the system rather than the God who gave it and the mercy of God. See, communion is for you and I, this beautiful reminder of God's mercy. And that's why we do it.

How about water baptism? Personally, I love water baptism. But in a lot of churches, we've trusted in the system rather than the God who's behind it all. He told us to be baptized. Right? And baptism is this beautiful picture of identifying with Christ in the, in His death, burial, and resurrection.

It's a lovely pantomime illustration to anyone who's watching, I am identified with Christ. He identified with me on the cross. I identify with Him in the waters of baptism, depicting His death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus is my Lord.

It's wonderful, but it points to what? Points to the mercy of God. What do we do? Have you been baptized in water? Well, if you're not baptized, you're not saved. See, we make it all about the system, whether it's communion or baptism, or any number of other things that we could possibly throw in there.

It's exactly what the Jews were doing. Trusting in the system of the sacrifice rather than the God of mercy who gave it, so that they would focus their attention on His mercy. And that's the point.

Here's what God wants them to do. Look at verse 14,

"Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High,

15 and call upon me in the day of trouble; (and) I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

You know what He's saying here in these 2 verses? I want you to care. You're doing this in a perfunctory and meaningless sort of a way. I want you to care. I want you to be people who have gratitude.

When you and I are taking communion, we should be overwhelmed with gratitude. Oh God, look what You did for me. When you get baptized in water, it'd be, oh Lord, just as the water washes away the filth of the body, I know that You through the spirit, the blood You shed on the cross. You've washed away the sin of my life. And, oh, I'm so grateful. It's meant to remind us, I want you to be thankful.

Notice the first thing God says here is, I want you to offer *"a sacrifice of thanksgiving."* And I want you to be really thankful. And he says, I want you to care enough that when you take a vow in the name of the Lord, you keep that vow out of respect for Me. Don't use My name to impress people.

Taking vows for the Jews back then was huge. It was enormous. (Numbers 30) In fact, it was so big, they, people talked to Jesus about it. God's just saying, just care, just care. And He says, when you're in trouble, how about turning to Me and not to the world for answers..., sort of a thing. How about turning to Me. Care enough to turn to Me.

And He even gives a promise there. I will deliver you if you'll just turn to Me. Stop trusting in the system and trust in Me. Right? That's what the Lord is saying.

You know what God is saying to the Jews? I want a relationship with you. I want a relationship. Because you see... And, we Christians talk a lot about relationship and there's a reason for it. If you don't have a relationship with God and yet you think about God, or you do church, or whatever, then you are involved in religion, not relationship.

And religion become, can become, very empty, very fast. Going through the motions, doing what you need to do. Got to read my Bible because it's time to read my Bible. It's not that I want to get to know God. It's not that I want to understand what He has for my life or His will. I just got to do it because it's my job. Here we go. And you're looking ahead, oh, there's a long chapter. Oh, man. I got to get going here.

How do you think your spouse would feel if you treated them that way, related to sitting down and having a relationship? Well, I've got 30 seconds. What's on your heart? Can you make it quick? That's not a relationship, is it? And you might be married.

Just like with God, you might be religious, but you don't have a relationship. Because there's no warmth. There's no reality. There's no beauty. There's no intimacy. And God is saying here to the Jews, I want to be intimate with you on a spiritual level.

Now, in the last part of this Psalm, God is going to turn to those, this other sector of Jewish society. And these are the people who are religious, but care nothing for God. Okay?

Verse 16.

"But to the wicked God says: (and that's, by the way, that's God's Word for religious people who don't care about Him. He says, to the wicked, God says, "What right have you to recite my statutes or take my covenant on your lips?"

He's saying, you speak the words, you talk the talk, but it's not in your heart. You could, you couldn't care less. Right? About what you're saying, what this is all about. It's just it's meaningless to you, but you do it anyway. He says, what right do you have?

And then God tells them why? Verse 17. He tells them why He calls them wicked. First of all, number one,

"...you hate discipline, (which is training. You don't care anything about being trained.) and you cast my words behind you." That's a poetic way of saying, You don't give a rip about My Word, the Scriptures.

"¹⁸ If you see a thief, you are pleased with him, and you keep company with adulterers." In other words you, rather than separating from the overtly sinful people in the world, you join with them.

Next in verse 19, he says,

"You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit." Which is a way of saying, you just say, you let your mouth say anything it wants to say, boastful, abusive, vulgar obscenities. It doesn't matter. You just let it come out of your mouth. He says,

"²⁰ You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son."

²¹ These things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you." This is a very severe word to these other individuals.

And He says in verse 22,

"Mark this, then, you who forget God, and that means you who ignore God. You do not fear God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver!"

What's interesting about this rebuke, there's mercy in it. Is God saying here, This is it. You're done. You're dead. Sorry, you're gone! Is He saying that? He's not, is He. You know what He's saying? He says, *"Mark this,"* in other words, listen carefully to this lest you forget God, and I tear you apart!

He's basically giving them a warning. And He's giving them another chance to get on the right track. And He says, in that case, when I come against you, there will be none to deliver! I am the final avenue of deliverance.

Verse 23. He ends the Psalm by saying,

"The one who offers thanksgiving (Right? The one who has a genuine relationship with Me) as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God"

In other words, I will reveal the means of salvation for the one who wants genuinely to have a relationship. We're going to stop there.

Let's pray,

Heavenly Father, we thank You and praise You, for Your goodness, Your blessing, and the hope that we're given from Your Word. Thank You Lord, for giving us insight and helping us to see what it means to really live for You, and to desire You and not to just go through the motions.

Help us Lord, to really press in, to know You, to love You. Give us a heart LORD, to love You more and more every day. We look to You Father and to no one else.

We pray all of these things in the name of Jesus, our Savior, amen.