

You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST
IN THE
LORD *and do good;*
dwell in the land and
enjoy safe pasture.
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 18

*The works of God show forth His glory:
His law is greatly to be esteemed and loved.*

1. The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of his hands.
2. Day to day uttereth speech, and night to night showeth knowledge.
3. There are no speeches or languages, where their voices are not heard.
4. Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth: and their words unto the ends of the world.
5. He hath set his tabernacle in the sun: and he as a bridegroom coming out of his bride chamber, hath rejoiced as a giant to run the way.
6. His going out is from the end of heaven, and his circuit even to the end thereof: and there is no one that can hide himself from his heat.
7. The law of the Lord is unspotted, converting souls: the testimony of the Lord is faithful, giving wisdom to little ones.
8. The justices of the Lord are right, rejoicing hearts: the commandment of the Lord is lightsome, enlightening the eyes.
9. The fear of the Lord is holy, enduring forever and ever: the judgments of the Lord are true, justified in themselves.
10. More to be desired than gold and many precious stones: and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.
11. For thy servant keepeth them, and in keeping them there is a great reward.
12. Who can understand sins? From my secret ones cleanse me, O Lord:
13. And from those of others spare thy servant. If they shall have no dominion over me, then shall I be without spot: and I shall be cleansed from the greatest sin.
14. And the words of my mouth shall be such as may please: and the meditation of my heart always in thy sight. O Lord, my helper, and my Redeemer.

The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.

PSALM NUMBER: 18

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of his hands." Being about to institute a comparison between the law of God and his heavens, and thence to extol his law, he sets out by saying, that such are the grandeur of the heavens, that they at once proclaim the grandeur of their Maker. The heavens show forth the glory of God;" that is to say, the heavens preeminently, beyond all the other works of God, by their grandeur and beauty make his glory known to us; "and the firmament declareth the work of his hands." The same repeated, for heavens and firmament signify the same thing, namely, the whole celestial display, consisting of sun, moon, stars, etc., for we read in Genesis, that "God called the firmament heaven," and in it placed the sun, moon, and stars. The word "heaven," and "heavens," are used indiscriminately in the Psalms, and governed by verbs in the plural, as well as the singular number, as are all nouns of multitude. The firmament, comprising all the heavenly bodies, announces and declares to men the work of the hands of God; that is his principal and most beautiful work, from which we may form some idea of his greatness and his glory.

2. "Day to day uttereth speech, and night to night showeth knowledge." What a beautiful announcement is that of God's glory by the heavens. For three reasons. First because they announce it incessantly. Second, because they do it in the language of all nations. Third, because they announce it to the whole world. How do they do it incessantly? This verse shows us how, for the heavens announce his glory day and night by the beauty of the sun in the day, and that of the stars by night; but as the days and nights pass away, and are succeeded by others, the Psalmist most beautifully and poetically imagines one day having performed its course, and spent it in announcing the glory of God, and then hands over the duty to the following day to do likewise; and so with the night, having done its part, gives the charge to the following night to do the same; and thus, "Day to day uttereth speech:" when its course has run, it warns the following to be ready, "And night to night indicates knowledge." When the night too has finished its task of praising God, it warns the following to be ready for the duty; and thus, without intermission, without interruption, day and night fall in, and lead the choir in chanting the praises of their Creator.

14. "And the words of my mouth shall be such as may please: and the meditation of my heart always in thy sight. O Lord, my helper, and my redeemer." Then shall I not only "be without spot," but even the words of my mouth will be agreeable; and the hymns I chant to your praise, both with heart and voice, will be always pleasing to thee, coming as they will from a clear heart and simple mouth. May my canticles find favor with thee, through your own grace, and not through my merits; for, if I am "without spot," "cleansed from the greatest sin," and if my words are "such as may please," the whole is thy gift, thy work, thy action, thou who art "my helper, my Redeemer:" my helper in prosperity, my redeemer in adversity.

END OF PSALM 18

10. "More to be desired than gold and many precious stones: and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb." The conclusion from the foregoing. Since God's law is so good, so much preferable to all the riches and delicacies of this world, for they are "More to be desired than gold and many precious stones: and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb;" that is, not only sweeter than honey itself, but sweeter than it is in its purest state, when it is overflowing the honeycomb. The word honeycomb is introduced to correspond with the words, "many precious stones," in the first part of the verse. How far removed is this truth from the ideas of the carnal! What a number of such people to be found who, for a small lucre, or a trifling gratification, are ready to despise God's commandments! And yet, nothing can be more true than that the observance of God's law is of more service, and confers greater happiness than any amount of wealth or worldly pleasure.

11. "For thy servant keepeth them, and in keeping them there is a great reward." He proves by an example, or rather by his own experience, the truth of what he asserted. For, says he, your servant knows it by his own experience, having received innumerable favors from you, so long as he observed your commandments.

12. "Who can understand sins? From my secret ones cleanse me, O Lord:" Having stated that he observed the commandments of God, he now corrects himself, and excepts sins of ignorance, which can hardly be guarded against, such as arise from human frailty.

13. "And from those of others spare thy servant. If they shall have no dominion over me, then shall I be without spot: and I shall be cleansed from the greatest sin." The meaning of "From those of others spare thy servant," is not to ask of God to forgive us the sins of others, in which sense this passage is commonly quoted but we ask God to protect us from the company of the wicked. For men of good will, such as David was, should especially guard against being ignorant of their own offenses, and especially against being seduced by the wicked; and the meaning of the prayer is: From those of others, that is, from men of other habits, "Spare thy servant;" that is, by sparing him, keep those ill-disposed people from the friendship of thy servant. He next assigns a reason for his fear of keeping up any familiarity with the wicked, for if those bad men "shall have no dominion over me," that is to say, by their familiarity get no hold of and master me, and thus bring me to act with them, "then shall I be without spot," and "cleansed from the greatest sin;" namely, mortal sin; for every mortal sin may be called "the greatest crime," because it turns us away from our good and great God; and directly leads us to the fearful punishment of hell.

3. "There are no speeches nor languages, where their voices are not heard." He now proves that the preaching of the heavens is delivered in all languages, that is to say, can be understood by all nations, as if the heavens spoke in the language of every one of them: because all nations, when they behold the beauty and the excellence of the heavens, cannot but understand the excellence and the superiority of him who made them.

4. "Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth: and their words unto the ends of the world." The third source of praise of the eloquence of the heavens is, that they announce God's glory, not only without intermission, and in all languages, but they do it, furthermore, all over the world. By sound is not meant noise, but the announcement of that glory that arises from beholding the beauty of the heavenly bodies. "Into all the earth," and "Into the ends of the world," mean the same, and is only a repetition of frequent use in the Psalms. St. Paul quotes this passage in proof of the preaching of Christ having reached all nations; from which we are to understand, that the apostles are allegorically meant here by the heavens. And in truth, the holy apostles and other holy preachers of the word, may deservedly be so compared to the heavens. For, by contemplation they are raised above the earth, ample through their charity, splendid through their wisdom, always serene through their peace of mind, through their intelligence quickly moved by obedience, thundering in their reproofs, flashing by their miracles, profuse in their gifts to others; and, in the spirit of true liberality, seeking nothing from them; free from the slightest speck, as regards sanctity of life; and, finally, the resting place of the supreme king, by reason of their perfect sanctity. "For the soul of the just is the seat of wisdom."

5. "He hath set his tabernacle in the sun: and he as a bridegroom coming out of his bride chamber, hath rejoiced as a giant to run the way:" Though the whole heavens declare the glory of God, the most splendid object in them, the sun, does so especially. The sun, then, being the most excellent object in the entire world, there God "Set his tabernacle." He calls it a tabernacle, not a house, because he dwells there only for a while, during this short time of our peregrination, when we see him "Through a glass," the glass of creatures, of which the sun is the principal. But when we shall come to our country, we shall see God, not "In his tabernacle in the sun," but in his own home, the home of eternity. The Prophet proves that God "Set his tabernacle in the sun," by three arguments: the first, derived from its beauty, the second, from its strength, the third, from its beneficence. "And he as a bridegroom coming out of his bride chamber." Here is the argument from his beauty. He rises, beautiful, bright, ornamented as a bridegroom in his wedding garments; and what can be grander, more beautiful, or more striking than the rising sun?

6. "His going out is from the end of heaven, and his circuit even to the end thereof: and there is no one that can hide himself from his heat." A second argument from the sun's power and strength, which performs an immeasurable journey daily at such speed, without the smallest fatigue. "He rejoiced as a giant," or as a stout, robust person, full of alacrity, (for such is the force of the Hebrew,) such as is peculiar to those who enter on anything with pleasure. "His going out is from the end of heaven, and his circuit even to the end thereof." By the end of heaven is meant the east, for there he rises, and never stops till he comes there again; and thus, "His circuit is even to the end thereof: and there is not one that can hide himself from his heat." The last argument, taken from the service rendered unto all created things by the sun. For the sun, by its enlivening heat, so fosters and nourishes all things, that it may be called the common parent of all things, on land and in the sea. Hence, the sun so assiduously and carefully traverses the entire globe, visits all creation, "That nothing can hide itself;" that is, lose a share of its wonderful favors.

7. "The law of the Lord is unspotted, converting souls; the testimony of the Lord is faithful, giving wisdom to little ones." The comparison is now applied. Beautiful are the heavens, more beautiful is the sun, but far and away more beautiful is the law of the Lord. Bright are the heavens, more bright is the sun, but much more bright is the law of the Lord. Useful are the heavens to man, more useful is the sun, but more useful than any is the law of the Lord. He then enumerates six encomiums of the divine law. First, "The law of the Lord is unspotted, converting souls." Most beautiful is the law of the Lord, without spot, without stain tolerating nothing sinful, as the laws of man do; and thus, when properly studied and considered, brings the soul to love it, and consequently to love God, its author. The second encomium is in the words, "The testimony of the Lord is faithful, giving wisdom to little ones." By "testimony" we are to understand the same law, because, in the Scriptures, and especially in the Psalms, God's law is not only called the law, the precept, the commandment, and the like, which other writers also apply to it; but is further styled the testimony, the justice, the justification, the judgment, as any one can see, especially in Psalm 118. It is called the "testimony," because it bears testimony to men: what the will of God is, what he requires of us, what punishments he has in store for the wicked, what rewards for the just. He says then, "The testimony of the Lord is faithful;" that is, God's law, that will most assuredly reward the good and punish the wicked. "Giving wisdom to little ones;" that means, giving to the poor in understanding the light of prudence to direct them in doing good, and avoiding evil. By "little ones" he means those who do not abound in the wisdom of the world; and by "wisdom" he means that spiritual prudence that helps us to reform our habits, and mold them to the shape of the law of God.

8. "The justices of the Lord are right, rejoicing hearts: the commandment of the Lord is lightsome, enlightening the eyes." The third encomium on the divine law is, that once we begin to love it, of which the first encomium treats, and to observe it, as treated of in the second, it diffuses a most extra-ordinary joy in the person, for nothing can be pleasanter than a good conscience. "The justices of the Lord;" that is, his law, his commandments, being most just, and making the observer of them just, "are right" and gladful; that is, "rejoicing the hearts;" for upright hearts harmonize with "right" precepts; and they therefore, are glad, and rejoice when an occasion offers for the observance of the commandments. The fourth encomium is, "The commandment of the Lord is lightsome, enlightening the eyes." The law of the Lord, through the bright light of divine wisdom, illuminates our intellectual vision, because it makes us understand God's will, and what is really good and really bad. God's law illuminates also in a preparatory manner, for wisdom will not approach the malevolent soul; and nothing proves such an obstacle to our knowing God, which is the essence of wisdom, as impurity of heart. "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God."

9. "The fear of the Lord is holy, enduring forever and ever the judgments of the Lord are true, justified in themselves." The fifth encomium is, that the law of the Lord causes the above-named goods to be not only temporal but eternal; for the fear of the Lord, that makes one tremble at the idea of offending God, "endure forever and ever:" as to its reward, the rewards to be had from the observance of the law do not terminate with death, but hold forever, as he says in Psalm 9, "The patience of the poor shall not perish forever." Both Greek and Hebrew imply, that the fear spoken of here is not that of a slave, but that of a child, without any admixture of servility; that of which Psalm 111 speaks, "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord; he shall delight exceedingly in his commandments." For he who works from servile fear does not observe the commandments freely, but unwillingly; but he who is influenced by filial fear "Delights exceedingly in his commandments; that is, is most anxious and desirous to observe them. The last encomium is, that the law of the Lord, being true and just in itself, needs no justification from any other quarter. "The judgments of the Lord are true, justified in themselves." "The judgments of the Lord" — meaning his commandments, because through them God judges man, and they are the standard and the rule whereby to distinguish virtue from vice, and good works from bad — "are justified in themselves;" they require no one to prove they are just, the pure fact of their being God's commands being quite sufficient for it. Along with that, the ten commandments, that are mainly alluded to here being nothing more than the principles of the natural law, so abound in justice, that they hold in all times, places, and circumstances, so as to admit of no dispensation; whereas other laws are obliged to yield betimes to circumstances.