*DEVOTIONAL*

December 25 - 30

*Blessed in the New Year*

**Monday, December 25 Psalm 1:1-6**

*“Blessed is the one who . . .”*

If you were to open a handwritten medieval manuscript of the Psalms at its beginning, chances are that you would discover this psalm written in red ink and without any evidence of a number. That is because at an early date the psalm we now know as Psalm 1 was understood to be an introduction to the whole book of Psalms rather than just another psalm. It encourages the reader to consider the entire collection of psalms to have the effect of divine guidance. This psalm also exhorts the reader both to study the psalms and to meditate deeply on the message God is communicating through them. It strongly affirms that how one responds to the revelation of God received by reading the psalms determines one’s ultimate destiny.

The psalm contains the standard Old Testament wisdom motif of the “two ways” of righteousness (v. 6) and wickedness (v. 1, 4-6). While the wicked await condemnation, the “blessed” experience the happiness that flows from being right with God. Jesus uses the same idea of “blessed” in his Beatitudes in Matthew 5.

*I delight in the guidance you give me, Lord, through your Word. Amen.*

**Tuesday, December 26 Psalm 3:1-8**

*“May your blessing be on your people”*

The historical notice in the psalm heading relates this lament to the occasion of David’s flight from Jerusalem to escape the attacking forces of his rebellious son Absalom (2 Samuel 15-16). But, David has been unable to escape his foes and finds himself surrounded by an overwhelming force intent on ending his life. Things do not look good for David; they are saying that this time “God will not deliver him.”

David, however, does not give up in silence. Instead, he responds with a cry of confidence directed not to his enemies in order to argue with them whether or not God will deliver him, but to God himself. Confronted by impending destruction, David calls on his God as a protective barrier (“shield”) to inhibit and frustrate those who plan to do him harm. God is also the giver of dignity (“glory”) and the one who lifts up the head (a public sign of honor). The final verse of the psalm encapsulates and drives home the essential meaning of the whole: deliverance and blessing come only from God.

*You bless your people, Lord, by delivering us from evil. Amen.*

**Wednesday, December 27 Psalm 16:1-11**

*“Keep me safe, O God”*

Where do we find our security? If you were to take a drive around your neighborhood, you would probably see signs posted on residences announcing the installation of a protective “security system.” Such signs are intended, of course, to forestall burglaries by announcing beforehand that any attempt at breaking in will set off an alarm and bring security forces to the scene. One wonders have many of the signs are fake! You can even go online and purchase “false” security cameras in order to give the impression of security where none exists.

Psalm 16 testifies that even at the most unstable and threatening moments of our lives – when all other forms of security fail and leave us without defense – God is still the one who blesses us with his presence. Many of us have experienced the assurance of divine presence when the rest of our life is in turmoil: our job is suddenly taken away; our spouse dies; our grown child denies the faith of his youth. In these situations – and many others like them – Psalm 16 wants us to know that God is the source of every good thing.

*The world can be a frightening place, Lord, but in you I am secure. Amen.*

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**Thursday, December 28 Psalm 23:1-6**

*“The Lord is my shepherd”*

The opening verse establishes the dominant theme of the first four verses. That God is “shepherd” is consistent with claims elsewhere that he is “king,” since ancient Near Eastern monarchs described themselves as shepherding their people. As shepherds, such kings understood their responsibility to provide protective order for their people and to administer just and effective laws. That God is our shepherd means that those who trust in him as sheep do in a shepherd will never lack for whatever they need.

The powerful image introduced in verse 5 is the prepared table, a symbol of honor and provision. The fact that the table is prepared “in the presence of my enemies” accords well with verse 4 about the protection afforded by the shepherd’s rod and staff while traveling through the valley of the shadow of death. While our life is lived in the presence and power of God, it is lived in a world that is not yet restored to the wholeness God intends. As a result, the faithful, though experiencing divine presence and reward for their faithfulness, are still among enemies.

*I trust you, Lord, to supply all my needs. Amen.*

**Friday, December 29 Psalm 24:1-6**

*“The earth is the Lord’s”*

The two introductory verses affirm the authority of God over the whole earth, its contents and inhabitants. Because he created it, the earth belongs to God. Having affirmed the creative power and continuing authority of God over the whole world, the psalm now turns its gaze on the creature who would enter the presence of this creator God. The question, “Who may ascend the hill of the Lord?” is intended to cause those who seek entrance into the temple to first reflect humbly on repenting of their sin and seeking forgiveness.

Having gained admission to the temple, the gathered worshippers anticipate the arrival of God himself. There is a sense that the temple can never fully contain the glory that is God; rather, it serves only as the meeting place of God and his people. As the divine “dwelling,” the temple is the place where God temporarily resides among his people and is the center from which he moves out into the world. The repeated ritual question, “Who is this king of glory?” allows the people to respond with a joyous, “The Lord Almighty – he is the King of glory.”

*Living in your world, Lord, I worship you and give you all the glory. Amen.*

**Saturday, December 30 Psalm 31:19-24**

*“How great is your goodness”*

Because of his unwavering faith, David writes of the glad acknowledgment of God’s goodness and his faithfulness to those that patiently wait upon him. He makes a statement worth pondering: “How great is your goodness?” The songwriter said it well, “The longer I serve him the sweeter it grows.” That is because we get to see God’s great goodness in action. As we see it, it calls for our wonder, our love and our praise. His goodness is great, it is laid up in store for those that trust him and it will always result in our blessing.

As good as God had been to him, David had discovered a great secret: much of the great goodness of God was yet in store for him. Part of the goodness of God we can see and is measurable, but so much of it is unseen and boundless. It’s like comparing the river to the great ocean, or the part of the earth that our eyes can see with the vast earth that our eyes cannot take in all at once. So, “be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord,” for his goodness is never ending.

*As good as you have been to me, Lord, there is much more in store. Amen.*