

Psalm 149 – 150: Good beginnings need Good Endings

Well friends, back at the beginning of May – nine weeks ago if you can believe it – we started this sermon series on the Psalms, looking at Psalm 29.

And now here we are at the end of June closing it off, looking at Psalm 149 and 150 – the last two compositions of the book of Psalms.

And I deliberately chose these two Psalms, wanting to present them together as one Psalm, because neither one on their own brings the kind of ending that our series needs.

Psalm 150 is too short – there's very little information given as to why we should praise Yahweh, by turning the whole orchestra up to eleven as it exhorts us to do...

And Psalm 149 starts out well – but you may have noticed that it ends on a note of vengeance and judgment – not really the sort of ending we'd expect for the book of Psalms.

But in combining Psalm 149 and 150 we get a one-two punch as it were that gives us plenty of information and a triumphant climactic finish that leaves us breathless – the way a good ending should.

Because friends, good beginnings.... need good endings. Do you know what I mean?

Have you ever read a book where the storyline grabbed your interest right from the opening paragraph and kept you on a roller-coaster ride of ups and downs right through the middle – but then all of a sudden you notice there's only a few pages of the book left and you realize there's no way this story is going to resolve itself satisfactorily – there aren't enough pages left to do it in...

And sure enough it just sort of fizzles out and ends, leaving you disappointed and very frustrated.

I mean it's one thing to end with a cliff-hanger, which isn't really an ending at all but a pause in the story where the

author makes the readers wait, to build up anticipation for the next book to be released... but a bad ending can ruin a good story can't it.

In fact bad endings can ruin many things that initially started out well.

A piece of poetry, a movie, a song, a dance... these can all have great beginnings but they can be ruined by bad endings...

Sermons and sermon series can start out well – but their message and effectiveness can also be lost in a bad ending.

And if you are a Toronto Maples Leafs fan you know all about how good beginnings and bad endings can apply to sports.

And friends, a bad ending can also ruin a good life.

Consider the lives of former Canadian Senators Mike Duffy and Pamela Wallin who were both investigated by the RCMP

and are now facing criminal charges in the court for submitting fraudulent expense claims to the Senate.

Whatever prior good they have done as news reporters, whatever public service they performed as they entered politics, whatever they may have done for the good of our nation – it has all been tarnished and tainted by how their public lives are ending.

So friends, good endings are important. But what makes for a good ending?

Well, in literature and music and dance a good ending comes from a satisfactory resolution of themes, melody, and movement – and while there are many different ways this can happen – the satisfaction in the resolution occurs as the elements of the performance develop and come to a place that is appropriate and fitting for an ending.

A murder mystery novel needs to somehow solve the question of whodunit... A child's lullaby should fade gently into the

silence needed for sleep... a crump dancer needs to be able to complete their moves and then walk away maintaining that swagger and presence which they've just boasted about through their dancing...

But what makes for a good ending for our lives?

Now, I'm sure we could identify what would be a bad ending for our lives; scandal, bankruptcy, poverty, loneliness, loss of loved ones, sickness, constant pain – both physical and emotional...

But what would be a good ending for your life look like?

Would it be some variation of “and they lived happily ever after?”; or do you envision yourself “going out in a blaze of glory?”; or maybe deep down – though you wouldn't admit it – you admire the bumper sticker that says “he who dies with the most toys wins!”

But before we go too far down that road, friends – let me offer what Psalm 149 considers to be a good ending for our lives, as this Psalm plays its role in bringing the book of Psalms to its end, and we find this suggestion right near the end of this Psalm in vs. 9 in the words “*his faithful people.*”

And if an ending is good in part because of how it relates to the beginning, then we need to notice that this phrase “*his faithful people*” also shows up in vs. 1 at the beginning of Psalm 149 - and in the exact middle of the Psalm in vs. 5.

So really what is being said here in Psalm 149, is that from the beginning, through the middle, and all the way to the end of our lives, there is nothing more fitting and appropriate for us than to be described as having been faithful to Yahweh, a part of His faithful people.

And if it's a good beginning that needs a good ending, then it's hard to find a better beginning than being delivered from slavery by Yahweh and being told that you have been chosen out of all the peoples on earth to be God's treasured

possession and a nation of priests (Ex 19:5) and then having the Creator of Heaven and Earth bind himself to you in a covenant relationship.

This is why Psalm 149:2-3 calls the people of Israel to celebrate and praise Yahweh their King with dancing, and singing and music.

So this is a very good beginning, and it definitely needs a good ending where that faithfulness is still evident.

But friends, let me tell you something about the position you will find yourself in as a faithful covenant partner with Yahweh – you will discover rather quickly that you are dammed if you do and you are dammed if you don't.

You see it's not that Yahweh's covenant requirements for being faithful are unreasonable or unattainable – it's that they run at cross purposes against our sinful human nature and the way the world works.

As we attempt to live faithfully in our covenant relationship with Yahweh we will discover a part of ourselves that resists, that doesn't want to obey, that disbelieves, doubts and rebels... and thus being faithful requires a constant battle against our sinful nature – and this can get wearisome.

Furthermore, as Israel has discovered, the other nations in the world don't take too kindly to one nation identifying themselves as God's chosen people and claiming that they alone know the way in which people ought to live to please God – and this leads to hostility, attack, and persecution...

And should Israel give into their sinful nature and acquiesce to the lifestyles of the nations around them - then God would allow them to experience the consequences of their unfaithfulness and give them over to the hostility and persecution of those nations until they turned back to Him.

All this is to say that it's not easy being in a covenant relationship with Yahweh, and we might wonder why anyone

would want to be in a covenant relationship with Yahweh - if it means such struggle and challenge in your life?

Well friends – it’s all because good beginnings need good endings.

You see God’s choice of Israel as His faithful people wasn’t truly the beginning... for that we go all the way back to the beginning beginning, when God saw all that He had made and said that it was good!

And when Adam and Eve were lead into unfaithfulness and rebellion and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and broke the Covenant of Creation - God determined that He was still going to bring about a good ending to His good beginning.

But that means Yahweh will have to work against our sinful human nature and the way in which human beings have developed and shaped God’s world since that time, and thus anyone who is included in Yahweh’s plans for the redemption

and restoration of His creation is also going to be at odds with themselves and with the ways of this world.

So to answer the question as to why would anyone want the beginning of being brought into a covenant relationship with Yahweh – it’s because He promises victory for the ending, and forgiveness in the middle.

Let’s look at vs. 4-5 in Psalm 149 a bit more closely.

The first part of vs. 4 says *“For Yahweh takes delight in his people...”* Now notice that the adjective “faithful” is missing here – this is acknowledging the reality that none of us is able to stand against the pressure of our sinful nature and the ways of the world to stay faithful to Yahweh – we will all be unfaithful to him in some way...

And it is a humbling experience friends to have to face that and own up to that – but remember that vs. 4 also says *“Yahweh delights in us... and he crowns the humble with victory”*

Then in vs. 5 all of a sudden the “faithful” adjective is put back in, it says *“Let his faithful people rejoice in this honor...”*

What’s happened here?

Friends, the good news is that God has provided a way for us to be faithful even in our unfaithfulness. Let me repeat that – God has always provided a way for us to be faithful even in our unfaithfulness.

Under the Covenant of Law if you were unfaithful to Yahweh, you could repent and offer sacrifices to receive forgiveness for your unfaithfulness – it was humbling to admit you had been unfaithful by taking advantage of the means of forgiveness which God had provided - but if you were faithful in doing so you were raised up, from how you had fallen, and considered faithful again.

Thus vs. 5 is better translated as *“Let his faithful people rejoice in this honor and sing for joy where they lie prostrate.”*

So, having been lifted up from their prostrate position of humility, having been honored with a new beginning the good news is that a good ending is once again part of the picture - and that is another reason God’s people are exhorted to “praise Yahweh...” literally Hallalu – Yah!

And friends not only does God provide a means of forgiveness so we can still be considered faithful – He also promises vengeance for all the persecution and attack that his people suffer from the nations around them when they are faithful to Him.

And the nation of Israel experienced God fulfilling this promise whenever He would raise up a Judge who would fight against the nation who was oppressing Israel.

And so vs. 6 says *“May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double edged sword in their hands”* and it brings to mind the battle that Gideon fought against the Midianites in Judges 7 when Gideon’s three-hundred soliders attacked the

Midianite army at night holding torches and trumpets and shouting, “A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!” (Judges 7:20)

Now if you know the story of the nation of Israel you will remember that eventually through King David and King Solomon Yahweh gave Israel victory over their enemies to such an extent that the surrounding nations paid Israel tribute and were subject to them.

Now that sounds like a good ending – but friends the story didn’t end there.

While Israel was free from the external opposition of persecution and attack and temptation which faithfulness to Yahweh can generate from others – they were not free from their own sinful nature.

And this proved to be their ultimate undoing in terms of being unfaithful to Yahweh, so He handed them over to the nations around them and sent them into exile.

But the story didn’t end there either friends, because Psalm 149:4 is still true “*the Lord delights in his people; and crowns the humble with victory*” and Yahweh still intended to bring about a good ending for his good beginning.

And so Yahweh sent the promised Messiah – our Lord and savior Jesus Christ – who would embody all that God’s people were supposed to be as faithful covenant partners, and whose death and resurrection would become the new means of forgiveness through whom God’s people might be considered faithful in their unfaithfulness.

So now we have a new beginning again - a wonderful new beginning in Jesus Christ that will definitely lead to the good ending that Yahweh has purposed for His Creation.

But, that story is still be worked out – the ending has happened just yet and following Jesus in our present age doesn’t change the fact that Yahweh’s plans are still running at cross purposes with the rest of the world.

Jesus himself warned us about this in John 15:20 *“Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”*

And so just as Psalm 149:4 is still true – “that God delights in His people and crowns the humble with victory “ the remainder of the Psalm regarding vengeance and punishment for those who persecute God’s people is still true as well.

Only now it has been revealed to us that it is our Lord Jesus Christ – as He embodies all that God’ faithful Covenant people are supposed to be – who will return to bring in this judgement and fulfill Psalm 149:6-9

As the apostle Paul explains in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8 *“ God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”*

Now friends - I hope you can appreciate the irony of the Apostle Paul speaking these words...

Because Paul used to be Saul the Pharisee - persecutor of the early church and responsible for the arrests and deaths of numerous Christians – so it’s ironic that he is reminding the Thessalonians of what will happen to those who persecute the followers of Jesus.

But in the case of Saul who became Paul we also are reminded that though vengeance and punishment are still coming, it is Yahweh’s desire to delay this judgement - so that people like Saul can become Paul – and so that as Paul says in Romans 11: 25-26 *“the full number of the Gentiles [may] come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved.”*

Friends, even those who persecute God’s people, who work against His purposes in this world, if they humble themselves in repentance, and come to Christ they can be forgiven and be considered faithful, and they can become members of God’s people in Jesus Christ.

Thus Saul became Paul and was He commissioned to take this message of repentance and inclusion in God's people through Jesus Christ to the Gentiles – and as long as our Lord delays in His return – those who persecute God's people still have the opportunity to repent and become part of God's people in Jesus.

And this is yet another reason to Praise Yahweh – because this delay has meant that each of us has now had the opportunity to have a good ending to our lives – as faithful covenant partners with Yahweh through Jesus Christ.

Even if our lives haven't been great up to this point, or we didn't start out with a great beginning... in terms of being faithful to Yahweh.

Because friends, Yahweh takes delight in His people and He crowns the humble with victory!

And in Jesus Christ He has provided a way for us to be faithful to Him in our unfaithfulness – we only need to humble

ourselves and receive the grace and mercy that is offered to us.

And if we need a bit of incentive to do this friends consider what our ending will be like without it...

And don't knock the power of a bad ending to motivate a change of heart friends – after all it is what motivates us to quit smoking, to eat better, exercise more, save up for retirement, and work to improve our relationships.

So friends, good beginnings need good endings and Psalm 149 motivates us to stay faithful to Yahweh through the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ so that we will be a part of that victorious ending when our Lord returns and brings in the New Heaven and the New Earth.

And now friends – with that amazing and awesome good ending in sight we are finally ready for the grand finale of Psalm 150 to bring this message and this whole sermon series

to its proper and good ending.... read it with me, with feeling
if you would, please....

Hallelujah!

Praise God in his sanctuary;

praise him in his mighty heavens.

Praise him for his acts of power;

praise him for his surpassing greatness.

Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,

praise him with the harp and lyre,

praise him with timbrel and dancing,

praise him with the strings and pipe,

praise him with the clash of cymbals,

Praise him with resounding cymbals.

Let everything that has breath praise Yahweh.

Hallelujah!

Friends after all that has been said this morning needs, this
needs no further explanation only our response of obedience
– so let's turn the band up to eleven and let's praise Yahweh!
Hallelujah! Amen