

Psalm 125 "The Fruit and Posture of Trust"

Read Psalm 125

1. (vs. 1-2) What is the fruit of trust? How do these images borrowed from the topographical features of the pilgrim way help us understand how trust in the Lord impacts us? Do you see this borne out in the life of faith?

There are two if not three fruits mentioned in this Psalm.

- I. *As a mountain those who trust are immovable. To be immovable could be many things. It could be that our sense of security or of self is no longer tossed to and fro on the waves of circumstance or the opinion of others. It could be the reality that when the crucible of circumstances hit we are often tempted to compromise our convictions or character to bring change to our situation. To be immovable could be to remain constant in character and conviction in spite of our circumstances.*
- II. *Now and forevermore. The relationship with God that is built on trust is such that it goes on forever. It is eternal in nature.*
- III. *Security. As the hills surrounded Jerusalem so the Lord surrounds us. We are surrounded on all sides by barriers to invasion, ramparts of protection. Protected by his grace, his love, his providence, his strength.*

This Psalm is spoken into a specific situation. The scepter or rule of wickedness appears to be resting upon the land.

2. What "wickedness" are we facing in our world today?

This portion of the study is potentially fraught with current events where there will be a spectrum of perspective. (eg. Some would call the freedom convoy wicked – while others will see the heavy-handed governmental response wicked). You may need to sensitively stick handle through a few pieces to find the common ground of – we all perceive that there is wickedness all around us – though we may focus on different aspects of it.

The point of this question is to find a similar context as the original listeners into which to locate the truths the psalm invites us to consider. As with the pilgrims there is a sense in which wickedness is indeed reigning in some areas and in some corners of life.

3. (vs. 3) This verse is the promise that God will bring wickedness to it's end. Why does the psalmist want the listener to hold onto this promise?

"Lest they reach out their hands to do wrong"

There is a tendency when we are under the thumb of wickedness to take matters into our own hands and push back against the wickedness with the same weapons

of wickedness. To fight fire with fire, violence with violence, fear with fear, angry word with angry word...

If we fight back against wickedness with the same weapons there is the very real danger that we will become what we are fighting against. Human history is full of such examples...

(vs. 4-5) These verses are written in the form of wisdom literature. Wisdom literature arises out of the conviction that just as God has knit a pattern, a fabric into physical reality, God has knit a pattern into every aspect of life. There is a pattern then to living into the trust that God will make a final end of wickedness. In the sermon a portion of the sermon on the mount was referenced that expresses what that pattern looks like in response to those who have wronged us.

Read Matthew 5:38-48

4. What is the pattern that Jesus fosters in response to wickedness? What impact do you think this would have on that wickedness?

Here is an unedited portion of the sermon which reflects on this passage to help trigger the conversation.

Here is the fabric – the pattern – don't resist the evil one – and then Jesus gives three examples of what that pattern looks like – if someone slaps you on the right cheek turn to them the other also...

For most of my life I have read or heard or preached the examples Jesus gives as affirming a passivity that renders a person a doormat to be walked over – but recently I read Walter Wink's Powers that be – he has a chapter in that book on these examples – seeing each one – I think rightly – as an example of non-violent resistance that upends the entire dynamic...

You see – to strike someone on the right cheek – was to strike them with the back of your hand – it was a strike that was given from the superior to an inferior – from a master to slave – from occupier to occupied – to turn the other cheek invited a strike with a closed fist – and in this culture only people of equal status could fight with closed fists – to turn the other cheek was an act of non-violent resistance – you may have just treated me as less than – but I am your equal – like you made in the image of God.

Jesus gives a second example – if someone takes your tunic give to them your cloak as well – this is picture of someone who has a debt they can't pay – their wealthy creditor seeking repayment sues them for the only thing they would have to their name – their robe – Jesus says – if that happens to you – give them your cloak as well – meaning give them your underwear – picture it – the wealthy creditor is left holding all your clothes including your skivvies – while you walk out as naked as the day you were born – and in a culture of honour and shame – where nakedness is shame – that shame rests upon the one who exposed the nakedness of another – such an action draws attention to injustice – both to the creditor and

to the society that supports such a justice system – it's an act of non-violent resistance where the tables are turned.

Jesus adds a third example – if someone forces you to go one mile – go with him two. At the time Roman law dictated that any soldier could force a civilian to carry their gear a mile – it was written into the military code – but you couldn't ask them to carry it any further – and the Roman's were merciless against infractions – any soldier who had a civilian walk more than a mile - could be flogged – demoted - docked rations.

Can you picture it? They get to the mile marker and the soldier turns to the conscripted civilian – expecting to receive their gear - and the civilian keeps walking – shock – no civilian has ever done this before – usually they make themselves scarce when they see me coming – is it kindness? – but wait what if my commanding officer sees this – can you imagine the soldier arguing with the civilian – pleading - can I have my stuff back now – it's an act of non-violent resistance that turns the tables on wickedness.

With each example you can almost see the faces around Jesus erupt in smiles – laughter spreads through the crowd – as they picture how such acts would undermine the scepter of wickedness – these examples are not so much rules to be followed – as examples to trigger creative reflection on how wickedness might be resisted...

Wink tells a story from South Africa – right before the fall of apartheid – the Afrikaners were set with bulldozers and police presence to level a squatters camp and gave the few women there 5 minutes to gather their things – perhaps aware of the residual puritanical sensibilities in the Afrikaners the woman stripped naked and stood before the bulldozers – the police turned and fled – the camp – at the time of his writing some 7 years later remained.

This is the pattern – the fabric - that trust in the promise that God will make an end to wickedness fosters.

But perhaps the fabric that has the most impact upon wickedness is what Jesus says next – you have heard that it was said love your neighbour and hate your enemy – no I tell you love your enemy - pray for those who persecute you – love will turn the tide of wickedness... (This was followed by the story of the change brought about when a Jewish couple – Michael and Julie Weisser – expressed love in the face of the threat by Larry Trapp the leader of the Nebraska chapter of the KKK.

5. (vs. 5) What is the pattern if you respond to wickedness with the weapons of wickedness?

"Those who turn aside to their crooked ways – the Lord will lead away with evildoers"

As reflected earlier when we respond to wickedness with the weapons of wickedness we become the very thing we wish were not there and as a result will be caught up in God's judgement against wickedness.

6. Eugenie Peterson says that a colloquial yet accurate translation of the blessing that closes the Psalm (Peace be upon Israel), would be Relax. How can we rest in the security that in Jesus God is going to make a final end of wickedness?

This is a personal reflection question where the truths of the Psalm are reflected upon.

For some this may bring up personal matters where they are facing wickedness. Jesus invites a response of love and forgiveness. When injustice has been done there is indeed the natural desire for justice. Love and forgiveness does not negate the desire for justice it simply gives it over to the only one who can rightly bring it about – that is God in Jesus.

For others this may address some of the worry and anxiety they have as they reflect on the state of our world.

The major thrust of the passage however I believe invites us to rebuke using the weapons of wickedness to fight back against wickedness and instead respond to that wickedness with creative acts of non-violent resistance and love.