

“The Least of These”: Ministering to Those in Need Mercy and Justice in Psalms and Proverbs

Lesson #4 for July 27, 2019

Scriptures: Psalm 9:7-9,13-20; 82; 101; 146; Proverbs 10:4; 13:23,25; 30:7-9.

1. Should our spirituality impact our lives every minute of every day? The books of Psalms and Proverbs talk about everyday living. It should be clear that these books picture God as having an impact on everything we do.
2. But, in our world we see injustice, violence, and evil permeating almost everything. Why is that? Where is God when we need Him? Are the widow, the orphan, and the poor being treated fairly in our world? Should the government be responsible for making sure that justice happens? Or, do we have some individual responsibility? Should God be responsible in some way? Is God responsible?
3. When the oppressed cry out to God, how do they expect Him to respond? Are we in any way responsible for assisting God in responding?
4. Both Psalms and Proverbs were written in poetic form. That makes them easier to memorize; but, it also reminds us that the authors were singing! There is still hope in the world.
5. Read Psalm 9:7-20. This psalm is a good example of many other psalms that we could cite suggesting that while the wicked seem to prosper at times, God is still Ruler of the universe; He will judge fairly and righteously. Death will be the “reward” of the wicked; but, eternal life will be the reward of the righteous. Can we be sure of that—in the end?
6. To many people, the idea of God’s judgment is something to be feared. But, should that be true? Don’t we know that God will be fair? If so, then the only ones who should fear God’s judgment are those who are doing evil!
7. C. S. Lewis noted:

Thousands of people who have been stripped of all they possess and who have the right entirely on their side will at last be heard. Of course they are not afraid of judgment. They know their case is unanswerable—if only it could be heard. When God comes to judge, at last it will.—C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958), p. 11.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sunday, July 21].[‡]

8. So, what about us? Do we look forward to God’s judgment?
9. Other psalms, like Psalm 82, seem to call for God to do something. Wicked judges were deciding cases unfairly and accepting bribes. They were abusing the orphans, the widows, the needy, and the helpless. And what does Psalm 82 say about judges who behave in those ways?
10. Read Psalm 82:6; compare John 10:34. What are these verses trying to say to us? In the handling of people’s lives, earthly judges are acting as if they are God. Asaph concluded his psalm by calling on God to come and rule the nations and judge fairly.
11. Unfortunately, the children of Israel did not live up to God’s guidance given so carefully through Moses. Judges and even priests became selfish and accepted bribes, and the

poor were exploited.

12. Ellen White commenting on these facts said in *Prophets and Kings** 198: Judges “are appointed to act as judges under Him [God].”[†]
13. What kind of a world would we have if every judge and every ruler were truly acting on God’s behalf and following God’s will?
14. When Jesus reminded Caiaphas that his behavior would one day be judged by God Himself, Caiaphas tore his robes! He did not want to think that one day he would stand trial for what he was doing at that moment.
15. When the poor and the needy cry out for help, how does God respond? Who are the poor and needy in our community? Which of them might be open to hearing the Word of God? How can we find those who are? Are we expected to help those who stand on the street corners and ask for more money so they can buy alcohol or drugs?
16. Read Psalm 101. It has been suggested that this psalm might have been written early in David’s kingship and may even include some of the things promised at his inauguration. It would be a wonderful pledge for every political leader to take today and fulfill.

The vows of David, recorded in the 101st psalm, should be the vows of all upon whom rest the responsibilities of guarding the influences of the home.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,* October 12, 1911, par. 12; *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students** 119.1; *AH** 408.2; *HP** 215.2.

17. By honoring God, David, in turn, expected God’s assistance not only directly from God but also through the assistance of wise counselors to administer justice and mercy in his work as king. Are we ministering justice and mercy in whatever ways we can in our daily work and other activities? Or, are we exempt because we do not work in the judicial system?
18. Read Psalm 146. The final five psalms are all psalms of praise to the Lord. Read especially Psalm 146:5-9. The psalmist rejoiced that, ultimately, God will judge in favor of the weak and helpless.
19. Do you think Psalm 146 is only talking about the future in the kingdom of heaven? Or, is it talking about what is supposed to happen now? Sometimes, Christians feel that they should help the poor and needy because God has commanded them to do so. But, this psalm makes it clear that God is already doing that work, and He just invites us to join Him in doing that. Can you think of any greater honor than to work side-by-side with God? Do you see opportunities each day to work against poverty, oppression, and disease?

Unto the poor the gospel is to be preached. Never does the gospel put on an aspect of greater loveliness than when it is brought to the most needy and destitute regions. To men of every station it delivers its precepts, which regulate their duties, and its promises, which nerve them to the discharge of their duties. Then it is that the light of the gospel shines forth in its most radiant clearness and its greatest power. Truth from the Word of God enters the hovel of the peasant and lights up the rude cottages of the poor, both black and white. Rays from the Sun of Righteousness bring gladness to the sick and suffering. Angels of God are there, and the simple faith shown makes the crust of bread and the cup of water as a banquet of luxury. Those who have been loathed and abandoned are raised through faith and pardon to the dignity of sons and daughters of God. Lifted above all in the world,

they sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. They have no earthly treasure, but they have found the pearl of great price. The sin-pardoning Saviour receives the poor and ignorant and gives them to eat of the bread which [170] comes down from heaven. They drink of the water of life.—Ellen G. White, *Letter 113*,* 1901; *Welfare Ministry** 169.1; compare *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 7, 226.2; *MLT** 244.5.

20. Have you found that you have a closer relationship with God as a result of your working for others? How has that impacted you? Are you doing little things that make a difference?
21. As we have already suggested, the psalms and the proverbs deal with many different aspects of life.

The psalms of David pass through the whole range of experience, from the depths of conscious guilt and self-condemnation to the loftiest faith and the most exalted communing with God. His life record declares that sin can bring only shame and woe, but that God's love and mercy can reach to the deepest depths, that faith will lift up the repenting soul to share the adoption of the sons of God. Of all the assurances which His word contains, it is one of the strongest testimonies to the faithfulness, the justice, and the covenant mercy of God.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 754.3.

22. When he was very young, David was described as “a man after God's own heart.” (Acts 13:22; 1 Samuel 13:14) Yet, we know that David fell deeply into sin. But, the good news about David is that when he was faced with the truth about his behavior, he sincerely repented. Review that story in 2 Samuel 11-12.
23. One of the most famous psalms is Psalm 51. It is a psalm talking about David's deep repentance for what he had done.
24. While David's deep repentance resulted in God allowing him to continue to rule, it did not prevent disaster in his children. Four of his sons died unexpectedly.
25. Why do you think God was so merciful to David and, yet, did not prevent the consequences to his children? Was that fair? Were those natural consequences of David's bad example? Or, were they penalties imposed by God? Did his children suffer because of their own sins and behaviors? Or, was it because of David's behavior?
26. It is very interesting to notice how Paul used Psalm 51 in the writing of Romans 3.

Psalm 51:4: I have sinned against you—only against you—
and done what you consider evil.

So you are right in judging me;

you are justified in condemning me.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Psalm 51:4). New York: American Bible Society.†

Psalm 51:4: Against You, You only, I have sinned

And done what is evil in Your sight,

So that You are justified when You speak

And blameless when You judge.—*New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*.* (1995). (Psalm 51:4). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.†

Romans 3:1-4: Have the Jews then any advantage over the Gentiles? Or is there any value in being circumcised? ²Much, indeed, in every way! In the first place, God trusted his message to the Jews. ³But what if some of them were not faithful? Does this mean that God will not be faithful? ⁴Certainly not! **God must be true, even though every human being is a liar.** As the scripture says,

“You must be shown to be right when you speak;

you must win your case when you are being tried.”—Good News Bible.*†

27. Did Paul twist the meaning of Psalm 51? Or, did he see a deeper meaning?
28. Read Psalm 73. In light of what we have just read, whose example were the wicked following in Psalm 73:3-12? What contrast do you see between these verses and the rest of the psalm? Who seems to be in charge in that last half of the psalm?
29. What do you suppose the psalmist was implying when he talked about righteousness happening when he went into the temple? What did he learn about the wicked there?
30. What can we learn from the story of David? Does your understanding of his story impact your understanding of the book of Psalms? Remember that only about half of the psalms were written by David. And what do you know about the story of Solomon? Does that impact your understanding of Proverbs?
31. We have just barely touched the books of Psalms. But, what picture of God do you get from these passages about His fairness and transparency?
32. As we have noted, both Psalms and Proverbs were written in a poetic format. That makes them much easier to memorize. Do you suppose that some people have memorized certain psalms that they have repeated or prayed to God when they were in trouble? Can you think of times when some of these passages we have studied would have expressed your feelings very well?
33. **The book of Proverbs is full of pithy, short, wise statements about life.** Look at Proverbs 10:4; 13:23,25; 14:31; 15:15-16; 19:15,17; and 30:7-9. In these verses it is suggested repeatedly that good, conscientious work will benefit you; but, being lazy will make you poor. If you oppress poor people, you are insulting God because God is their Creator and heavenly Father. Proverbs 19:17 suggests that when you give to the poor, it is like lending to the Lord; the Lord will pay you back. Could that be true in our day?
34. Talking about the book of Proverbs, Ellen White wrote:

These are principles with which are bound up the well-being of society, of both secular and religious associations. It is these principles that give security to property and life. For all that makes confidence and cooperation possible, the world is indebted to the law of God, as given in His word, and as still traced, in lines often obscure and well-nigh obliterated, in the hearts of men.—Ellen G. White, *Education** 137.1.
35. We do not know the background of each poor person we happen to come across. Sometimes, they are poor because of circumstances beyond their control; sometimes, because of poor choices, either on their part or on the part of others, or even exploitation. But, whatever their situation, God is still their Creator, Redeemer, and Father. Read Proverbs 22:2,22-23. All of us are like children of the one heavenly Father.

36. Read Proverbs 16:8. Do you find that it is true that it is better to have a small income and few assets which were honestly earned than to have a large income which was gained dishonestly?
37. Are we honest and fair in all our dealings? Do you find that business, government, and other agencies with which you must deal each day are fair and honest in their dealings?
38. Read Proverbs 14:5,25; 16:11-13; 17:15; 20:23; 21:28; and 28:14-16. These passages talk about being honest in dealing not only in business but also in what we say each day. Are we ever tempted to tell lies just because it is more convenient and maybe even just time-saving to do so at that moment? If we are feeling terrible and we still need to go to work, is it okay to say, "I am fine" when someone asks?
39. Is there anything we can or should do if we see others being unfairly dealt with by governments or businesses? It is easy to feel sorry for someone; but, is there anything we can really do? It should be obvious from our study so far that we should never be found oppressing one of God's children, especially since God is, at the same time, trying to help them!
40. So, let us take a look at the bigger picture. Why do we and our church exist? Aren't we supposed to be reaching out to the world, touching people's lives?
41. Does it seem to you that injustice, even murder, and violence are decreasing or increasing in our world today? Why do you think that is happening? God warned us that at the end of this world's history, He would gradually withdraw His presence and let Satan have more and more control so we can see what kind of a universe Satan would have if he were allowed to run it! Remember that Satan claimed way back in heaven that he could run a better government than God does. He claimed that angels should be allowed to do whatever they wanted to do, that is, practice selfishness which has always been the operational principle of Satan's government.

Leaving his place in the immediate presence of the Father, Lucifer went forth to diffuse the spirit of discontent among the angels. He worked with mysterious secrecy, and for a time concealed his real purpose under an appearance of reverence for God. He began to insinuate doubts concerning the laws that governed heavenly beings, intimating that though laws might be necessary for the inhabitants of the worlds, angels, being more exalted, needed no such restraint, for their own wisdom was a sufficient guide. They were not beings that could bring dishonor to God; all their thoughts were holy; it was no more possible for them than for God Himself to err. The exaltation of the Son of God as equal with the Father was represented as an injustice to Lucifer, who, it was claimed, was also entitled to reverence and honor. If this prince of angels could but attain to his true, exalted position, great good would accrue to the entire host of heaven; for it was his object to secure freedom for all. But now even the liberty which they had hitherto enjoyed was at an end; for an absolute Ruler [Christ] had been appointed them, and to His authority all must pay homage. Such were the subtle deceptions that through the wiles of Lucifer were fast obtaining in the heavenly courts.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 37.1.‡

42. Seventh-day Adventists have an almost unique understanding of God's judgment. Read 1 Corinthians 4:5 and 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10; compare Daniel 7:9-10,13-14.

43. Seventh-day Adventists are the only group to teach about the sanctuary in heaven and the pre-advent judgment that has been going on since 1844. God's judgments take place in the throne room of heaven with four living creatures, twenty-four elders, and millions of angels observing. (Revelation 4-5) So, we can be sure that everything that God does is totally transparent and completely fair to everyone who is judged. Remember that God's judgment is always fair and in favor of the oppressed, the hungry, etc. See Psalm 146:7-9.
44. In light of all we have studied in this lesson, what do you think? If Jesus were on this earth today, what would He be doing? Helping the poor and needy? What is He doing right now?
45. Is God active in your community? What is He doing in your neighborhood? Is He asking you to join Him?
46. Read Proverbs 14:31; Proverbs 29:7; and Proverbs 31:8. How does our understanding of God impact our relationship to the poor? Does our attitude toward the poor impact our understanding of God? In our daily activities, do we treat everyone fairly? Are we willing to speak up for those who, for one reason or another, cannot speak up with themselves? (See Proverbs 31:8-9.)
47. Are you aware of a significant number of people in your community who are poor and voiceless? What could we do for them? Do we even know about them?
48. Should reaching out to the poor, the homeless, the sick, the widows, and the orphans be a major undertaking of Seventh-day Adventists wherever they live? If the Holy Spirit is to be our Helper and Guide, (John 14:26) could we ask Him to guide us as we reach out to others? What kind of exciting things might happen if we began to work side-by-side with the Holy Spirit?

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