

Psalm 50: God Speaks about the Heart of Worship

Most Psalms are prayers to God, but **Psalm 50** is a *divine oracle* in which God addresses humanity and his covenant people. If you didn't know it was a psalm, you would think it was prophecy, an *oracle of judgement*. It sounds like one of Israel's prophets, and Asaph is actually described as both a musician/choir director and a seer (prophet) in Old Testament references (1 Chronicles 6:39, 2 Chronicles 29:30, Nehemiah 12:48). **Psalm 50** and **Psalms 73-83** have the title, "of Asaph," a Levitical musician/seer, indicating they had some connection to his ministry or heritage.

1. Psalm 50 has 3 main parts and a summary:

50:1-6 "Gather to me" - God summons the earth to assemble before Him.

50:7-15 "I don't need your sacrifices" - He speaks to His people: Worship Him from the heart.

50:16-22 "You are evil" - He speaks to the "wicked": He rebukes them.

50:23 "Honor Me" - He sums it up: Worship Him with the heart.

2. Read 50:1-6. Who are the participants in this courtroom scene (judge, jury, defendants)? What words describe the judge, the jury (50:1 and 4), the defendants (50:4-5)?

What's it like for you to see God as your judge? Notice that God wants to exercise his righteous rule over His people, not necessarily punish them. How does awareness of God as your judge impact your attitudes about yourself and also your actions? The ESV intro to the background of 1-2 Kings states:

It is not a vending machine world, however, in which every coin of sin that is inserted results in individual packaged retribution. There is no neat correlation between sin and judgment in Kings, even though people are told that they must obey God if they are to be blessed by him...This is largely because of *the compassionate character of the Judge*, who does not desire final judgment to fall on his creatures (2 Kings 13:23; 14:27), and who often delays or mitigates such judgment (1 Kings 21:25-29, 2 Kings 22:15-20). *God's grace is to be found everywhere in 1-2 Kings* (1 Kings 11:9-13; 15:1-5, 2 Kings 8:19), confounding expectations that the reader might have formed on the basis of an oversimplified understanding of law. Sin can, nevertheless, accumulate to such an extent that judgment falls, not only on individuals but on whole cultures, sweeping the relatively innocent away with the guilty (2 Kings 17:1-23, 23:29-25:26). (ESV Study Bible, p. 664, italics are mine.)

3. How would you describe God the Judge's audience in **50:7-15**? Who is he addressing and what is his message to them? They apparently had misconceptions (perhaps from their Near Eastern culture) about how to worship God. How did they have the purpose of their worship backwards? (Who needs whom? **50:15**)

What does God teach them (and us!) in **50:14-15**? Why are offering sacrifices of thanksgiving and performing vows right uses of sacrifice (Lev. 7:11-12, 16)? God wants them to make grateful sacrifices that are shared as a meal with others, with God as the host.

How do God's instructions in **50:14-15** ask us to engage our *hearts, all of who we are*, in relating to Him?

"Search our hearts, Mighty One, and point out where we actually are in our gratitude for You and our dependence on You."

4. Imagine being a sincere Levite, serving in the Temple, as you see people with no penitential attitude at all coming to offer sacrifices. Then read God's instructions to "the wicked" in **50:16-22**. God rebukes doctrinal profession of belief without life change. (Keller, *Songs of Jesus*, p. 107)

What evidences of *hypocrisy* do you see in **50:16-20**? How are these examples of "limiting the range of one's faith from his entire body to the space between his ears"? (Quoted from Emily Hunter McGowin's article, "[Beware False Teachers with Good Doctrine and Bad Ethics](#)," *Christianity Today*, 9/16/21; the title is a link. Emily is an Anglican priest and assistant professor of theology at Wheaton.)

Before we get too hard on "those hypocrites," we are compelled to examine our own lives too. How much are we participating together with all God's people in the great project of "showing forth true humanity for the sake of the world" (ESV Study Bible, p. 1111)? We are to be living in Christ and sharing Him, the truest human ever! In Christ, we are challenged to "be" and to be embodying his love in all situations, obedient to him with our thoughts, words, actions, finances....How is that possible?!

5. Notice how gracious God is with "the wicked" in **50:22**. What does he want for them? How does he underscore the seriousness of his instruction?

Look for the good news, the gospel, in the words "lest I tear you apart and there be none to deliver." Who was "torn apart" for the judgment we each deserve? Who endured the shame and suffering so that there would be One to deliver us?

How does **50:23** summarize the core elements of "the heart of worship" that God is teaching all people about in **Psalms 50**? (Compare John 4:24.)