



REBEL HEARTS

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, CA, on Sunday, August 1, 2021

The fiftieth psalm is introduced simply as “A psalm of Asaph.”

We learn from 1 Chronicles 15:17 and 2 Chronicles 29:30 that Asaph was a relative of Heman, the Levite, and was appointed to the Temple orchestra. He was a skilled musician, a prophet, and a songwriter, and Psalm 50 is one of his songs.

It is a song concerning God’s sovereign justice and power, and the astounding covenant He made with the Hebrew people, and with all those (like you and I) who put their trust in Him.

As you may remember, the Hebrews were delivered from four centuries of enslavement to the Egyptians. They crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, as the result of God’s miraculous act of deliverance. Then, they traveled to Mount Sinai, where God manifested His glorious presence and spoke with Moses face-to-face, and wrote the Ten Commandments with His fingertip on stone tablets. It was there that God also transmitted, through Moses, the moral, religious, and social codes by which the Hebrews honored and worshiped Him—some, even to this day.

But that covenant (which we refer to as the First Covenant or the Old Testament) was never intended to be permanent. From its inception, Moses told the people, *“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you—from your fellow Israelites; you must listen to Him.”* (Deuteronomy 18:15)

Faithful Jews in our time still await this prophet, their messiah-king, prejudicially dismissing Jesus of Nazareth as a candidate for that role, even though He fulfilled their dearest prophecies and demonstrated divine power over diseases and death, including His own resurrection.

Still their hearts are hard as stone and their eyes are blinded due to unbelief. They refuse to believe.

In such a case—both then and now—their trust is in their own religious practices more than in the God who prescribed them. Religious people always want to DO for God—sometimes, even do IN THE PLACE of God.

But God is not really into religion. Perhaps that sounds strange to you, but for Him, religion is simply a tool for a task—and when that task is complete, the tool becomes unnecessary.

The Task of God's Religion

And what was the task of the religion that God prescribed to the Jews?

- To reveal the nature of God—

(Exodus 34:6-7) *"Yahweh! The Lord! The God of compassion and mercy!*

I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. ⁷ I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But I do not excuse the guilty."

- To unveil the nature of humanity—

(Romans 3:10-11) *"As the Scriptures say, "No one is righteous—not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God."*

(Romans 3:23) *"For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard."*

- To introduce God's Kingdom and present the Messiah (the Christ)—

(Isaiah 53:4-6) *"⁴ Yet it was our weaknesses He carried; it was our sorrows that weighed Him down. And we thought His troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for His own sins! ⁵ But He was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole.*

He was whipped so we could be healed. ⁶ All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on Him the sins of us all."

He was whipped so we could be healed. ⁶ All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on Him the sins of us all."

The extreme wonder of the Messiah is that He is more than an elevated man—He is God come down to earth, God in human form—come to rescue humanity, not by power and might, but by humility and love.

And in the end, the Judge of all the earth will be none other than this gracious Savior. He Himself—one of us by birth, and God by origin—will evaluate the deeds and motives of every person, specially of His followers. It is this judgment to which Psalm 50 refers, as it expresses what it is that God really wants from us all.

God Draws Near

Psalm 50:1 The Lord, the Mighty One, is God,

and He has spoken;

He has summoned all humanity

from where the sun rises to where it sets.

² From Mount Zion, the perfection of beauty,

God shines in glorious radiance.

³ Our God approaches,

and He is not silent.

If there is one thing that we should know about the Creator of the ends of the earth, it is this: He is not distant, He is not remote, He is not detached.

He calls Himself, *“I am that I am.”* (Exodus 3:14)

One psalmist interpreted that like this: *“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble.”* (Psalm 46:1)

And the people sang: *“We thank you, O God! We give thanks because You are near. People everywhere tell of Your wonderful deeds.”* (Psalm 75:1)

Our God is present, and He is speaking—if you simply have a strong desire to hear His voice.

God Will Be the Judge

*Psalm 50:3 Our God approaches,
and He is not silent.*

*Fire devours everything in His way,
and a great storm rages around Him.*

*⁴ He calls on the heavens above and earth below
to witness the judgment of His people.*

*⁵ “Bring My faithful people to Me—
those who made a covenant with Me by giving sacrifices.”*

*⁶ Then let the heavens proclaim His justice,
for God Himself will be the Judge.*

When God draws near, things can get rough! His approach stirs things up. Devouring wildfires and savage storms swirl around His feet. He will get the attention of all those in Heaven and all those on Earth to witness His righteous judgment.

Notice who fills the defendant’s box in this courtroom: *“My faithful people—those who made a covenant with me.”*

This is not a judgment of rebellious sin and unfaithfulness. On the contrary, it’s the disclosure of His people’s faithfulness to their covenant—a faithfulness revealed by their continual sacrificial gifts.

No wonder Jesus emphasized, *““If any of you wants to be My follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow Me. ²⁴ If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for My sake, you will save it.”* (Luke 9:23-24)

What Does God Need?

Psalm 50:7 “O my people, listen as I speak. Here are my charges against you, O Israel: I am God, your God!

⁸ I have no complaint about your sacrifices or the burnt offerings you constantly offer. ⁹ But I do not need the bulls from your barns or the goats from your pens. ¹⁰ For all the animals of the forest are mine, and I own the cattle on a thousand hills. ¹¹ I know every bird on the mountains, and all the animals of the field are mine. ¹² If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for all the world is mine and everything in it.

¹³ Do I eat the meat of bulls? Do I drink the blood of goats?

God prescribed the sacrifices of animals, along with gifts from their flocks and fields, but the people became focused on the ritual and lost sight of God Himself—they became focused on their own deeds, rather than on the One whom they served with their acts of worship.

They began to act as though God NEEDED the things they brought Him, when what He wanted was THEM.

God missed their genuine worship—their acts of faith and love. So He sang to them, “Come back, My people, to the heart of worship—it’s more than a ritual, more than an exercise, more than a song you sing.

What Does God Desire?

Psalm 50:14 Make thankfulness your sacrifice to God, and keep the vows you made to the Most High.

¹⁵ Then call on me when you are in trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will give me glory.”

Gratitude and integrity are of greater value to God than any religious acts in themselves. Our dependent trust in God’s ready willingness to help us when we’re in any trouble is how we honor Him and He gets to display His glory.

Pride has so warped our personalities that we become self-focused in discouragement and defeat, and shame separates us from our Savior.

“Call on Me when you are in trouble.”

God doesn’t much care who got you into trouble—it might have been someone else, or it might have been you yourself. What He cares about most is who you will depend on to get you out of the trouble. Will you call on Him and wait for His deliverance, and in this way, honor Him and let Him demonstrate His glory? Or, will you take the matter into your own hands—and fret and struggle and force an outcome of your own?

Don't Forget God

This same Savior-Judge has words also for those who have refused His fellowship and discipleship, who follow Him in name and word only. Take note of His words today:

Psalm 50:16 *But God says to the wicked:*

“Why bother reciting My decrees and pretending to obey My covenant? ¹⁷ For you refuse My discipline and treat My words like trash.

¹⁸ When you see thieves, you approve of them, and you spend your time with adulterers. ¹⁹ Your mouth is filled with wickedness, and your tongue is full of lies. ²⁰ You sit around and slander your brother—your own mother’s son.

²¹ While you did all this, I remained silent, and you thought I didn’t care. But now I will rebuke you, listing all My charges against you.

²² Repent, all of you who forget Me, or I will tear you apart, and no one will help you.

Reciting His words, but refusing His discipline is an exercise in painful foolishness. Pretending to obey His covenant, while treating His words like trash, is the ultimate religious hypocrisy.

“Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.” (1 Corinthians 15:33) If you hang with thieves and adulterers—in person, in books, or on television—their immorality will infect you. It may not manifest in the same ways, but that same spirit will find a way to turn your thoughts and behavior away from godliness.

Don't imagine that your slander of other Christians as “less worthy than you” is in any way pleasing to the ears of the Heavenly Father. You cannot improve your standing with God by lowering your estimation of His other children.

And don't suppose that His silence is agreement, when you behave in such ways. He will not forget what you have done. If that worries you, fine. Repent of your foolishness.

The same Savior who graciously receives you when you repent, will judge you harshly when you refuse to repent.

C.S. Lewis said about the Lion-King Aslan, “He’s not a safe lion, but he is good.”

The Salvation of God

Finally, the psalmist circles back to the chief thought he presented earlier (verse 14); that the sacrifice that really wins God’s heart and attention is the sacrifice of self on the altar of obedience, with thanksgiving.

Psalm 50:23 **But giving thanks is a sacrifice that truly honors me.
If you keep to my path, I will reveal to you the salvation of God.”**

Oh, you who are beloved of God, please hear His words today and adjust yourselves! God doesn't want your stuff; He wants you. Lay down that rebel heart before the Lord. Lift up your hands in surrender. Take hold of eternal life, in Jesus' name.

Isaiah 1:11 **“What makes you think I want all your sacrifices?” says the Lord. “I am sick of your burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened cattle. I get no pleasure from the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.**

Psalm 51:16 **You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering.
¹⁷ The sacrifice You desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.**

Psalm 40:6 **You take no delight in sacrifices or offerings.
Now that You have made me listen, I finally understand—You don't require burnt offerings or sin offerings.**

Hosea 6:6 **I want you to show love, not offer sacrifices.
I want you to know Me more than I want burnt offerings.**

In closing, perhaps you could sing this with me:

*All to Jesus I surrender
All to Him I freely give
I will ever love and trust Him
In His presence daily live*

*I surrender all
I surrender all
All to Thee, my Blessed Savior
I surrender all*