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**Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith**  
**Message: Introduction to the Psalms**

**Transcribed Message**  
**June 4, 2023**

If I were to ask you this morning to name your favorite book in all of the Bible, you have 66 books, right? If I asked you what is your favorite book in all of the Bible, I would imagine in a group this size we would go from Genesis to Revelation. I don't know if we get all of the books chosen or who would pick Leviticus, but we'd get a whole bunch of them. We'd get from Genesis to Revelation. A lot of books that have touched you in a certain way and been meaningful to you. You'd say that's my favorite. What if I changed the question just a little bit? What if I changed the question and I said you are going to spend one year on a deserted island alone all by yourself. Which book of the Bible might you pick if that was the circumstance that was before you? Well, if you picked the book of Psalms you wouldn't be too far off from what a lot of other people said they would. In fact, I think it's Gateway Bible website that says that the book that is accessed the most of all of the books of the Bible is the book of Psalms. That of course is not without good reason.

If you look at your outline there, just notice these five things that would suggest to us why if we pick the book of Psalms to be stuck on a deserted island, it wouldn't be a bad choice at all. It is in the Psalms that we really get in touch and we see all of the emotions that are part of our journey. All of the experiences of life. We just sang about a bunch of them this morning, the different things that we go through, the different emotions. The psalmist touches on so many of those.

Secondly, the Psalms are our inspired hymn book of worship. What a better choice could there be if you're going to be spending a year alone on an island to have your own personal hymnbook that God has provided for you in the psalter.

Thirdly, the Psalms proclaim the messianic prophecies. The psalms say so much about our Lord and things that are a part of His life journey and His experience in the

incarnation and even beyond in His eternal reign. The psalms are filled with comments and prophecies about Christ.

Fourth, the psalmist yields more and more to us. We go deeper and deeper every time. It's true of course of all of Scripture, but it's true when you go to the Psalms. It's something unique often times about how the psalmist as you read you find something new and different almost each time.

The fifth one we notice is that the Psalms are really something that touches all the different occasions of life. As you noticed in your bulletin if you haven't seen it already, here is your assignment for the summer. We're jumping into the book of Psalms for the summer. We're not going to get through 150 of the Psalms. We're probably just going to focus on Book 1. But here's the thing. Here's my challenge to you. I want to challenge you to read the book of Psalms once a month for three months. If you read five chapters a day you'll get through the entire book of Psalms in a month. Now you're going to have to build in Psalm 119 which is a little bit longer, but if you read one set of Psalms of five every day you'll get through the month. The other part of the challenge I'd like to throw out. Memorize one psalm each month. I wouldn't recommend Psalm 119. That's 176 verses. Psalm 117 is going to be a very popular psalm in this challenge because it's two verses. When we think in terms of the assignment for the summer, you've got the whole summer to fulfill this assignment. Once a month read through the book of Psalms and memorize one psalm.

Here's what I'd like to do. I would think it would be cool if you'd step forward and said I have memorized a psalm. We might work you into the worship morning maybe to come up as child or a student as an adult and you would recite the psalm for that morning for us. We'll see how that goes. But that's the challenge that I throw out to you.

Here's what we want to see. The book of Psalms is God's prescription for His people and it reveals to us how great, wonderful, and awe-inspiring our God is. Let's look. What do we know about the psalms? Here's just a little first out-of-the-gate observation fun fact. When we talk about the book of Psalms as a whole, we use the word "psalms", plural. When we talk about one psalm we use the singular "psalm". So, Lord willing next Sunday, we're going to look at Psalm 1. We're not going to look at

Psalms 1. There isn't a Psalms 1. There's a Psalm 1. That's just by way of a little clarification.

The title of this book. In Hebrew *tehillim* means praises. So it came to simply be referred to as the song of praises. It came to be known as the book of praises among God's people in the Old Testament times. When the Hebrew text was translated into the Greek text, the word that was used in the Septuagint to describe the Psalms was *psalmos*. It meant to pluck strings, so like playing an instrument, playing the guitar, playing something that would have strings. That too came to be correlated with song of praise for both in the Greek and Hebrew. We've already noted that this is the first hymnbook that God's people used. So that holds great significance.

When you think in terms of the authorship of Psalms, this is one of those cases where we use the plural authors because there are multiple authors to the Psalms. When we think of another book that is a neighbor to the book of Psalms, it is very much like that. It's the book of Proverbs. Proverbs has multiple authors. Some of them are named. Some of them are not. Psalms has multiple authors. Some we know. Some of them we're not altogether sure of in that regard. There are many. The man who wrote the most is David. David wrote almost half of all the Psalms. There's 150 of them and David is to have written 73 of them, maybe even a little bit more, but at least 73 of the Psalms are written by David.

Many of your Bibles will have a little superscription, just a little description at the beginning of each psalm. Look at Psalm 3. We read: "A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son". David is referenced in many of the Psalms as being the writer. Charles Spurgeon wrote a three-volume commentary called *The Treasury of David* that is almost 3000 pages long. In that reference this is what Spurgeon said about the Psalms in his life: "I think I was never so low that I could not find that David was lower, and I never climbed so high that I could not find that David was up above me, ready to sing a song upon his stringed instrument even as I could see mine." That gives you a little bit of the flavor of his love for the Psalms and why he committed himself to write such an extensive commentary. Asaph wrote 12 of the Psalms. The sons of Korah wrote 10. Moses is believed to have written the 90<sup>th</sup> Psalm. Think about this.

Listen to the 90<sup>th</sup> Psalm and think of Moses writing the words. "Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God." This is coming from the pen and the heart through the Holy Spirit and of course through Moses as he wrote this song so many years before. Then of course you have others that are mentioned. Solomon. A man named Heman. Ethan. Haggai. Zechariah. Ezra. All of these noted to be authors of different psalms out of this 150.

The date of the Psalms. Just think about what we just said. If Moses wrote as we believe he did the 90<sup>th</sup> Psalm that's 1400 BC. Then if the last psalm takes us all the way to Psalm 126, which is after the exile and the children of Israel returning to their homeland, you're talking about a period of time of 900 to 1000 years over which the psalms were written. We know that the Bible as a whole was written over a period of about 1500 years. The book of Psalms includes a huge portion of the time in which the Scriptures were written. If Job was the very first book of the Bible written and Revelation was the last book of the Bible written, within that 1500 years, 900 years of life within the covenant people of God, they were writing and recording different psalms. It helps us to understand the breadth and the width of the psalms covering so much of Israel's history and life.

Then when we think in terms of the kind of psalms, it is important as we work our way through some of these over the summer months to realize that there is a genre, there is a type. There's a way that we can classify these psalms. When you study your Bible, when you read your Bible it's always important to know what you're reading. For instance, when you're reading your Old Testament, it's a lot of narrative material. It's storytelling. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges – these are all narrative accounts. We read narrative accounts differently as we study the Scriptures. There are all these different kinds. When you get to the New Testament, there is biography. There is didactic teaching material in most of the epistles. The psalms aren't like that. The psalms are in fact a kind of poetry.

Now you say well it's not the kind of poetry that I'm thinking of. When we think of poetry, we often think of rhyming poetry. Today is June 4 and it just so happens to be Bonnie's and my 47<sup>th</sup> anniversary today. I know you're applauding for her that she

could live 47 years in this circumstance and that's worthy of applause. But I have written Bonnie many poems over the years. Almost all of my poems begin "roses are red, violets are blue". You're laughing. But other men in here, when you write a poem to your wife, do you use roses are red? That's a jumping off point and then my creative juices just go crazy. But I almost always start off that way, so she's now anticipating a 47<sup>th</sup> anniversary poem. It most assuredly will start roses are red, violets are blue. That's the way we think of poetry. When you think of Hebrew poetry it's much different. It's called in many cases parallelism. There are parallel lines in many of the psalms as the writers give them to us. That's a definite distinction that we're going to see.

Let's just think through some of the different types of psalms that we'll see as you read through your assignment this summer. The largest category of psalms in terms of a single category is lament psalms. That might be kind of interesting. You maybe hadn't realized that lament psalms, both individual laments and corporate or community laments, make up the largest number in terms of one category of psalms. Laments are like this. Laments are saying life is tough. I am hurting. The bad guys are winning and God, you're not helping me. That's a lament and there are a lot of laments. Individual laments that David wrote in particular and then laments of the whole nation. It is good for us to realize and at times step in to the laments of Scripture and to see as we said at the beginning the emotion that the psalmist brings to many of these psalms that we'll be looking at. If you're right there at the beginning of the psalms, look at the 6<sup>th</sup> Psalm. "O Lord, rebuke me not in Your anger, nor discipline me in Your wrath. Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled. But You, O Lord—how long?" and he goes on to lament the circumstances of life that he finds himself in. the laments are a major part of the psalms.

Here's the key to understanding the laments. Laments always come around and end in a very similar way. They nearly always end in praise to God. They start off saying God, I'm hurting. God, You're not helping. The bad guys are winning. But they circle back around and the psalmist comes to a place where he recognizes and he praises God. I read a neat little article this week. It said we should all be psalters. Psalmists. We should all be writing psalms in terms of what's going on in our lives. He made that very point. he said he was talking to a man going through all kinds of difficulties in his life,

just hard things that were going on in his life. He said as we talked for an hour or so, I realized there was a pattern in the way he was expressing his heart to me. He would be pouring out his heart and sharing some of the hard things, but he kept coming back to the fact that God's faithful, God's with me. He said that he realized this man was in a biblical lament. He was doing it in the way that his heart was being poured out before God, but he was also doing it with the realization that he would come back and he praised God because he knew God was trustworthy.

The second category is thanksgiving psalms. Again, you have individual thanksgiving psalms and you have community thanksgiving psalms. These are declarations of gratitude to God for His blessings, His goodness, His faithfulness, His protection. If you look over at Psalm 18 and look at the superscription. It's a long superscription. It says: "The Psalm of David, the servant of the Lord, who addressed the words of this psalm to the Lord on the day when the Lord delivered them from the hand of his enemy and from the hand of Saul." That was the beginning of this psalm of thanksgiving for God's deliverance and God's work in his life.

The third category is praise psalms. Praise psalms are easily recognized by the exuberance of the psalm. Look at the 8<sup>th</sup> Psalm. "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babies and infants, You have established strength because of Your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger. When I look at Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have set in place, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You care for him?" That's a praise psalm. That is a major category as well.

There is a fourth category of psalm called wisdom psalm. The wisdom psalms are as close as you might come to just teaching, giving wisdom and guidance. I think the opening two psalms – Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 – don't really fit into any other category than maybe this wisdom. They're almost introductions to the whole of the psalter but they're wisdom psalms. We'll again open up there next Sunday.

A fifth category, again a difficult one, is called imprecatory. Imprecation is a literal calling down of judgment. You know an imprecation when you come across it, don't you? as you're reading the Psalms, all the sudden you're going to be jolted at some

point as you realize I'm reading an imprecatory psalm in which the psalmist is asking God to do things that sound really pretty hard and harsh. But what we keep in mind when you think of an imprecatory psalm is you keep in mind that the psalmist is almost always calling out on behalf of the covenant people. Not only calling out on behalf of the covenant people, he's calling out in recognition that God is a holy God, that God hates sin, that God hates and opposes injustice and unrighteousness. Those are the kind of the contexts in which you see these imprecatory psalms. It recognizes and acknowledges that the sovereign God is sovereign even over the enemies of God's people and even over those who have chosen things are so contrary to God and to His word.

The sixth category are simply called kingship or messianic psalms. They have a messianic outlook. Some of the Psalms of David in which he is looking at his reign, his kingship but always with a view to what's coming, to the fact that there is a Messiah that is yet to come and he is going to rule and reign and establish His kingdom. The messianic kingship psalm may look at things of an earthly king but they're often looking far beyond that. We'll see that in Psalm 2: "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.' He who sits in the heavens laughs..." That's a great psalm. Hopefully we'll get to look at that one as well.

The last category are just special occasions psalms. You have many psalms that fall into just the general category in which the people of God, the covenant people are celebrating or are experiencing some special occasion. Maybe it's the Psalm of Ascent as they make their way to Jerusalem. Maybe they're focused on the city of Jerusalem itself or the celebration of the city or the temple worship of God. all of these things are part of that which is the psalms of special occasions.

Let's move from this matter of the different kinds of psalms. Let me share with you almost a fun fact about the uniqueness of the book of Psalms because truly out of all of the Scriptures this is a unique book that we're going to be looking at. This is the longest book in the Bible. You knew that already. 150 chapters. The next closest one would be Isaiah with 66 chapters. Here is the psalmist with 150 chapters. The Psalms

have the longest chapter. Psalm 119. When I was thinking and praying about what to do this summer I almost said I'm just going to go to Psalm 119. We're just going to spend the whole summer in Psalm 119. We wouldn't have even made it through with 176 verses but it is a psalm that just lifts up the word of God and speaks of it in so many beautiful ways. The book of Psalms has the longest chapter in 119. It has the shortest chapter in 117. Psalm 117 is one of those psalms you want to memorize this summer. It has just two verses.

The second thing that is unique about Psalms is Psalms has the most authors as we've already said. Numerous different authors who have written. It's the most quoted book in the New Testament. The book of Psalms is the most quoted book in the New Testament. There are some 360 quotes and allusions of the Old Testament Scriptures in the New Testament. Some 360 times the New Testament writers make reference. We've seen it in the book of Romans. Paul goes into the Old Testament and into the Psalms numerous times. 360. Now get this. 112 of those are from Psalms. Almost 1/3 of all of the allusions and all the quotes of the Old Testament Scriptures in the New Testament are from Psalms.

Then of course it has the most prophecies. The book of Psalms has the most prophecies of the Old Testament. If you want a beautiful description of that, just go to Psalm 22. Psalm 22 is as graphic a picture of crucifixion by death that could have ever been recorded before crucifixion was even practiced. The psalmist fills the Psalms with different prophecies about things that were to come even and especially about the life of the Messiah.

Then thirdly, Psalms has the central verse of all of the Bible. You go to Psalm 118 verse 8 and that is the midpoint of your Bible. It is a wonderful statement that God makes to us there.

Let's just close with this. How did we get the Psalms? When we ask that question, we're not taking that question out of the context of how did we get our whole Bible. That is part of what it is that we're speaking about, right? How did we get our Bible? It didn't fall down from heaven 66 books in a nice leather bound fully put together book. But here's the other thing that is always so important to remember. Whenever we talk about how we got our Bible, I always want to remind us that God didn't write His



word and then scatter it all over the world and then say go find it. I hope you find it. I hope you find all 66 books. No, of course not. God gave His word to His people. There was a discovery process, a collection process, a writing process, a preservation process. The Holy Spirit was governing all of this. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable and the Holy Spirit is the one who gives oversight to all of that.

But there are some practical things that we should just touch on. It began with the writing of a psalm. A psalm had to be written. That's where it began. Whether it was Moses back in 1400 BC writing Psalm 90, or whether it was the writing of the last Psalm 126 in 450 BC, somewhere in there all of these other things happened. David wrote Psalm 23 at some point.

The next thing that had to happen as that number of psalms grew then those psalms were collected. Since they're being used in the context of community and corporate worship, these psalms are then gradually collected. The priest would've been very much a part of that process of gathering different psalms for worship, seeing the value of having these psalms available to them as the worshiping community. At first, they're collected into individual books. If you look at Psalm 72 and verse 20 that last of that psalm says: "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended." There was a very definitive statement made about the ending of that particular book. What you had at some point, the collecting of psalms needed to be collected into one big psalm. It wasn't practical to have a 150-chapter book on a scroll. It would not have been feasible. What happened was the initial collection was in two different books.

We have five different books of the psalms. You have Book 1, Book 2, Book 3, Book 4, Book 5 so they would be manageable in terms of even having them collected. At some point, all of those five books are collected together making up the Psalter itself. Your English Bible almost certainly indicates at the beginning of every one of the sections that we'll just look at very briefly that there is Book 1 and so on. I think every English translation notes that in the translation. You'll see that as we go forward. It is thought, and I think it's a good corollary, you have five books of the Psalms. You have the five books of the Pentateuch – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Psalms are often referred to as the Pentateuch of David. We have five books of the Psalms. We have five books of the law. This becomes the worship

manual of God's people so that they are familiar with the law of God and they're familiar with the worship pattern that God lays out before them.

Let's look at these five very quickly. Book 1 is going to take us from chapter 1 to chapter 41. Almost all of these psalms are written by David. During his coming into his kingship, the establishing of his monarchy really is what happens in this early period. 273 times David refers to Yahweh, to Jehovah, as God. 15 times He is Elohim. Just this look at the closing doxology. We'll just do this as we close out this morning. Psalm 41 and verse 13: "Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting, amen and amen." The end of Book 1. Book 1 had been collected. Book 2 takes us from chapter 42 to 72. Again, David is the primary author of Book 2. Again, it is this period of time in which his kingdom has been established. The interesting thing is the majority of the lament Psalms are in Book 1 and Book 2. That's where most of them are. In the Psalms of David Book 1 and Book 2 you get to the end and I have already indicated at Psalm 72 verse 19: "Blessed be His glorious name, forever may the whole earth be filled with His glory, Amen and Amen." That is the doxology of Book 2.

Then you come to Book 3. In Book 3, you have from chapter 73 to 89. Probably this period of time is the same or near the same as Book 2, but now we're beginning to see the division that is taking place in the nation. So you have psalms that are decrying the fact that God's people are turning away from Him. There are periods of expressing there is within the nation a drifting away from the Lord and an increasing state of wickedness. Psalms 73 to 83 are all written by Asaph, who we already noted as one of the other major contributors. Then it comes to Psalm 89 and you come to the end of that third book. Verse 52 says: "Blessed be the Lord forever, amen and amen." This doxology in each of these books. Very familiar refrain. Book 4. 90 to 106. Now we're postexilic. So you have Book 1, Book 2, part of book 3 all during the reign of David, the establishment of the kingdom, the beginnings of an increasing sense of the vision happens in Book 3.

Now you come to Book 4 and you're looking at people coming back from exile. In 722 when the Assyrians came and swept away the 10 northern tribes and took them off into captivity, they never returned back to their homeland. In 586 BC when the Babylonians came and took the two remaining tribes back to Babylon, and then they

were brought back again from the exile under the reign of Ezra and Nehemiah. The rebuilding of the Temple. The rebuilding of the walls. That what's been happening in Book 4. You come to the end of this one in Psalm 106 and verse 48: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting, and let all the people say amen. Praise the Lord." Why? They had been brought back from exile. They were now back in the homeland, and it was time for celebration.

Then finally book 5. 107 to 150. Some 600 years after Book 1. That is the time span that we're looking at here. Again, obviously the time after the exile. Psalm 119 is tucked away in this section. It speaks of the sufficiency of the word of God. The doxology of the closing book 5, you can really say that from 146 to 150 all the psalms are almost a doxology, but the last one of course that comes at the end of 150: "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord, praise the Lord." So that is the Psalter. The book that God has given to us as a prescription for His people. It's a book that speaks to us and reveals how great our God is, just how wonderful He is, how awe-inspiring our God is. You can look forward for these summer days, weeks, and months to being blessed by the psalmist.

So what do we take away? What do we want to learn from the Psalms? What are we going to learn over the course of this summer from the Psalms? Well, we're going to learn that praise is important. Worship is important. As we gather together, that is important. It is important both as a gathered community and individually. We're to learn that prayer is important, both corporately as we come together and individually. The psalmist is going to speak of this. Corporate worship is important. When we read the psalms, we're going to pray the psalms. We're going to sing the psalms. We're going to memorize the psalms. We're going to meditate on the psalms. All of these things are going to be what God uses to bring about change in our life.

If you commit yourself to the Psalter for the summer months, you and I will be changed. One of the reasons we'll be changed is because the psalms lift up so often the Lord Jesus Christ. It is Christ who is lifted up. It is Christ who is magnified. Realize this. Jesus's worship manual was the book of Psalms. I'm absolutely confident Jesus had memorized most of the psalms. He prayed the psalms. He sang the psalms. He meditated on the psalms. They will point us to Christ and to His saving work on our

behalf. That's where we're going. That's what we have ahead of us. We want to see Jesus lifted up. We want to see our Savior magnified.

And that's what we want to do right now. We just want to remind you that as this worshiping community gathers week to week, we gather because of one reason. We gather because Jesus has brought to our understanding the gospel of what His death and resurrection and ascension mean to each one who believes in what He did. What He did in His death on the cross was to make provision for our sin. What He did on our behalf was to make it possible to have our sins forgiven so that we could be in a relationship with God and live with Him forever. All He asks of us is not to go to church every week, not that we give money regularly, not that we're kind and nice to our neighbor, even though those are all good things. What He asks of us is simply to believe that what Jesus did on the cross is all that was needed to be done. Put your faith and trust in what Christ did and in Christ alone for your salvation.

Let's pray. Father God, we are thankful for Your word. We're thankful for the book of Psalms. Father, we're thankful for this revelation of Yourself to us. I pray for myself, I pray for this church family, Father, that You will grow us deeper in our walk with You in the summer weeks of study, that Your word will come alive to us, that it will be all that it can be in each of our lives. The sufficiency that we all need is found right here in Your word and in Your truth. We pray that You will do that for Your glory. In Jesus's name, amen.