

SUNDAY'S SOUL SONG - Vol 2, No 11. OT 5. Psalm 112.

“Sing the words and tunes of the *psalms* and hymns when you are together” Ephesians 5:19

Theme: “Being Good Pays Dividends In The End”

R. A ‘light’ rises in the darkness for the upright.

V4. God is a light in the darkness for the upright:

he is generous, merciful and just.

V5. The good man takes pity and lends,
he conducts his affairs with honor.

V6. The just person will never waver:
they will be remembered for ever.

V7. They have no fear of evil news;
with a firm heart they trusts in the Lord.

V8. With a steadfast heart they will not fear;

V9. Open-handed, they gives to the poor;
their justice stands firm for ever.

Their head will be raised in glory.



The First Reading from Isaiah (58:7-10) speaks of the demands of social justice and the blessings that come to those who practice them. Psalm 111/112 mirrors this message. It spells out the characteristics of right/just living and the rewards that follow. It spells out the agenda and characteristics of the covenant God of Israel – generosity, merciful, just (v4) and steadfast (v8). The word ‘light’ in the response to the psalm could mean that God gives understanding to those who live in the darkness of ignorance or that the just actions of God people [disciples] are a light that shows the ways to those who don’t know how to act justly. Jesus says in the Gospel (5:13-16) “You [disciples] are the light of the world.” What a blessing and a challenge. In the light of the (NRSV) translation I have included the verses of the (Grail translation) for praying especially in group bible study.



The first 3 verses of the psalm spell out a blessing[beatitude] for those who live justly. But Jesus and many of the psalmists pronounce a blessing over the good/just people because they are in touch with deeper, more lasting, indeed downright eternal truths. Then the psalmist moves from the blessings of the righteous to some pretty grand statements that are typical of many psalms. Sure, it is true that in the long run the righteous are better off. What’s more in the final verse of the psalm (v10), we are told the wicked will see the prosperity of the righteous will make the unrighteous angry and they will gnash their teeth over it all.

Truth is, in my experience it is the just who are often angry over the successes of the sinful. Psalm 111/112 may express our fondest wishes for how life should go and it is no doubt accurate in the long run in God's kingdom. But for now . . . well, there you go again painting a stark black-and-white picture that too often falls painfully short of reality. I mean, even in Jesus's own Beatitudes in Matthew 5 he ends up blessing the persecuted (and by the way: as followers of Jesus we should come to *expect* persecution and hardship too).



Still, in addition to that truth that this will be our ultimate reality, there are some other truths in Psalm 111/112 worth savouring and worth lifting out. In particular I like verses (7-8) "They have no fear of evil news; with a firm heart they trusts in the Lord. With a steadfast heart they will not fear." There is something about that idea of not having to fear "bad news" that strikes a chord. I think the sense here is not that bad things will never happen to the just. We know that is simply not true. But instead I think this means that they don't have to worry about being haunted by past misdeeds, sins, or crimes. When you live an upright life, things may or may not go well for you financially or in terms of your health or the wellbeing of your loved ones, but you won't lie awake at night worrying that somebody is going to find out about that horrible crime you committed years ago.



The most literal descriptions of Psalm 111/112 about the just being rich and happy and forever free of problems or sickness may not, for now, be true. But the portrait of being secure (recall the image of Psalm 1 about being a well-rooted tree) is surely true even now. That is why they will be "remembered forever" when the cosmic day comes, the righteous will be revealed as rock solid while the wicked will be revealed as having all along been finally nothing, like chaff in the wind, only flash and bling. "Blessed are the righteous" Psalm 111/112's opening beatitude declares. Yes, indeed, they are blessed!