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The Morning and Evening Sacrifice: A Sacrifice of Praise through the Psalms

By Walter Hampel*

The Need for Memory

Every nation must have a collective memory if it is to survive. Memory is the re of its history. Even though no living Americans have personal memory of President orge Washington, we still remember him as our first president. Without a national mory, we would soon forget what it means to be American.

Memory serves us individually as well. It roots us to our community, family d even ourselves. It is not uncommon to find family photographs on our desks at work stuffed inside a wallet. We do this not because we cannot remember these loved ones thout such photographs. Rather, we do it because the photos serve as a periodic minder during the day of those who love us and of our life beyond the confines of rk.

Christians need memory too. Without it, we begin to forget the One who loves and died for us. The world has a way of trying to force its attention and its priorities to our daily lives. David Wells likens the world's influence on us to a constant unding. He writes that such a pounding

> is made up of the pressures, demands, and expectations of our modern culture that combine to deliver the message that *we must belong to it,* not simply in the sense that we must live in it, but rather that *we must live by it.*[1] (Emphasis added)

This threat is not a new one. Throughout church history, Christians have found rious ways of fulfilling the command to "remember Jesus Christ, raised from the ead, descended from David."[2]. Numerous devotional practices have developed as hristians have sought to keep their minds on heavenly things rather than on the things this world.[3]

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Christians throughout the centuries have used various means of rememberi God on a frequent basis. In many cultures, roadside "pilgrim crosses" were set up reminders of Christ and to serve as sites for travelers' prayers. These crosses acted a "thread of memory" which connected the traveler to Christ.

There are two special "threads of memory" which can keep us connected Christ. These threads have been used for millennia by those faithful to God. Wh woven together, these threads provide a time-tested pattern for communing with Chr and keeping Him in our memory.

The First Thread – A Timely Sacrifice

When God was preparing His people Israel to enter the Promised Land Canaan, the LORD gave specific commands to Moses concerning the rituals of worsh which He wanted of His people. Among the many requirements given to Moses, G commanded a twice-daily sacrifice. He commanded the daily sacrifice of "two lamb year old. Offer one in the morning and the other at twilight." [4] This set in place t pattern for the morning and evening sacrifice.

Over the next several centuries, the worship of God was centered in the Tent Meeting described in Exodus 25-27. After King David made Jerusalem the capital the nation, he desired to build God a permanent house to replace the Tent of Meetin God told David that his son Solomon was the one to build the Temple. Yet, David w allowed to make plans and provisions for that future House of God. One of t provisions required a change of priestly functions for the Levites. Since the Levit would no longer need to take down and set up the Tent of Meeting, God, throu David, gave them a new assignment. The Levites were now

> to stand every morning to thank and praise the LORD. They were to do the same in the evening.[5]

The morning and evening sacrifice was beginning to take on a devotional character.

As Israel's history progressed, the devotional component of the morning a evening sacrifice grew. Prayer was now being likened to the evening sacrifice. T Psalmist writes in Psalm 141.2:

> May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.

The twice-daily sacrifices also had become time-markers for the people of ael. In Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal, the writer of 1 Kings dicates that Elijah's sacrifice to God occurred at the "time for the evening sacrifice."[6] ring the Babylonian Captivity, with the Temple in Jerusalem in ruins and all but a w of the inhabitants either dead or deported, Daniel offers a prayer to God and ceives an answer from the angel Gabriel "about the time of the evening sacrifice." [7] en after the period of exile in Babylon, the writer of the book of Ezra points out that ra ends an hours-long period of abasement before the Lord and begins a prayer of nfession for the sin of his people "at the time of evening sacrifice."[8]

Enter the Church

The Church further developed the practice of a morning and evening sacrifice. nce Christ's death was the ultimate, once-for-all, and perfect sacrifice, the original orning and evening sacrifice of a lamb would no longer be necessary or even propriate. Yet, the Scriptures call us to a continual sacrifice. It is not a bloody animal crifice or an offering of grain or wine. We are called to a sacrifice of praise. The riter of Hebrews reminds us that

> Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that confess his name. [9]

Early in Church history, Christians continued the pattern of prayer and praise arted by their Old Testament counterparts. Not only did morning and evening prayer ntinue but additional times of prayer developed as well. Using Psalm 119:164 as its andate ("Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws"), Christians veloped fixed-time prayer with up to seven times a day specified as special hours of ayer.

Standardized formats and fixed times for prayer arose early in church history. he Didache, a manual for church practice, dating to the late 1st or early 2nd century, garded the Lord's Prayer as a fixed format prayer to be said continually by the hristian faithful. It instructs its readers to pray the Lord's Prayer and to "Say this ayer three times every day."[10] Early church fathers such as Clement of Alexandria

(c.150-c.215) and Tertullian (c.160-c.225) suggested the use of fixed times of pra throughout the day.[11]

Hippolytus, writing around AD 217, recommended seven specific times daily prayer. The first is upon waking in the morning. The second at 9 a.m. The thir noon. The fourth at 3 p.m. The fifth at bedtime. The sixth at midnight. The seventh i dawn. He used several biblical texts as patterns for these set times of prayer. He wr that the reason for a 9 a.m. time of prayer, for example, is that it was "at that hd Christ was nailed to the tree."[12]

John Chrysostom, writing in AD 388, urged believers in Christ to set asid time of prayer in church at dawn, before going to work. This would be a time to th God and "make your prayers and confessions to the God of all things."[13] Likewise, instructs the Christian

> that at evening, he should return here to the church, [and] render an account to the Master of his whole day and beg forgiveness for his falls.[14]

Corporate morning and evening prayer was finding expression in places su as Jerusalem. In AD 384, a Spanish traveler named Egeria wrote a detailed account her pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In this account, she noted that prayer services were da held at the site of the Lord's resurrection. These services were no small gatherin Starting before dawn, the monks, virgins and some lay persons met for hymns, pray and psalms until sunrise. There were also services at noon, 3 p.m., and the even "Lucernare" at the time of the lighting of the lamps at 4 p.m. at which time furt prayers, hymns and psalms were offered until dusk.[15]

The monastic movement continued this practice with the development of sev "canonical" (ordered by church rule) hours. These hours roughly correspond Hippolytus' hours. They are Matins & Lauds (dawn), Prime (6 a.m.) Terce (9 a.m.) S (Noon), None (3 p.m.), Vespers (Sunset) and Compline (night). In observance of th hours, the clergy were required to recite the Divine Office, "a complicated set of pray that changed every day."[16] These prayers consisted of various hymns, passages fr Scripture and the Psalms with specific readings found in a book called the Breviary.

During the middle ages, it was not uncommon to have the morning and evening yers sung in church. In England, these services were open to both the laity and the rgy. F.A. Gasquet wrote

> In some of the larger parish churches a considerable portion of the Divine Office, as well as the Mass, was sung daily. A note in the churchwardens' accounts of St. Michael's Cornhill, London, written in 1538, asks prayers for "Richard Atfield, sometime parson of the church ... for that he, with consent of the bishop, ordained and established Mattins [Morning Prayer], High Mass, and Evensong [Evening Prayer] to be sung daily in the year 1375." This had been done regularly for 163 years, and the hours at which the various services were held would appear to have been: Matins at 6 a.m., High Mass at 9, and Evensong on work-days at 2 p.m.[17]

Medieval piety developed, literate laypersons desired to copy the pattern of the ayers and special hours for prayer which the monks followed. Roger Wieck points out

> With increasing wealth and education, the late medieval laity began to covet both the clergy's prayers and its books, particularly the breviary... They sought a book like the breviary but easier to use and more pleasing to the eye. The Book of Hours became that book.[18]

xed-hour prayer was, once again, becoming a practice of the everyday Christian.

After the Reformation swept through Europe in the 16th century, the use of ked-hour prayer continued. Luther's liturgical revisions maintained the canonical urs of Matins (Morning Prayer) and Vespers (evening prayer). The Church of otland, in its 1647 *Directory for Family Worship*, instructed

> ...for secret (personal) worship, it is most necessary...to perform this duty *morning and evening*, and at other occasions.[19] (Emphasis added)

The Book of Common Prayer (BCP) is a collection of ancient Christian ayers, first compiled and customized for use by the Anglican Church in 1552. Among e prayers in the BCP are daily Morning and Evening prayer. Despite numerous

revisions since 1552, the Morning and Evening prayers have been retained right up the present.

The Second Thread – The Psalms

The Psalms have been called the "Hymnbook of Israel". One hundred fifty number, the Psalms make up the largest individual book in the Bible. They cover th range of human emotion and human interaction with the God of Abraham, Isaac, an Jacob.

The Psalms offer praise to God in the midst of the circumstances of life. Or finds joy, (Psalm 98), anger (Psalm 109), sorrow (Psalm 137), anguish (Psalm 6.3) an wonder (Psalm 8.3-5). In the midst of these emotions, God is the One worshipped an looked to as the ultimate meaning of human existence (Psalm 62.1-2).

The New Testament is filled with quotes from the Psalms. These quotes are nc incidental references. The Lord Jesus used Psalm 110.1 to point to His true identity as descendant of King David, yet possessing more honor than David.[20] The crucifie Lord's anguished cry of despair to God was a direct quote from the first verse of Psalı 22. [21] On the Day of Pentecost, Peter used Psalm 16 to prove that Jesus was truly th Messiah of Israel.[22] The disciples understood Psalm 2 as a prophecy of Herod an Pontius Pilate's complicity in the death of Jesus. [23] The Psalms which sing God's prais also provide a wonderful testimony of His son Jesus.

From the start of church history, the Psalms found a place in the hearts an minds of Christians. Early liturgies in the church featured a responsorial use of th Psalms in which verses would be chanted and the worshippers would echo back a singl refrain.[24] Even today, ,many Christian denominations still use responsorial Psalms in th course of corporate worship. A great love for the Psalter was attested to by the 4 century theologian Basil the Great. In his *Homily 10 on Psalm 1,* he wrote:

> The Book of psalms has taken over what is profitable from all. It foretells coming events; it recalls history; it frames laws for life; it suggests what must be done...A psalm implies serenity of soul; it is the author of peace, which calms bewildering and seething thoughts...the voice of the Church...Therein is perfect theology...[25]

The early Christian devotion to the Psalms was evidenced in the 1984 covery of a codex Psalter in Egypt. The completely intact book, written on 17 cm by cm sheets of parchment, was found at an excavation site in a Christian cemetery 85 les south of Cairo. This Psalter, bound with a wooden cover, was found under the ad of the corpse of a 12-year-old Egyptian girl. The text was written in the Coptic lect of Oxyrhynchos. Both the burial site and the book date back to the late 4th ntury. Such a burial gesture must have reflected the reverence in which the girl's nily held the Psalter. Gawdat Gabra, the director of the Coptic Museum in Cairo ypt, where that old Egyptian Psalter was put on display in 1992, related that

> I can imagine her parents, in their grief when she died, deciding to give her the most precious gift they knew: the *Book of Psalms*....It was the ultimate gift.[26]

The Psalms became the core of the Divine Office. They were chanted (sung) monks as early as AD 500. As Andrew Hughes writes: "The main purpose of the ivine] offices is the recitation of the psalms."[27] It was an early ideal for the monks to ant the entire Psalter every day. Yet, in the Rule of Benedict, an early book of gulations and instruction for monks, a concession was made. The 150 Psalms would chanted during the seven canonical hours over the course of one week rather than in single day. While the entire Psalter would be recited during the week, the actual salms used during a given session of the Divine Office were not necessarily sequential .e. Psalm 1, then 2, then 3, etc.)

Like the fixed hour prayers, the structured recitation of the Psalms also found a lace with the laity. An example from early church history is that of Macrina (c.327–79). Macrina was the sister of Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. She was a student of the salms and avidly used them throughout her daily activities. In a letter to the monk lympius, Gregory remembered that

> She was especially well versed in the Psalms, going through each part of the Psalter at the proper time; when she got up or did her daily tasks or rested, when she sat down to eat or rose from the table, when she went to bed or rose from it for prayer, she had the Psalter with her at all times, like a good and faithful traveling companion.[28]

The Psalms were the heart of Christian worship well into the era of t Reformation. In early colonial America, the congregational singing during Sund worship services consisted of the singing of the Psalms that had been put into met (rhyming musical verse). The importance that this form of worship had with coloni American Christians is seen in the fact that the first book printed in British Nor America was the 1640 collection of metrical Psalms called *The Bay Psalm Book*. Th devotion to praising God with the Psalms continued in the piety of the early Ne England home. The piety of praising God with Psalms in the context of home worship found in the example of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). It was common for Edwar and his family to mark the start of the Sabbath on Saturday evening at sunset. At sunsr they offered a prayer, the lighting of a candle and the singing of a psalm.[29] The Psalt was also used as an instructional tool in Puritan New England. Psalters such as th Ainsworth Psalter contained not only the text of the Psalms but explanatory notes well. Alice Earle points out that such a Psalter was

> not only a dictionary but a perfect encyclopedia of useful knowledge. Things spiritual and things temporal were explained therein.[30]

The BCP also makes provision for a structured reading of the Psalms. conjunction with its Morning and Evening Prayers, the Book of Common Prayer pars out the Psalms in numeric sequence, special church feasts and Sundays excepted. Th BCP arranges the Psalms so that a handful of them would be read during Mornir Prayer and another handful read during Evening Prayer. Rather than going through th entire Psalter in seven days (i.e. Benedict's Rule), the BCP takes its reader through th 150 Psalms in a month.

The Two Threads Woven Together

As can be seen from the Bible and Church history, Christians have a ric devotional background in fixed hour prayers such as the Morning and Evening Praye as well as the rich use of the Psalms as the premier hymnbook of Christian praise God. These practices have transcended language, culture, time and place. They provic for us a time-tested pattern for keeping Christ in our memory and thoughts. Our spiritu ancestors found it important to set aside at least two times (morning and evening) ever day for prayer. They also made use of the Psalms as their primary text for prayer ar praise. We would benefit to make their pattern our own by offering these readings God as a morning and evening sacrifice of praise.

The advice of Hippolytus, given in the 3rd century, applies just as much in the 2[1] century. Concerning cultivating a discipline of regular daily times of prayer, Hippolytus advises his readers then and advises us now:

> if you act so, all you faithful, and remember these things, and teach them in your turn... you will not be able to be tempted or to perish, since you have Christ always in memory.[31]

Endnotes

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Colossians 3:1-2

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1 Chronicles 23:30

1 Kings 18

Daniel 9:21

Ezra 9:5

Hebrews 13:15

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[12] Ibid 80.

[13] Ibid 85.

[14] Ibid 85.

[15] Egeria, *Pilgrimage of Egeria, XXIV-XXV,* transl. John Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels* (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1971) 123-126.

[16] Roger Wieck, "The Book of Hours – The Medieval Best Seller," *Bible Review* IV/ (June 1988) 24.

[17] F.A. Gasquet, *Parish Life in Mediaeval England* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1922) 150-151.

[18] Wieck 24.

[19] White 96.

[20] Luke 20:41-44

[21] Matthew 27:46

[22] Acts 2:25-28

[23] Acts 4:25-27

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