

**Sermon Sunday 11 June 2023**  
**Psalm 50:7-15.**  
**Sermon theme: “I am God. Your God”**  
**Dr Stephen Pietsch**

I'd like to start today by telling a short parable.

*Carol and Mark were a married couple who had been together for a few years. They had been joyful when they first tied the knot, but things had been really right in their marriage for some years. Carol noticed that her husband had, even in the first couple of years of married life, lost interest in her. He did not want to spend time with her, even when the opportunity came to do so. He did not share his thoughts with her or look for Carol to share her thoughts or feelings with him. It became clear over time to Carol that Mark did not trust her or believe that she was committed to him, even though she often went over and above, trying to help him, trying to support him, even cooking his old favourite dishes, and having things just the way he liked them. Mark was generous enough. He worked hard and they had a nice home. He even made a point of taking Carol out for dinner each year on their wedding anniversary. One year he even bought her a ring.*

*She hoped he might be warming towards her again, but no, nothing changed. He closed himself off in his work and his own pursuits, as if, well almost as if Carol was not there.*

*One evening things came to a head with all this. Carol was at the end of her endurance. She spoke up: why won't you ever let me get close to you? Why do you push me away? It is like you do not even see me.*

*She asked him.*

*'What do you mean? I try to keep you happy. I provide you with everything you need, and more!' Mark answered.*

*'What about that ring on your finger?' Where did that come from?'*

*She looked down at the ring on her finger and said to her husband 'I'd happily give up this bit of metal, this house and everything else if you would just talk to me, be with me, trust me, share your life with me'.*

*Exasperated, Mark said 'What do you want from me?'*

*Carol answered this question clearly because she knew the answer and she was ready to give it with all her heart. With a quiet, calm but tremulous voice, she said: 'I just want to be your wife'.*

This is what is going on in today's Psalm. Read the whole thing sometime and you will see how it unfolds. God is talking to Israel, and he is saying 'I just want to be your God'. Israel had turned their covenant with God into a sham-marriage, a matter of mere outward actions and appearances. They have begun to imitate the pagan

nations around them, treating the true living God like one of the ‘flunky-gods’ of the ancient world, who responds to bribery and flattery.

They have fallen into doing mere dead external actions, thinking that this was worship, offering sacrifices without any sincere thanksgiving or prayer.

This parody of worship is *not* the covenant God made with them. They have forgotten who God actually is. Listen what he says to them here in vv 7-13:

*“Hear, O my people, and I will speak,  
O Israel, I will testify against you.  
I am God, your God.  
Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;  
your burnt offerings are continually before me.  
I will not accept a bull from your house,  
or goats from your folds.  
For every wild animal of the forest is mine,  
the cattle on a thousand hills.  
I know all the birds of the air,  
and all that moves in the field is mine.*

*“If I were hungry, I would not tell you,  
for the world and all that is in it is mine.  
Do I eat the flesh of bulls,  
or drink the blood of goats?*

God clearly does not want to be part of this charade – as if Israel were giving him something he wanted or needed *in return* for his favours. God says: ‘you don’t need to feed me or tickle my fancy – the world and its fullness is mine already. I am not somebody you manipulate and manage. *I am God, your God* (he says in verse 7).

This is not an idol made in the image of human needs and desires. This God is *righteous* – he is above all our human manipulation and coercion. He judges what is true and does what it is right. He is also *sovereign* – he owns all and has no need of the puny things we offer him. He is also *merciful and loving* – he will hear when we call and act to save us, yes even us who so often turn our backs on him; he does not have to kept happy and interested as if he were grudging or uncaring.

This is the God who called not Israel but all humanity back into real mutual relationship, closeness, (in a certain sense) friendship. What does he want from us?

He wants to be our God. As Luther says in his LC in his explanation on the First Commandment, God wants us to look to him for all good, to run to him in all trouble, to turn to him as our saviour and helper in every need.

In verse 14 God is speaking to Israel again. He says:

*Offer God a sacrifice of thanksgiving  
And perform your vows to the most high...*

This needs a little bit of explanation. When you read the psalms you find out that in the covenant God first initiated with Israel, there was a real two way relationship. In psalms of petition, where the psalmist calls out to God in need or distress, he often makes a vow, a 'vow of praise'. In Psalm 51, for example the very next psalm, in verse 14, the psalmist has just prayed for God's forgiveness of his sin, and he says:

*Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God of my salvation  
And my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.*

This is a vow of praise, in which the supplicant says to God 'I won't forget that it was you who rescued me. I will perform my vow to the most high. I will be thankful and I will praise you because it was you who saved me'. So this is how this mutual relationship works. God extends his love to save and help his people, and we, moved by that loving mercy, respond in thanks and praise.

What we see in the psalms here is the same love of God that offered and still offers salvation and help to all people by coming close to us in human flesh and blood, in his Son Jesus, the one who, through his death and resurrection, brings us into deep two-way relationship with his Father. In John 14 Jesus describes this in beautiful words (verse 21): *And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and show myself to him.*

In his Son Jesus, God the Father says to us: *I am God your God.* He wants to be close. He wants true friendship with us, in which there is honesty and trust, in which he speaks to us and we respond to him, in which we grow in relying on him absolutely.

Verse 15, the last verse in this text, distils all this down into a few words. This is a verse worth learning by heart. Even though we so often make things with God complicated, it is really very simple and very helpful. God is still speaking to Israel here – and us. He says:

*Call upon me in the day of trouble,  
and I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.*

He wants us to call out to him in the day of trouble. He delights in our relying on him, in our needing him, calling out to him; when we have sinned and feel deeply guilty or shamed, when we are distressed and grieving, when we are afraid, or depressed and despairing.

He can and will hear us and help us, so that our deep thanks and trust is, in turn, expressed in thanksgiving and praise. To use the language of the psalms, we *perform our vow of praise*, as we sincerely and whole-heartedly give him our thanks.

So how do we grasp this wonderful relationship and hold onto it? So, what teaching is being handed on to us from this text today?

Well, as with Israel, so in God's new covenant with us this has a a) a *public corporate aspect* and b) a *private and intimate dimension*, which are deeply intertwined.

- a) Full participation in worship, confession, praise, supplication: liturgy is designed for this: forgiveness of sins, the Kyrie, the songs of praise and thanksgiving. This trains our heart in this dynamic.
- b) Personal spiritual life of prayer – calling out to God in all our deepest needs, in our private prayer times, and indeed at anytime. This Psalm shows us that God is like the friend Jesus talks about in his parable in Luke 11 who will answer the door at midnight to help you in your need.

Our Lord says to us as he said to his people long ago:

*I am God your God.  
Call upon me in the day of trouble and  
I will deliver you  
and you will glorify me.*