

## The Sons of Korah

Readings: Psalm 46 and Psalm 84

Well we've been focussing on music in worship this morning and looking at some Psalms. And that's great as the Psalms are the songs that Jesus would have sung.

And, of course, the Psalms were meant to be sung. And as they were sung and not just simply read they were able to touch the minds and imaginations of people in a way that only music can do.

And I love the Psalms. For me there's something about the honesty and raw feelings within them that touches you at the very core of your being once you get into them. And in recent years I've found myself being drawn to them time and time again as they've become for me, such a source of tremendous strength and comfort and also encouragement as well. You know I read somewhere that you don't really begin to understand the Psalms until you begin to pray them. And I think there's a lot of truth in that - as there's so much within them, the pain, the joy, the elation that invites us to pray the same prayers those original authors did all those years ago. C.S. Lewis once described them 'as the greatest poetry ever written.'

And for me some of the most beautiful and moving Psalms in the collection are those written by some very gifted musicians called the Sons of Korah. And if you are familiar with the Psalms you've probably seen the inscription in italics at the top of some of them which says:

*'For the Director of Music – of the Sons of Korah.'*

And the ones we had in our readings this morning were two of theirs which, of course, is why I chose them. And in fact, all together we have 11 of their songs in the collection preserved for us today,

And we see from the first book of Chronicles that the Sons of Korah were part of a much larger group of worship leaders, during the time of the great King David, responsible for the choral and orchestral music that took place in the tabernacle. The tabernacle, of course, being the place of worship for ancient Israel before a permanent temple was built in Jerusalem sometime later during the reign of King Solomon.

And so what more do we know about the Sons of Korah?

And what I would like to do this morning is offer a few reflections on their story and what inspired them and then some thoughts on what their legacy might have to say to us today.

And perhaps a good place to start is just before David becomes king. And the descendants of a man called Korah had the job of being doorkeepers and custodians of the tabernacle which included serving as a support for the ministry of the priests. And in some ways it was not a dissimilar role to that which their forefather, Korah performed, many generations earlier and had turned his nose up at. But more of that in a moment.

Doorkeepers - and I'm guessing it may have been a fairly mundane occupation. But it was not long before King David, being an accomplished musician himself, was able to discern there were those within the family of Korah with a special musical gifting and so he elevated them to playing a leading role in the tabernacle's worship team.

Now although these talented musicians were occupying a prominent position in the nation's worship there was something of a dark cloud in their family history. And we need to take a look at that as it has a strong bearing on what inspired them and shaped their songs. And so

let's go back a few hundred years to the book of Numbers and the story of their great, great, many times great ancestor, Korah.

Now Korah and his family lived at the time of the Exodus and when the nation of Israel spent 40 years wandering around in the desert. And at the heart of the community was their place of worship, the tabernacle. This was a tent like structure which had to be taken down and put up again every time they moved from one place to another. And it was the job of Korah and his family to carry all the holy furnishings in the sanctuary every time they moved. They had to carry all these items on their back and it was hard work but it was a calling from God.

But at some point it seems Korah decided all this manual work was beneath him – he felt he deserved something better – a more upfront role like being part of the priesthood. After all the leaders Moses and Aaron were his cousins.

And so what Korah does is to gather together a group of other malcontents and they launch a rebellion against Moses and Aaron challenging their very God anointed leadership. And as happens in these situations there's a confrontation and Moses says:

“Look Korah, why are you doing all this? Don't you realise what a blessing and privilege God has already given you in being near to Him here in the tabernacle and serving his people?”

But Korah won't listen – he and his mates don't want to know. And because of their defiance and act of rebellion, Korah and his co-conspirators meet a tragic end as they come under God's judgment for their pride, rebellion and defiance. The ground opens up beneath them and swallows them up. And with that Korah's part of the story come to an end. But what about his sons or should we say great, great grandsons?

Well Korah may not have appreciated what a tremendous privilege it was for him to serve in the house of the Lord but this new generation did. Unlike their forefather these Sons of Korah had a deep and living and intimate relationship with God. And you can see it in the Psalms attributed to them. I just think of those wonderful opening words of Psalm 42 where they express that beautiful yearning for more of God:

‘As the deer pants for streams of water - so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.’

And then those opening words from Psalm 84:

‘How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh cry out for the living God.’

And so why did these gifted musicians adopt the name, the Sons of Korah when the name ‘Korah’ throughout the generations had become so tainted and reviled. Why not choose the name of another of their ancestors? But, as one writer suggests, maybe they kept the title as a reminder that God was so merciful and gracious to them, despite the name Korah having had such a bad reputation. And we get hints of that within some of their songs. I just think of that line in Psalm 46 that goes:

‘Therefore we will not fear - though the earth give way.’

Surely those words are not there by accident are they? It seems to me to be a very clear reference to their forefather having been swallowed up by the earth.

And so what does the legacy of the Sons of Korah have to say to us to day. Well for me it speaks of a God who restores and redeems. And I'm grateful to one commentator who gives this insight. He says this:

'The name Korah was infamous for many generations. But God in his grace and mercy takes a name associated with rebellion and distrust and disobedience and makes it a name associated with praise and worship and love of God.'

And let's not also forget that the same God that the Sons of Korah sang to, is the same one we sing to, and he has redeemed us, just as he redeemed them. To redeem means to buy back at a price. And Jesus paid the price for us with his own precious blood.

Well what Korah squandered, his sons treasured. And do we treasure the inheritance we have in Christ? For Jesus gave his life as a ransom for us so that we might find forgiveness and hope and newness of life.

You know one of my favourite quotes is from the English test cricketer who played in the first ashes test in Australia and later devoted his life to mission work, first in China and then later in India and Africa. His name was C T Studd and he said this:

'If Jesus Christ be God and died for me then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.'

Then just one final thought - if God has called us to a role or to do something for him, however menial or ordinary it may seem, let us do it to the very best of our ability because we are doing it for him who loved us and gave himself for us. The Sons of Korah continued to be faithful in the responsibilities appointed to them. And I can imagine if someone asked them "wouldn't you make good priests?" I'm pretty sure how they would respond as I only have to think of that well known and wonderful line from Psalm 84: "I'd rather be a doorkeeper - in the house of my God." Amen

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Sermon preached at a service of Morning Worship at St Laurence's, Scalby on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2020.