Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Do you know who Eeyore is? He is a stuffed donkey who belongs to Christopher Robin in the Winnie the Pooh stories. And Eeyore always expects the worst to happen. He has a very gloomy personality. But he is also a reliable character; someone you can lean on in times of trouble. He can even be quite insightful and wise sometimes. In fact, in the New Adventures of Winnie the Pooh, there are hints that Eeyore is arguably the smartest, wisest, and most down-to-earth resident of the Hundred Acre Woods.

So, why have I given you this detailed analysis of Eeyore’s character? Well, one type of Psalm that we find in the Psalms is Psalms of **Lament**. And boys and girls, lament means sadness or sorrow. And it might surprise you to know that nearly ⅓ of the Psalms are lament Psalms. They are the single largest category. But when you think about it, that makes them very real and relevant, doesn’t it. Life simply is not a bed of roses or a barrel of laughs. We all endure very tough situations and seasons in life. And on that score the lament Psalms are a precious gift from God. And in this way, they are a bit like Eeyore - they appear quite gloomy, but they are actually full of down-to-earth and insightful wisdom.

So, today we are going to consider a very typical Psalm of Lament. And as it should always be with Scripture, our key aim is to see how this Psalm points us to the person and work of Jesus Christ. But we must start by taking the Psalm at face value - what is this Psalm about? What is the problem or complaint of the Psalmist? And what solution does the Psalm provide? Well, in verse 12, the Psalmist describes himself as standing on level ground. And that saying suggests balance and security and that things are as they should be. So, we consider Psalm 26 under this theme: **Life on “Level Ground” is the best life**. And to see why and how this is so, we will look at the **SETTING** of the Psalm, the **STRUCTURE** of the Psalm, and finally the **SAVIOUR** in the Psalm.

1. So, let’s begin with the **SETTING** of Psalm 26
   1. The title of the Psalm simply says, “*Of David*.” But as we look at the content of the Psalm, and Psalms that are similar, we get an idea as to the possible setting of the Psalm.
      1. And one possible setting is that of **someone who is seeking vindication from the Lord, at the temple, because they have been falsely accused**.
         1. To be vindicated is to be proved right. And we see that Psalmist is proclaiming his “*integrity*” and “*innocence,*” and he refers to “*men of falsehood*” and those “*whose right hands are full of bribes*.”
         2. And verse 6 describes the Psalmist as going round the altar, which was in the house of the Lord.
         3. Well, in **1 Kings 8:31-32**, at the dedication of the temple, Solomon prayed these words: “*If a man … is made to take an oath and comes and swears his oath before your altar in this house, then hear in heaven and act and judge your servants, condemning the guilty … and vindicating the righteous by rewarding him according to his righteousness*.” So, in Old Testament times, if a person was falsely accused of something, they were to go to the temple and the altar, and ask the Lord to vindicate them; to prove their innocence.
         4. And Psalm 26 fits that situation very well; it has all those elements.
      2. But another possible setting is that this Psalm is what is called **a ‘temple entrance liturgy.’**
         1. There are many places we can freely go but to enter some places you need a ticket or there may be a **dress code** requirement. And if you do not have a ticket or you are not dressed properly, a **bouncer** - a big strong bloke - will stand in your way and not let you in. Well, in Old Testament times, to be able to enter the inner courts of the tabernacle or temple, you first had to pass the priests who were kind of like ‘**spiritual bouncers**.’ And they would conduct a kind of ‘spiritual warrant of fitness’ interview. And they would use Psalms for this interview.
            1. **Psalms 15 and 24** are two examples of this. Both of them ask: Who may come into the house of the Lord? Who is qualified or who meets the standard for entry? And then we are told the character of the person who is qualified to enter. Psalm 15 says: “*He who walks blamelessly and … speaks truth in his heart; who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend … who swears to his own hurt and does not change; who does not… take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved*.” And Psalm 24 says, “*He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the Lord*.”
            2. So, the priest would recite Psalm 15 or 24 as the ‘spiritual warrant of fitness interview,’ and Psalm 26 may have been a Psalm that a person would recite in order to gain entry. And in this way, the person seeking entrance to the house of the Lord could go in knowing that their feet were standing “on level ground.”
         2. So, that is another possible setting for Psalm 26.
2. But to see more about the essential truth of this Psalm we need to dive in a little deeper. And we do that, as our second point, by turning our thoughts to the **STRUCTURE** of Psalm 26. And here we want to see how the Psalm is laid out and what is being said here.
   1. And Psalm 26 is very typical of the basic **structure** of lament Psalms.
      1. Most of them begin with an **invocation** - a call or cry to God. And that is exactly what we see in verses 1-3 - “*Vindcate me, O Lord…*” And then we get the problem or the question or the complaint of the lament. And in Psalm 26, that is verses 4-10 - the false accusation/s of wicked men. And finally, lament Psalms typically end with an expression of confidence in the Lord. And verses 11-12 are exactly that. So, that is the basic structure of this Psalm - invocation, complaint, and expression of confidence.
      2. Now, if you have done any study of the Psalms, you might remember that a good rule of thumb for Psalm interpretation is to look at the middle of the Psalm. Right? And that is because the Psalms are Hebrew poetry. And Hebrew poetry often provides the key to understanding the Poem in the middle of the poem. And that is true of Psalm 26. Verses 1-3 and 11-12 are a cry to the Lord and an expression of confidence in the Lord. Verses 4-5 and 9-10 are about the wicked. And verses 6-8 are about worship. So, the Psalmist’s problem is ultimately answered in worship.

* 1. So, let’s move through this Psalm and look at all this in more detail.
     1. In verse 1, the Psalmist cries out to the Lord, “*Vindicate me … for I have walked in my integrity*.” And that phrase is repeated in verse 11: “*But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity.*” And as we have noted, it seems pretty plain that the Psalmist had been falsely accused of something. He could not prove it himself, with witnesses, so he was entrusting himself to the Lord. He had come to the house of the Lord and was saying, You know, O Lord; You know that I have told the truth, or that I did not do what I am accused of.
        1. Have you ever found yourself in that situation? Boys and girls, have you ever been blamed for something that your brother or sister did? It really hurts, doesn’t it! So, we can empathize with the Psalmist here.
     2. But it is not just one moment or one event that the Psalmist speaks of in this Psalm. He is also describing the **general tenor or attitude or character of his life**.
        1. He says, “*I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and my mind … I do not sit with men of falsehood, nor do I consort with hypocrites. I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked. I wash my hands in innocence*.” That’s quite a claim, isn’t it!
        2. And look also at how transparent and earnest the Psalmist is about how he lives; in verse 2 he says, “*Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and my mind*.” We see similar words in **Psalm 139:23**: “*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*”
        3. Now, one thing we know for sure is **the Psalmist was not perfect** because no human being, except for the Lord Jesus, is without sin. So, what are we to make of the claims of the Psalmist about his body and soul devotion, his integrity, his trusting in the Lord “without wavering,” his washing his “hands in innocence,” his loving the Lord’s house, and about not sitting with evildoers or consorting with hypocrites, etc?
           1. When was the last time that you asked the Lord to vindicate or search or prove you, and claimed integrity and innocence and unwavering trust?
           2. And the reason I ask this, brothers and sisters, is because it can be the case that we use God’s grace and forgiveness as an excuse to not be concerned about personal holiness. Do you know what I speak of? If we are saved by grace alone and we can go to God for forgiveness, do I really have to try hard to obey all God’s commands? Do I really have to be concerned with how I speak or behave in every situation I encounter? Does it really matter that how I live my life, apart from between 10:30-11:30 on Sunday morning, is no different or not much different than the life of the unbelievers I know?
        4. Well, the answer of Psalm 26 is, Yes, it matters a lot.
           1. Think back to **Psalm 1**: “*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked … but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates, day and night*.” And how is this man described? “*He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in season and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers*.” And how does Psalm 1 describe the wicked? “*The wicked are not so … the way of the wicked will perish*. So, Psalm 1 tells us that the life of obeying God’s commands is the blessed and best and happiest life; it is life lived with your feet on level ground.
           2. And Psalm 26 asks us this question: Do you really believe Psalm 1? And can this be proven by how you live? Again, you will not be perfect, but can your commitment to Christ be measured by how you talk, think, and behave?
        5. So, one lesson of Psalm 26 is that personal holiness really matters.
     3. But having said that, Psalm 26 is about more than personal holiness. As I have already stated, the Psalmist was not claiming perfection, because none of us can. And we can go further than this and see that the Psalmist was not offering his own efforts at holiness as in any way making him deserving of God’s favour. In fact, by faith, the Psalmist **understood that his entire salvation rested in God and His Messiah**.
        1. Verse 1 speaks of him trusting in the Lord. And that is the essence of faith.
        2. And where is the Psalmist **looking** in verse 3? At the “*steadfast love*” of the Lord and His “*faithfulness*.” And brothers and sisters, those are covenant words. All through the Bible, God binds Himself to His people on the basis of His steadfast love and faithfulness. And do you know where we see the steadfast love and faithfulness of God most plainly? At the cross of Calvary. For that is where God, through Jesus Christ, saved undeserving sinners, like the Psalmist and you and me.
        3. But notice also **where the Psalmist is** as he speaks these words? He is at worship! He is by the altar in the house of the Lord. He will be looking at the blood of animal sacrifices, which pointed to the greater sacrifice of Jesus. He will be smelling the sweet incense that rose from the altar toward heaven, as a sign of the sweetness of Jesus’ obedience and sacrifice.
        4. And notice **verse 11**, where the Psalmist says, “*Redeem me, and be gracious to me*.” The Psalmist knew that his feeble efforts at personal holiness fell far short of the perfection that God demands. His only hope was redemption and grace through the promised Messiah. And it is the same for you and me. We should be concerned with personal holiness, but that is not about earning salvation; it is about being thankful for the salvation that Christ has earned for us!
  2. Well, we have already begun to see the Saviour in Psalm 26, but before we move on to see more of that in our third and last point, Psalm 26 is another reminder about **the importance of public worship**. It is the centre of this Psalm and it is where the Psalmist experienced the presence and vindication of the Lord in the most special way. And that is why it is so good that we can back together as a full congregation in worship! Livestream has been a blessing, to be sure, but when “*I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells,*” he means gathered, in person worship. So, let us never lose the love of being in the house of the Lord.

1. Well, that brings us thirdly and lastly and briefly to the **SAVIOUR** **IN** Psalm 26.
   1. One very helpful way to think about the Psalms as the songs or prayers of Jesus. And congregation, no one is more qualified to sing or pray Psalm 26 than the Lord Jesus.
      1. In terms of **walking in integrity**, think of all the times that He demonstrated or claimed to be Messiah and the Son of God. And each time He was rejected by the Pharisees and the people, or falsely accused of blasphemy.
      2. And in terms of **trusting in the Lord without wavering**, think of all the times that He turned His face toward Jerusalem, knowing what awaited Him there. And think of Him in the Garden of Gethsemane entrusting Himself to His Father, even though He knew the horrors of the cross that lay ahead.
      3. And in terms of **loving to be in the house of the Lord**, think of the time when HIs parents thought they had lost their young son, only to find Him in the temple courts, teaching the religious leaders. And when His parents asked Him why He had done this to them, He replied, “Did you not know that I must be in My Father’s house?” And think also of the love or zeal for the Lord’s house that we heard of in our earlier reading, when Jesus cleared the temple of the money-changers.
      4. And He spent almost every minute of every day in His public ministry **proclaiming thanksgiving aloud** and telling the people about God’s wondrous deeds.
      5. And think of how often He **rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocrisy** and wickedness, only to fall prey to their thirst for blood as they had Him crucified.
      6. And in terms of being **vindicated** by the Lord, when Jesus was baptized, the voice from heaven said, “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*.” And also on the Mount of Transfiguration, the Father said of Jesus, “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him*.” And even though He died and was buried, **Romans 1:4** says, He “*was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead.*” The resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate vindication of the Father that what Jesus said is true - He is the Son of God and the only Saviour for sinners.
      7. And boys and girls, **where is Jesus now?** He is in heaven. As verse 12 says, His foot truly and ultimately stands on level ground; in the great assembly He glorifies His Father.
      8. So, who is most qualified to sing Psalm 26? The Lord Jesus!
   2. But **Romans 8:1** says, “*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*.” So, if you have put your trust and confidence for salvation in the Lord Jesus, this is the vindication of your Father in heaven, today. Though you look at yourself and see sin and guilt, He says, Because I have joined you to my Son, I see you as righteous and blameless. And though the world thinks your views about creation and sexuality and obedience to my commands and hell are false and hateful, you know the truth and therefore you stand on level ground. You are living the best life, now!

* 1. And when you stand before the Lord on the Day of Judgment, you will not be condemned to hell with the wicked. Instead, the Lord will say to you, “*Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.*” And then your feet will truly and completely be standing on level ground in the great assembly as you bless your wonderful, precious, and mighty Lord. Come Lord Jesus. Come, quickly. Amen!