

## **Dr. Fred Putnam—Psalms Lecture 2**

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In our first lecture, you probably noticed that I used the word “poem” a number of times interspersed with the word “Psalms” and even spoke about Biblical poets. All right, that’s a big question these days, probably for the past twenty-five years. There has been debate whether there really is poetry going on in the Bible, and because I think that has very large implications for the way we read the psalms as well as other poetic passages, I’d like to discuss that for a little bit and talk about, first of all, what do we mean by poetry? And secondly, are the Psalms and other biblical passages really poetic? And finally ask what are some implications of that.

So, our first question is: what is poetry? Well, you can define it in about as many ways as you find writers. Robert Frost said, for example, “The good reader of a great poem knows the instant that he has read it that he has take an immortal wound, that he will never recover.” Emily Dickinson said, “You ask me ‘What is a poem?’ Or ‘How do I know it is poetry?’ I answer that if I feel as if the top of my head had been removed or I had been so cold no fire can warm me, I know that is poetry. Is there any other way?” There were many other definitions like that, which you noticed, put the emphasis on the effect that the poem has on the reader. That’s one approach to defining “poem,” if it makes me feel like a poem, then it’s a poem.

A second way of defining it is by asking about the author’s intent. So we read some poems, I think more commonly in modern poetry, probably since the time of the New Criticism, T.S. Eliot, the first to second World War. They just seem to be prose that has been rearranged so it looks a little different on the page. In fact, there’s a famous baseball announcer. I’m from New England, so I don’t cheer for the Yankees, but the Red Sox are more of my speed. Phil Rizzuto was a play commentator for the New York Yankees, and ten years ago, two men took the transcripts of his play-by-play commentary and snipped out little sections and rearranged it on a page and sold it as a book of poetry. Now, Phil Rizzuto was not speaking in poetry. He had no intentions of creating poems or being a poet or anything else. And so the question is: Does that make them a poem? Because somebody says this is a poem, does that make

it one? So the second approach is in the intention of the author. If the author says it is, no matter what we think of it. It is a poem.

The third way of defining poetry which tries to be a little more neutral and maybe scientific, if that word were to be applied to poetry, says that we recognize a poem because it uses rhetorical devices that are used in all language, but poetry uses them a lot. So poetry is compressed language. It's language where every single word is chosen, not just for what it means, but for what it suggests, for how it sounds, for how it fits the other words, maybe for how it fits the mood of the poem, so that at every point of the poem, the author is choosing which word best fits in here.

In fact, a very interesting experiment is to go online. There's a website dedicated to the poetry of Wilfred Owen, World War I English poet, and when you read his poetry, it sounds just like how it is—kind of prose, kind of rearranged, little bits and pieces sound poetic. It sounds like paragraphs that have been sliced a little bit. But when you look at the manuscripts, and the website has photographs of his manuscripts, you realized that he wrote lines, crossed them out, and some lines he rewrote 3, 4, 5, 6 times so that even though it sounds like he's just writing prose, he's very clearly struggling to find just the right word to go into that spot. So when we look at the way he has chosen the words and see how he has densely packed his writings, we realize that these are poems in a way even poetic soundings texts are not.

So some people would say that the end of Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address where he says, "With charity toward all, with malice towards none, with strength with determination to do right as God gives us to see the right." Or Winston Churchill, "Nothing to offer, but blood, sweat, and tears." Or "We will fight them on the beaches, we will fight them on the lanes, we will fight them in the villages." Is that poetry? It does sound very poetic, but they were not intending to write poems. The piece as a whole, the whole speech or the whole essay is not a poem. It's neither presented as one, nor is it written as one. So we find this interplay of three factors. One is the effect on the reader, one is the intention of the author, and the third one is the way that the language itself is being used.

In fact, Roman Jakobson, who was a famous literary critic and structural philosopher, talked about poetry or the poetic function of language as he said the

seventh function. He identified seven basic functions of language to communicate knowledge, to motivate someone to do something, to feel a certain way, and so on. But the poetic function is the focus upon language for its own sake, so that the poet chooses a word far more deliberately than someone who is writing a paper. I know we all choose words deliberately. That's true, and Jakobson knew that as well. He doesn't mean only poets choose words carefully. But in poetry, the significance of those choices goes up and becomes far more important. And we have to remember that the significance is not simply what the word means or what the phrase or sentence means but what it connotes. That is, what are the other associations come in because we use that word?

Let me give you a quick example. If you invite someone over to your house for dinner, you can say, "Why don't you drop by our place?" Or you could say, "Hey, come on over and visit our new castle." Or, "Well, it's kind of a hovel, but you're welcome anyway." Now, place, castle, hovel—three very different words, three very different associations. Probably if you use the word "castle," the person you're speaking to thinks you're joking, and they know you don't live in a place that's built of stones surrounded by a moat or dragons and dungeons and all that. But they get the idea that maybe you've just bought a big, new house. You're proud of it. You're excited about it, or you've changed something. But if you say "hovel," well that certainly doesn't have a very positive overtones for most of us. We think do I need to take some sanitary wipes with me or do I dare go here? Do I really want to eat whatever this person serves? Or as the term "place" is very innocuous. It doesn't really have many connotations at all. It probably has the least association, the fewest associations.

So poets are constantly choosing words for their associations. Let me read you a very brief poem. This was written by a nineteenth century Christian poet, Christina Rossetti. This is four lines. It's from a book called *Sing Songs*, which is a book of children's poems she wrote.

What are heavy? Sea, sand and sorrow

What are brief? Today and tomorrow

What are frail? Spring blossoms and youth

What are deep? The ocean and truth

What has she done? Well first of all, that doesn't really sound like a poem for children to me, or maybe for very thoughtful children or children whom you want to be thoughtful. She's done a number of things. First, each line has the same pattern, a question and an answer. Each answer has the same pattern, two different nouns. Each line starts with the same two words--"what are". There's a rhyme. Sorrow, tomorrow. Youth and truth. There's a meter: "What are heavy? Sea, sand and sorrow. What are brief? Today and tomorrow." There are these images. Notice this: sea, sand is a physical thing. Truth is not. Today, we know that today exists because we're here; we don't know anything about tomorrow. Spring blossoms are physical things. Youth is not. It's a quality. The ocean also is a physical thing. Truth is not. And she's put all these things together--the sound what we call anaphora, which is when a number of lines start with the same word or expression, the repetition in other words; the pattern, the question with a two word answer; the meter; the imagery. She's put all those together to take a very simple idea and make it resonate far more deeply than it would if she just said something like, "You know sorrow can be really difficult. Life is brief and actually kind of frail, like youths, and the truth is really deep." What's the difference? Well, the difference is that the patterning of the language, the compression of it, the pictures that she uses change it from a series of pretty banal, or even boring, trite statements, into a way of thinking that affects us and communicates far more deeply than any four point outline would have.

Here's another example: we talk about the difference between poetry and prose. If we turn to the book of Judges, we find in Judges four and five a very familiar passage. Judges four is a story of Deborah and Barak and the war with Sisera or Jabin, who's the king of Canaan, and Sisera's his general. In chapter five, we have a poem about the same incident--a song that Deborah and Barak chanted on that day. I'm just going to read a couple of verses from these two chapters and see if you can tell which is the poem and which is the prose narrative. This is when Sisera the general fled from the army, and he's fleeing for his life, and he sees a tent and he goes to a woman named Jael and asks her for help to protect him. So, this is starting Judges 4:18.

“He turned aside to her into the tent. She covered him with some sort of cloth, a rug or a blanket or something. And he said to her, ‘Please give me a little water to drink because I’m thirsty.’ So she opened a container of milk and gave him drink, and then she covered him and he said to her, ‘Stand in the doorway of the tent, and if anyone comes and asks you and says, ‘Is there anyone here?’ Then you should say “no.”’ But Jael, Heber’s wife, took a tent peg, put a hammer in her hand, went secretly to him, and drove the peg into his temple, and it went through into the ground for he was sound asleep and exhausted, so he died.”

That’s one account. Here’s the other account.

“Most blessed of women is Jael, the wife of Heber the Canaanite. Most blessed is she of women in the tent. He asked for water. She gave him milk. In a magnificent bowl, she brought him curds. She stretched out her hand for the tent peg, and right hand took the workman’s hammer. Then she struck Sisera. She smashed his head. She shattered, and she pierced his temple between her feet. He bowed. He fell. He lay between her feet. He bowed. He fell. Where he bowed, there he fell, destroyed.”

They don’t quite sound the same, do they? They describe the same incident, but two very different ways of even thinking about what’s going on. So we say, “Well, what shall we call them?” And the people who argue about whether there’s poetry in the Bible want to say, “Well, the second one, we’ll call that high language.” Well, if you’re going to give it a term “high language,” you might as well call it a poem because it certainly sounds a lot more poetic or at least it has the same characteristic of poetry—this compression, this use of images, in Hebrew this repetition, which is very standard as we’ll see, very normal for biblical poetry. And yet we might ask, “Well, which one is the more accurate picture of what went on? Surely the narrative tells us the real story, and the poem just gives us an artistic interpretation of it. And you know, I think that sometimes that’s one of our hesitations about thinking of the Bible as having poetry in it because we hear the word poetic license or in Shakespeare who says and has his characters say several times, “All poets are liars.” And we have this sneaky suspicion that poets don’t really deal in quite an upright way. We want the facts like Dragnet. But when we look at them, if we were to read all of Judges four

and all of Judges five, and if we were to highlight the things that they have in common, they have hardly anything in common, that is, actual statements. Most of the things they have in common are proper names and places and things like the article “the” or “a” or “an” or something in the English translations. Very few of the incidents are described in the same way or even described in one and completely left out of the other.

So at the end of chapter five, the poem, we have this story about Sisera’s mother wondering where her son is and her servant girl saying, “Don’t worry. He’ll be back, and he’ll bring lots of booty and spoil with him, and then we’ll have the choice of whatever we want.” Well, that’s not in chapter four at all. Did that really happen or did Deborah and Barak just make it up? Well, first of all, we say we can trust the Bible, and so, our assumption is if they described this, then the Lord revealed it to him, or they captured a Canaanite, and he said, “Yeah that’s probably what’s happening back at the palace right now,” or something like that. However they got their information, we can’t know, but we say, “Okay, yes, this happened.” But the differences between the two stories are which is the more accurate account or which one tells what really happened. The answer is they both do. It’s just that they look at the same events in two very different ways. This is not a fair comparison, okay, so please don’t misinterpret what I’m going to say. But it’s the difference between somebody writing a history textbook about the reformation and a student studying the textbook and the same student going to watch the movie Martin Luther.

Now the movie communicates some of the same things. Now, of course, I realize that in a movie there are licenses, artistic licenses. See? That’s what makes us nervous about poetry too, the same thing right? Well you can’t really trust that, and you’re right. Everything in the movie, they even tell you some of the stuff is made up. It’s fictitious. The conversations are made up. We can’t know all that stuff. Well, what happens? The book, the textbook communicates in one way. Its goal is to get across “x, y, z” amount of information in as few words as possible so that the textbook publisher can make as much money per book as possible, right? Short, with all the information, so the student has what he or she needs to pass the test, to graduate, to get a job, etc. The movie is made so that you will sit through the whole

movie and not leave the theater and ask for your money back. You're going to want to watch it, and you're going to enjoy it, and you're going to walk away, maybe even thinking about what went on. The textbook doesn't really care about how you feel. The goal of the textbook is: "You need this information. I'm going to give to you." The movie says, "I'm going to entertain you." Judges 4 says, "Okay, here's an account of the battle." The focus is on Barak's role and his obedience or his hesitation to obey and Jael's role. Here's a poem about the same battle. The focus in the poem is on the way that the tribes of Israel did or did not join the war. So there's a long catalogue, which goes back and forth and says, "From Ephraim, they came down. Benjamin came down...Makir...Zebulun." But then it goes on and says, "Wait a second. Reuben didn't come. The tribes of Gilead stayed on the other side of the Jordan. Dan stayed where they were. Asher stayed where they were, but Zebulun and Naphtali risked their lives." Oh, there's no more count of that, all you read in chapter four is that Barak went up Mount Gilboa and Mount Tabor. And all these men came after them. That's all it says. In the same way, in chapter five, we find this, "That the stars themselves, fought from heaven." Now in chapter four, it does say that the Lord routed Sisera and his chariots and his army with the edge of the sword before Barak. And Sisera got out down from his chariot and fled away. But we don't know how he did it. But chapter five suggests that the brook, the Kishon (which is actually a fairly small stream), overflowed its banks, got the ground muddy, so that all these chariots, these five hundred iron chariots, bogged down and were no longer an advantage, but actually a disadvantage to the Canaanites that were counting on the chariots to overwhelm the foot soldiers of the Israelites. All of a sudden, their advantage is gone. So their strategy for the battle falls apart. And Sisera, being a smart commander, looks out and knows it's a disaster and runs for his life. But we don't get that from the prose account. So the poet, the singers, and the chanters, from around Barak give us a view of their experience of these events, that's very different from the view of the author of the rest of the book of Judges. The two accounts complement each other. They work together and work on us in different ways.

That points up another aspect of poetry, and that is that a poem...This theory goes back maybe six hundred years to Sir Philip Sidney's defense poetry. He said that

poets actually create a golden world. He said, “You know, if you’re a mathematician, an astronomer or a chemist, you don’t have any choice. You have to work with what you’ve got. You can’t make up any stars, chemicals or elements or any other things. You have to work with what’s there. But a poet, he gets to create a golden world.” And the poem, then, invites the reader to enter this world that the poet has created.

Now the poet knows that this is not the whole universe. It’s a separate world, so that poems communicate truth. But they communicate truth in a different way than expository prose or logical sets of propositions, so that no one poem ever tries to tell the whole truth. You know, we read of Psalm, and we’ll look at this in a few minutes in quite a bit more detail, but if we read of a Psalm like Psalm 121, “I lift up my eyes to the mountains, where does my help come from?” It would be easy to come away from that Psalm thinking to ourselves, “This promises that nothing bad ever happens to anyone who belongs to the Lord.” Because that’s what he says: “He who keeps you, won’t let your foot slip... He won’t slumber... He’s your shade on your right hand... He will protect you from all evil... He will keep your soul, guard your going out and coming in now and forever more.” That sounds like nothing bad can possibly happen to anyone who belongs to the Lord. But the poet has no intention of describing the whole of theology. He’s only working in eight verses or fifteen lines. So he’s not trying to encompass everything, instead he says, “Let’s think about the relationship between the Lord and His people this way.” Yes, all those other things exist. You’re right, all those other things exist, and there’s lots of Psalms that talk about the trouble that happens. I mean there’s no reason to ask for the Lord to rescue you from disaster if you’re not in the middle of disaster. Or the poet saying, “The water is coming up to my neck. The water shall surely sweep me away.” “It swept me away,” etc. Well, he’s not concerned about those things. What he wants to do is to think about: What does it mean to think of God as a watchman? What does it mean when we consider God’s role in guarding over and keeping us? What does that look like? And so that’s what he meditates on.

So we have to read pretty carefully. We have to then read looking for all the ways that the poet has compressed his poem or compressed his message and how he has packed that poem with meaning. But at the same time, we have to be careful to not

assume that the poem tries to tell us everything about anything. Instead, it's playing with, as I said in the first lecture, some aspect of reality: the Lord, our relationship to Him, the world, our relationship to others, something like that. So when we think about poetry in English. I'm using English for a moment because I've just found in teaching that if you start talking about poetry with biblical poems, that everyone wants to argue about theology. They don't want to talk about the poetry. So I'd rather talk about the poem first, and then we can talk about what it actually means. The thing about English: we recognize a poem because it has rhythm, rhyme, by its layout on the page, by its being broken up into stanzas. There may be sentences, but the sentences don't stop at the end of a line. They might keep on going. So all sorts of things.

In biblical poetry, there really isn't any rhythm. People argue about that all of the time, but there really isn't rhythm in the way that we think of it in English. There is no rhyme. Once or twice, there are places where you get words that end with the same sound, but that's very unusual to see any pattern to that. There really aren't stanzas. That is, when you buy a book of poetry, there are blank lines. There might be eight lines and then a blank line, eight lines and then a blank line. You'll see those in your English Bible, but that's the editor's decision. It's not done that way in the manuscripts that we have. It's just the translator and the editor or in some cases, the editors of the Hebrew Bible and the translators are just following that.

We find that in biblical poetry, sentences tend not to go from one line to the next and continue down the page. Each line tends to be its own clause or its own sentence. There are a few exceptions, but as rule, that's true. So those are pretty big differences between English and biblical poetry. But at the same time, the basic similarities are what makes them both poetic: the compression, and the idea that the words used are very deliberately chosen. We can almost talk about manipulated language. I don't like that word. It makes people nervous to think about the Bible being used like that, but the words have been chosen, and the language is being used in ways that are pretty striking. You know, it's interesting.

When you study Hebrew, you can think in terms of a reading Biblical stories, and by the end of your first semester, even the middle of the first semester, you should begin to work your way through the story of Joseph or Abraham or something, but

then you say to yourself, “Boy, this is so much fun. I think I’m going to read a Psalm.” Then you turn to the book of Psalms, and it’s like a different language. All of a sudden, things that should be there aren’t there, and the things that are there don’t quite look or sound like they’re supposed to.

Well, did you know that if you open up the Encyclopedia Britannica to the article on poetry, it says, “Poetry is the other use of language.” And some critics even talk about poetic language as a language of its own within the language of its culture. So there’s the English language. Then there’s the language of English poetry. And by that, they don’t just mean the choice of words like using, “Ere I saw you,” or words that sound archaic or old or “oft in the eve.” They don’t mean that. They mean the whole way of using the language, of organizing thoughts or organizing sentences or putting pictures together is different then what we find in books of history or philosophy or organic chemistry.

So the poetry really is a very different language because it’s language that’s self-consciously manipulated, that is self-conscious on the part of the poet, and we also find other things in both that are common to both so that what’s called, paronomasia. We think of them as puns, but using words that sound alike, or using sounds that reflect each other. English poetry does that a lot, that what rhyme is, right, “Sorrow and tomorrow”, “youth and truth”. Hebrew poetry does that as well. Of course, we lose that in translation. That’s just the cost of translation. There’s a lot of repetition in both. That’s fairly common, and both of them are organized line by line so even in the English poetry where a sentence goes across the lines, the question is, “Why does this sentence go across the line?” or, “Why does it stop and start?” or, “Why does it stop and start where it does?” Both of them rely very heavily upon imagery.

In fact, there is a marvelous little book by a women named Molly Peacock called, *How to Read a Poem and Start a Poetry Reading Circle* I’m not sure of the subtitle, in which she says that a very helpful key when we are struggling with a poem and trying to figure out what it’s saying. She actually says this. She says three different things at different points in her book. One time she says is to just go through the poem and list all the nouns, write out a list of all the nouns, in order through the

poem. Do that for a psalm sometime. You'd be quite surprised I think. Another thing is to list all the verbs in the poem because the verbs tell us what's happening. So the nouns tell us what it's about. The verbs tell us what's happening. List all the verbs, and again sometimes, some poems the nouns will help. Some poems the verbs will help. Then the third thing, she says to go through a poem and list all the images that are in the poem, and the important thing is to list them in order because that's the way the poet arranged them. So we think our way through the poem in terms of his or her nouns, his or her verbs, his or her images, because that's how the connection goes. That's how the logic of the poem actually works. Because that's what we mean when we talk about self-conscious language. And, in fact, the poetry in the Bible is just as self-conscious.

Now some of you, I can almost hear this, coming right through the camera are saying, "Ah, wait a second, this is going to get technical. You're going to start using words like "synecdoche," and "metaphor," "simile," and "anaphor," and things like that. Aren't you?" Well yes, some of them, but what does it mean to use technical language? If you're watching the Super Bowl, and the commentator says, "Ah they're using, a quarterback draw", that's technical language isn't it? Or if you're watching the Olympics and their talking about, and here I don't know what I'm talking about, "A double-axle." I mean, I know that means they jumped up in the air and went around twice versus "a double something else," that's technical language isn't it? And yet, we are not intimidated when it comes to sports or even music, perhaps depending on what your interest is, so we can say that the "adagio was a little too slow" or "the forte was a little too soft" or "the fortissimo was quite loud enough, thank you very much." And, we're using language that helps us understand what we're talking about; it gives us a common language. This is where jargon in insider talk comes from anyway. We have a need to communicate things without using all the words we need to explain them to someone else. We have to figure out some way to say this in short compass. So rather than say that the poem "Water Heavy" has four lines, each of which begin the same way, we can just say, "Oh, the whole poem is anaphoric." Save words. Save space, and we know exactly what we're talking about because we're using, when I say, "Each line begins the same way." You might say, "Well, does that

mean that it begins with a capital letter? Does that mean that it begins with the same word?” Well, anaphora tells us what we’re talking about is identical expression. So, sure we use some technical language, but that’s the way of studying anything, and, in fact, technical language gives us a way of thinking about even biblical poems in a way that maybe we have never thought of them before. So that we realize in a Psalm, like Psalm 113, which again is anaphoric, “Praise ye Lord, praise ye servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord.” Starts with the same, again, and the question we ought to ask ourselves, “Oh, there’s an anaphor. Why would a poet do that? What’s the purpose of that? What’s its function in relationship in the meaning of the poem? How’s it actually working?”

Now, part of this you probably noticed already is that I’m very interested in helping us, helping myself, helping you learn to read poems carefully, thinking of ways to force ourselves to pay attention to what it says by thinking about why it says it that way, how it says it, and why it uses that particular method. T.S. Elliot’s very famous essay on reading poetry said that we run into, or we kind of walk a tight rope. On the one hand, there are people who read a poem once, and they say, they come away with an impression of it, and they say “Oh yah, ok, that poem is about x, y, z.” So somebody reads Psalms 123 and says, “Oh that’s comforting,” and they walk away. The other kind of approach is to analyze everything that can be analyzed. How many words are in each line? How many syllables are in each line? How many lines are there? Why is that listing all the nouns, all the verbs, all the images, and analyzing everything and assigning a technical label to everything. Now, Elliot points out a problem in both those. First, the casual impression is often wrong. I can tell you, I just heard many sermons, where I could tell the person was preaching based on a casual impression. They hadn’t really studied the text, but they were looking for a sermon or a message so they read something, and it made them think of something else, and so they just kind of used that passage, that psalm like a diving board and went springing off into what they really wanted to talk about. Often times it had nothing to do with the psalm itself.

So we can misread because we don’t take the text seriously enough. On the other hand, we can subject the text to our analysis, to such an extent that we forget

that we're reading somebody else's text. We analyze it in such a way that it becomes merely a specimen to be pinned to the board and displayed.

I was on an ordination committee for quite a number of years, for my denomination, and we got papers from students. And I can remember papers on Psalms by students who were obviously very capable, based on their grades, and even on the things they said in the paper, who described everything in the Psalm. Every poetic aspect of the Psalm that you could possibly want to comment on was noted, annotated, usually in Hebrew and English, sometimes even in Greek if they were really ambitious. But they kind of forgot to tell you why any of that mattered and, even sometimes, what the poem was about, so that the analysis became the end. Contillon in early Roman Order said, "The danger is becoming stuck in the analysis." T.S. Elliot says that's one problem. On the other hand, if we're reading Scripture, we want to be sure that we're actually reading what the Bible says. You see, one of the challenges that you and I face, if we've been going to a church, or even Bible study, or college or seminary and studying theology or religion or the Bible is that we've heard lots of people tell us what Psalm 119 means, or what Job 6 is really about, or any other passage. So, when we come to the text, we almost can't read Psalm one anymore. It's sort of like putting on, or taking off our real glasses, and putting on a pair of sunglasses, and then putting on another pair of mirrored sunglasses, and then maybe some of those funny glasses with the big eyeballs that fall out, and trying to read through that. That's a little exaggerated. But we do let everything get in our way, and so we're reading, and we're hearing the voice of the preacher. We're hearing the voice of the commentary. We're hearing the voice even of the bull session in the dorm.

So one of motivations, the reasons, for trying to be very careful in, and read and pay attention to everything in the poem, is that I really want to read Psalm 113. I don't want to walk away with just an impression of it, and I don't simply want to read it through what everybody else has said. They may all be right. That's fine, but poetry is meant to be read, to be thought about, to be played with in our own minds, just as the poet plays with ideas in writing a poem.

You know, in our approach to Scripture, I think, very often, we run into the

idea that the purpose of the Bible is to communicate information. And that's certainly true. We get lots of information through the Bible we wouldn't know any other way. Who was Hezekiah's father, for example? No other way of knowing that. Who was his son? Who was his descendant? Well, it's good that we have the Bible so that we know things like that. But we do have to ask a question. Why would God, working within very limited scope... I mean the Bible. Well, I have copies of Shakespeare here in my library that have more than twice that number of pages, with much smaller print. If I were to pull down all the writings of Winston Churchill, there are many times, that many pages. The Bible really is, in scope of world literature, a fairly small book. So we ought to ask ourselves, perhaps, why would God choose to use poetry for 1/3 of this book, if his purpose is to communicate? Let me suggest then, that the reason is, that poetry communicates some things better than any other way. And if that's true, that is, if the use of poetry is deliberate, divinely inspired, which since it's in Scripture I think we would have to say, then God used poetry to communicate with us. Again, not just in the book of Psalms, all through the Bible, all the way through the book of Revelation, in fact, because poetry says best, what he wanted to say.

Perhaps here's the important thrust of that: if poetry is another way of using language, and if poems are another way of thinking about reality, than we need to use, learn, how to use, that language as well. We need to learn to use the conceptual language, and the words, and the images, and the way of putting things together, that we find in biblical Psalms. So that when we pick up the book of Psalms, we say, "I'm not just getting a statement about God. OK, the Lord is King, OK, I got the point." If that's all he wanted to say, that's all there would be! But he doesn't stop with that one sentence. Instead he goes on for twelve, or fifteen, or thirty verses, because he wants us to think about what that statement means. When we talk about the technical aspects of poetry, such as, anaphora. Psalm thirteen... "How long, O Lord, will you be far from me? How long will you hide your face? How long will I have the... How long?" Well, part of understanding any poem, is appreciating the artistry with which it is created.

The person who best appreciates a Mozart Sonata, is the person who has actually tried to play piano or violin or whatever else it might be. The person who best

appreciates that quarterback draw in the Super Bowl is the person who may be, has at least played a little touch football on Thanksgiving with his family. The person who best appreciates any poem is the person who understands the language of poetry.

With this I'll close. In the Encyclopedia Britannica, they cite this fact, which is so well-known they don't even footnote it. If you try this experiment yourself, go to the streets of whatever town or city you live near, with two pieces of paper—one of which has a short poem, one of which has a short paragraph. Stop ten people, and ask five of them, say, "Would you please read this. Would you please read this poem out loud?" And after they've done that, ask them to read the paragraph. The other five people, ask them to read the paragraph first, then the poem. And that's all you say, "Would you please read this poem. Would you please read this paragraph out loud?" Don't say anything beyond that. Then you tell them you are doing an experiment. This is what you will find in many more than 99/100 cases. The person, when they know they are reading a poem, their voice will change. Their posture will change. The way they pronounce the words will change. The thoughtfulness with which they read the text will change. Now, ask yourself, when was the last time, in a worship service, I heard a Psalm, read with the same care as I heard Dr. Putnam, read "What are heavy?" When was the last time I read a Psalm, or any biblical poem for that matter, with the same thoughtfulness that I might read "Stopping by Woods on A Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost?

I'm not trying to make you feel guilty, that's not the goal, it's instead, that if these things really are poems, we need to teach ourselves again to think the language of poetry, that we might appreciate them, because appreciation for a poem is part of understanding it.

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