

Joy Comes With The Morning

by Stephen Zeisler

There is an occupational hazard that comes with being in the ministry, and that is that Bible study and prayer, declaring the truth of God's kingdom to those who don't know him, sharing the deep things of Christ together with those you love can, if you are not careful, become tools that you use to make your living with rather than experiences of abundant life itself. The Lord has made me aware of the problem of treating him and his work in my own life as something ordinary, much like any other occupation, without seeing clearly what's involved. He has made me aware of that by granting me these past two weeks, a period that has been filled with joy, delight, and closeness to him that hasn't been true of my life for a long time. During those weeks I found myself reading the Scriptures for hours on end just because I wanted to know what they said, not because I had to tell somebody about it. I found myself delighting in the Word of God, longing to pray, and wishing I had more time to do so instead of hurrying through it.

I hope to encourage you with our study of Psalm 30 this morning to be able to take away some of the cobwebs, some of the demands and the issues that insinuate themselves between us and the Lord that keep us from that present, exciting experience of God in our lives. I long to live the kind of life of the men and women we read about in Hebrews 11. It says of Abraham, for instance, that he never sank his roots anywhere in the promised land. He never owned or gave his heart to anything this world had to offer even though God had promised him land. It never captured his heart because he was looking forward to an eternal city. He wouldn't settle for anything less, and I hope we will learn something about that this morning. If you love to read the Psalms, if you make it a practice of reading them over and over again, maybe every time you come to Psalm 30 from now on you'll remember some of these things, and they will be an encouragement to you.

**I will extol Thee, O Lord, for Thou hast lifted me up,
And hast not let my enemies rejoice over me.
O Lord my God,
I cried to Thee for help, and Thou didst heal me.
O Lord, Thou hast brought up my soul from Sheol;
Thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.
Sing praise to the Lord, you His godly ones,
And give thanks to His holy name.
For His anger is but for a moment,
His favor is for a lifetime;
Weeping may last for the night,
But a shout of Joy comes in the morning.
Now as for me, I said in my prosperity,
"I will never be moved."
O Lord, by Thy favor Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong;
Thou didst hide Thy face, I was dismayed.
To Thee, O Lord, I called,
And to the Lord I made supplication:
"What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit?
Will the dust praise Thee? Will it declare Thy faithfulness?
"Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me;
O Lord, be Thou my helper."
Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing;
Thou hast loosed my sackcloth and girded me with
gladness;
That my soul may sing praise to Thee, and not be silent.
O Lord my God, I will give thanks to Thee forever.**

We read in the introduction to this psalm that it is "a Song at the Dedication of the House," but it doesn't place the psalm or identify it precisely in the history of David's life. It seems to me that it represents the events,

including the plague that killed 70,000, that followed when David numbered the nation of Israel. Through that event David purchased the piece of land, the threshing floor, of a man named Araunah that eventually became the site for the temple. That may be what is meant by "the Dedication of the House" here.

Notice that, as is a pattern in the psalms, the opening ideas are really the conclusion. The reason for this, I think, is that the psalmist (David in this case), wants to make sure we get the main point. He's going to go on to tell us how he got there himself, but he leads off by making the main idea clear to us. As we study we'll go on to see how he came to these conclusions.

If you look at the first five verses there are two things that stand out, and I'd like to call them to your attention. The first is that David was the kind of man who had the life and choice and will of God, the actions of God, the heart of God, present in his life always. Wherever he went, the things he did, the issues he got involved in, the people he met, the places he lodged in and the issues he encountered were understood by him to be things that God had done or was doing. The sovereign activity of God directed him, and he lived with an awareness of God's movement and choice in his life.

Many of us have experienced periods when we have God compartmentalized. We are aware of him on Sundays, perhaps, but not during the week. We see that he has the right to be involved in our families but not on our job; he doesn't seem to be there or have much to do with it. We allow that God is involved in the birth of our children and death of our loved ones, and at Easter and Christmas, but aside from those times he doesn't seem present in our daily experience. He may exist, but he's not an active ingredient in our daily affairs. But that wasn't true of David.

The children in our 6-- to 8-- year-old Sunday School class here at PBC put together this "Children's Love Letter" recently which reflects the point I'm trying to make:

Dear Jesus and God,

Thank you for the visit with you when I talked to you last night, and thank you for the nice letter. How did it feel, Jesus, when you were on the cross? Thank you for my teeth that I can chew with. Thank you for taking care of my grandmother, Jesus. Do you have a grandma and grandpa? Thank you for the Bible. It was a nice gift to give us. It helps us learn about you. Thank you for dying for us. Thank you for taking care of all the Christians in heaven, including Rusty Lilleboe. Thank you, Joseph, for being Jesus' father on earth.

Love,
Group 111

Those children found it easy to talk about the death of Jesus on the cross and the creation of the Scriptures (which are very religious and apparent places where you would expect to find Jesus and to think about him), but stuck right in between those is thanksgiving for "teeth that I can chew with." Now that's what I am talking about-- people who are aware of the life of God all around them, who, while they are chewing, take time to think, "God made these teeth and he made this world. He created the opportunity for me to live in my neighborhood and to know the neighbors I know. He gave me the difficulty that I encountered that produced a relationship or that taught me something. It's God at work all around."

Now the reason I say that this psalm has that in mind is because David takes two extremes and he sees God at work in both of those. It suggests, I think, that if David sees God's active hand in the extremes he's the kind of man who sees God everywhere. He says of his Lord that the restoration, the healing, his own bringing up from the sorrow and difficulty he went through was the work of God. It wasn't something David accomplished on his own. It wasn't his marvelous constitution that "gutted out" the difficulty; it wasn't the work of doctors; it wasn't his insurance man; it was the Lord who brought him up.

But he also speaks of the "anger" of God. When David describes the pain he went through he's aware that it was God who was behind that as well; that a righteous God who properly hates sin, who properly has no painless place for unrighteousness to exist in his universe was behind the anguish he suffered. If David can see

that the God who restored him, the God whose anger at sin, not at people, had brought about the calamity, then, I think, he's the kind of man who probably thanked God for his teeth and for everything that he encountered.

The second thing that stands out is a natural corollary to the first. We see it in these first five verses, this "opening conclusion," and that is the God of this universe, the One who has revealed himself in scripture, the one whom we know in Christ, is a good God. He is one whose commitment is to blessing, not to hurt, and the people who know him best are convinced that he is a good, loving, kind, generous and gentle God whose primary aim, whose sole aim, perhaps, in his relationship to his children is to make life good for us and to set us free. You see the great statement of that in verse 5. David says, "I know that he is angry at times, but his anger is for a moment only. His favor, his blessing on me lasts a lifetime. Weeping may last for the night, but it won't last longer. A shout of joy comes with the morning." And there will be a morning for whatever night any one of us is in now.

At a recent staff meeting the pastors and staff here in the church were talking about the impact that the TV movie, "Holocaust" had made on us. The discussion finally came around to the question, "What if it had been us instead of the Jews?" (There have been periods in history when Christians have been martyred for owning the name of Christ. There are people in the world today for whom that's true, but there's a time coming when it will be characteristic of the Christian faith to be martyred.) So we asked ourselves, "What would we have done? Would we have fought back? Would we have hated the Nazis? How would we have responded? How do you trust God in those kinds of circumstances?" It occurred to me that when that day comes it is not the people who know a great deal about Christ who will stand firm, but the people who know him, who have the kind of intimacy we were just talking about, who see God at work all the time in their lives who will stand firm. The people who know him best, love him best, trust him the best, these people are most convinced of the truth in verse 5. He's a good God, and when the crunch comes if we only know about him we may fall prey to the temptation that says he is vengeful and hateful and murderous and doesn't care for his children. The ones who know him best, however, will be certain of his goodness, and that was David's conclusion from what he went through.

Now let's see how he got there. He wasn't born knowing this. He had to learn about the Lord the same way we learn about him. Verses 6-7:

**Now as for me, I said in my prosperity,
"I will never be moved."**

O Lord, by Thy favor Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong;

You may begin to suspect the problem right away. Prosperity has a way of clouding the truth as almost nothing else does. It's impossible to serve two masters. Nothing in our experience lays greater claim to being master in Christ's place than wealth, prosperity and material possessions. Now this is often misunderstood. There is nothing wrong with prosperity. In and of itself it is not evil or good, either one, but it is very dangerous; it is very seductive. It is very apt to make us think, "Look at all that I have. When I am hassled I can always take a vacation in Hawaii. When things in my house break I can hire somebody to come fix them. When I am lonely I can buy companionship. Whatever my heart desires my prosperous foundation can supply me." Specifically, in this case, it's security that David highlights: "I said in my prosperity, 'I will never be moved.' 'I can't have the pins knocked out. I can't find myself without a way of defending and taking care of and protecting myself.'" Abraham was a very rich man, but he never owned anything; he never owned land; he never sank his roots any place. He was always a nomad; he never quite belonged anywhere because he was looking for an eternal city to dwell in and that's what separates Abraham from David, at least at this point in David's life. David had found a mountain to live on, we read in verse 7. It was a secure thing and he had given way to that kind of security.

There's another subtle wrinkle to this that we ought to notice, and that is the statement in the beginning of verse 7: "O Lord, by Thy Favor Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong." David is saying, "God gave me this prosperity so it's all right if I trust it. It's not ill-- gotten gain. I didn't lie or cheat or steal or oppress the innocent to get this. It was God who gave me this prosperity and therefore it's OK to trust it." But be clear on what David is saying. He is not saying, "The Lord is my rock. The Lord is my sure foundation." What he

is saying is, "The Lord has given me a mountain and that mountain is secure. " It sounds almost like faith to describe it that way: "Yes. I'm this way because God made me this way, therefore it's OK for me to trust it."

But there follows a very jagged, wrenching kind of line that's most uncharacteristic of Hebrew poetry. Look at the last line of verse 7: "Thou didst hide Thy face, I was dismayed." That statement doesn't fit, doesn't flow very well with the line before it. It's as if a knife had slashed the page. Something shattered the mountain that David was on; suddenly the whole thing collapsed; the secure place that he would never be moved from was gone almost instantly.

I remember something that happened to me when I was a brand new Christian that was not particularly difficult in and of itself but it was at the time because I knew so little about God. I'd been a Christian about six months when my father announced to our family that we were moving from Arizona to California. I had come to Christ at a weekend camp, and I'd gotten involved in E. Young Life Club in high school. I was in a Bible study with a group of brothers who loved each other and studied the Word to "ether. These were the most exciting things that had ever happened to me. I didn't even know if they existed anywhere else for sure, and all of a sudden my father said, "We're moving to California." It was as if the mountain I had under me shattered. The prosperity of brothers in Christ, the good Bible teaching, the fellowship, the opportunity for witnessing, the whole thing was gone almost overnight. I didn't even know if God knew where California was! I really didn't know if there were Christians anywhere else or if this was a new thing we had just discovered at our high school! I remember wondering what would happen to me because I had counted on the fellowship, on the support, on what had been built into my life. It was clearly God who had given me those things, but without realizing it I thought as David thought, "In my Prosperity I will never be moved."

How did David respond to his mountain being shattered? the first thing he did was pray. He saw what had happened to him; he realized that this firm security had suddenly blown away; he saw what he'd done, and then he began to pray, based on the lesson he'd learned. Now if I had been in that kind of a situation, very often my first response would have been bitterness or stoicism or something. I'd finally get around to praying, but not right away. I'd want to "gut" it out, or get back at whoever did it to me, or go out and recreate whatever it was that I had before. My prayer, too, would be very different from how we will see David prayed.

I generally ask God to give me the mountain back. "Lord, I made a mess of this marriage. It's all fallen apart. Give me back the kind of marriage I ought to have had to begin with. " Or, " Put me back in circumstances that will give me the support that I had before." Or, "Lord, I'm out of a job. Give me another job that will provide the kind of security and income and self-- worth that I had with the previous one." Or, "I'm lonely. Give me people just as I had before my mountain shattered who will minister to my loneliness." Or, even worse, we'll start praying, "Lord, give me what my friend John has. How come he's got it so good? Why can't I live like that? Why don't we have a new car?" The thing, we ask for are the very things that David had to begin with, th' prosperity built on what he had been given, rather than on the Lord, so we pray to have it back again.

A step higher than that is the kind of prayer that Job prayed. Job didn't say that God ought to give him back prosperity. He was a man of God enough to know that he didn't deserve it, that it had been a gift to begin with, but he did want to know why it had been taken away. That is another thing that many of us will often pray, "Lord, why am I going through this?" Maybe you won't give it back to me, but the least you can do is explain yourself and tell me precisely why all this is going on. If I like the explanation you know we'll be on good terms again! "

But that isn't how David prayed either. Look at what he says (verses 9-10):

**"What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit?
Will the dust praise Thee? Will it declare Thy faithfulness?
Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me;
O Lord, be Thou my helper."**

Do you see what David is asking for? It has nothing to do with the mountain that he had; it has nothing to do with his former prosperity, either that it would be restored or that he would have explained to him why it's no

longer part of his life. All that he really asks for is the strength and vitality to live a life that is praiseworthy to God. He's saying, "Lord, if I die my opportunity to sing your praises is gone." That's what he asks to have restored to him. He doesn't ask for any kind of foundation that's built of anything else except a relationship with a living God that will give him an opportunity to work to his praise, and to declare his faithfulness.

I want to say as an aside here that something that has been a very great difficulty to me in my prayer life is the notion that I don't know how to pray very well. I keep thinking that I have funny-- sounding, unimpressive prayers, and therefore I ought to wait until I learn how before I pray. If you're at the point in your life where you are saying, "Lord, give me back the mountain," if you are praying that God would somehow provide for you the lack that you feel in your life, that is perfectly proper. It's the kind of prayer that's recorded all the way through scripture. God wants us to pray, and he doesn't want us to wait until we have grown-up, mature prayers before we pray because the way you learn to have grown-- up and mature prayers is by praying. It's that sort of intimacy with God that allows him to change your heart so that you start asking for different things, until suddenly you realize that your prayers are about more eternal issues than they were before. It's when you engage in prayer that you learn to grow up in prayer. You don't have to wait around until you're mature and then start, and I don't want to leave that impression.

Now look what happened as a result of David's prayer. He tells us in verses 11 and 12 that his prayers were answered, and I think it's these things that repeat the conclusion that he gives us in verses 1 through 5:

**Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing;
Thou hast loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness;
That my soul may sing praise to Thee, and not be silent.
O Lord my God, I will give thanks to Thee forever.**

God answered David's prayer for restoration, for freedom, for life so that he could live to the praise of God. David says it very clearly, "He turned my mourning to dancing, loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness. That [in order that, so that] my soul may sing praise to Thee, and not be silent." He is saying, "The reason I have my life back again is because he answered my prayer, and I have something to live for now that's infinitely more valuable, more true and more fulfilling than the prosperity I founded my life on before."

You'll notice that as David discusses his life here there are two places where he makes statements of unending commitment. The first is in verse 6, "I said in my prosperity, I will never be moved." In other words, "The condition I live in now is one that will never end; it is at least lifelong, if not eternal, in its stability and its worthwhileness." But almost overnight it was taken from him. The second time that David makes a statement of unending commitment is at the end of the psalm, "O Lord my God, I will give thanks to Thee forever." David is giving thanks to his God and living to the praise and honor of God right now. That kind of commitment, that stable place, that life lasts forever. This is indeed a mountain. This is indeed a platform that won't be taken away.

In the 11th chapter of Hebrews we read of men and women like that, but like David they are not men and women without problems or weaknesses or stumblings; they have learned to base their lives, over the long haul, on something that lasts forever. The promises of God, the city with foundation, life lived near God's heart are more important than anything else the world has to offer me. It tastes better; it's more fulfilling. And it can bear up under the greatest pressure, held firm in the knowledge that, "Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning."

Lord, I thank you so much for the times in our life when you give us that tremendous emotional sense of your closeness. How good it is to know you and how exciting it is to pray to you and to learn your scripture. We know that that always won't be our feeling, that we have no promise of that, but, Lord, we ask that it will be our commitment, that it will be something we determine to live for no matter what else is offered us. Thank you for the opportunity to learn these things, and we ask that you would call them back to mind. In Jesus name. Amen.

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