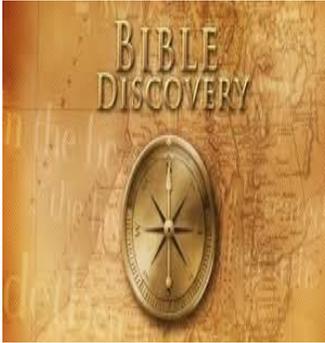


Psalm of Petitionary Praise



Could you accept if I were to say that all of us knows despair. Each of us has had moments when we felt deserted, alone and beyond what we could bear. The words spoken by the psalmist, David, repeated by Jesus and felt by so many of us, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” are the beginning of our scripture this morning.

I’m reminded of the man found on a park bench in total confusion and anguish, possibly suffering from signs of dementia. A police officer approaches him to see if he can assist. “What seems to be the problem?” The man responds initially with a stare but eventually explains that he feels like life is not worth living. The officer, thinking the man is destitute offers to take him to a shelter. The man then tells the officer, “I don’t need a shelter; I live in a beautiful mansion where I live with my lovely wife. She gave me a beautiful Mercedes equipped with GPS so I can find my way home for when I become disoriented. Our kids check in on us regularly. I have everything I need at home to look after myself.” The officer, somewhat skeptical of the man’s illusion to wealth asks him, “Well then, why are you in such despair?” The man hangs his head and sorrowfully replies, “Because I can’t remember where I parked the car!”

What I’m suggesting is the man had access to all the resources he needed to handle his problems; he just didn’t know how to get to them. In our scripture this morning we begin with David having a similar issue – his focus is on the problems and he feels totally abandoned. But then he looks up and sees God in his midst. Look at verse 3, “*Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel.*” Now the writer can see not only his own plight but the powerful rescue available to him through his Heavenly Father. His circumstances haven’t changed but his perspective certainly has. In subsequent verses, David expounds at length on those who are coming against him. Tradition holds that the psalm was written during the time when his son, Absalom had turned Israel against him and David was on the run.

I think that is why we’re all fascinated with prayer; petitionary prayer in particular. Each of us is seeking God and asking for help; each of us is feeling lost, overborne and encumbered by the many woes which come against us. Am I right? One does not have to look very hard to recognize the importance of prayer in the lives of the masses. Conduct a Google search on prayer and you’ll receive over 37 million hits. Prayers can be divided into two general groups: Petitionary Prayers such as in our scripture this morning that make a request of the Lord for health, wealth, happiness, victory; and Praise Prayers which express thanks, gratitude and recognition of greatness and power. In essence when we pray for the first, we are drawn to lift prayers in response through the latter. Subsequently we come to the place of petitionary praise.

There are many ways in which people employ prayer. We’ve heard of “foxhole” prayers where in the midst of dire circumstance we at last turn to God; we’ve all experienced searching prayers where we’re seeking to know God is with us; we’ve found peace by simply sharing with our Heavenly Father; and we’ve developed trust and faith as we’ve lifted prayers of praise and thanksgiving to God for his bountiful goodness.

*Prayers that bring God
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However, in speaking of petitionary praise this morning – prayers that bring to God the exposed, rugged, true self from our most inner being and recognizing His goodness, His care for us - I’m talking about how we live out being His children, being those who’ve been entrusted with a mission to the world. The issue here is: how do we deal with the world the way it is? How do we live in a world that is all too often much too real? How do we surrender the

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problems we encounter in this life and entrust God to handle our lives?

I certainly don't want us to give up talk of heaven and a better place, and a time when our troubles will all be over. I don't want to abandon the joy and celebration that our corporate worship draws us to. But for many, heaven is a long way in the future, freedom from worry, stress, decisions, conflict and problems a hope more than a reality. How do we live in the present, how do we live in a world that is often hard to comprehend, in a world and society in which we experience so much pain and hurt and disappointment? How do we bring all that to our Heavenly Father and yet give Him praise?

If we're going to be authentic in a real world, and not just hide behind nice sounding words, if we're going to live life honestly in relationship with God, then we may as well go ahead and honestly ask the questions we're thinking. Why? Why would God allow bad things to happen? Where **is** God at time of our deepest hurts? And how do we live with the burden of all that stuff in our lives?

That question of "Why?" is one that most of us have already asked at one time or another – though we'll deny, deny, deny – publicly (we've been told that that isn't being spiritual). There are times when we all have wondered where God was. Haven't we? For some, it may be moments such as the towers in New York taken out. Most of us remember that day. In Toronto, my sister, Barb, was among many waiting for answers, working in financial towers and wondering if their workplace was next. For others, it may be a personal hurt, large or small: the death of a loved one, a failing marriage, a lost job, a wayward child, a crippling illness, lost dreams, and failed ambitions.

All of us are susceptible to the hurts, anxieties, frustrations, worries, grief, that come by being human. We live in a real world. And a real world is sometimes a hurtful place. Unfortunately, we're deluged today with a multitude of distorted views of what is right and wrong, what is "normal", with the idea that all of us are okay, that all we need is more – more and newer something. And we're bombarded from all sides with a feel good religion that has little in common with the biblical views of being God's people in the world. Like the world view with which we're surrounded, we're told that if we just have *more* faith as Christians we can escape the lot of being human; if we follow a *new* way of worship we'll transcend the mess of life we often find ourselves in. If we would just believe enough, or read our Bible enough, or pray long enough, or 'praise' God in the right way, or send in enough seed-faith money, then God will take away all the hurts from our lives. We can live a life of health, wealth and prosperity and never have to worry about the cares of this earth and human existence.

The only thing with this entire great offer is - **it doesn't work!** So what do you do when you get stuck in the muck? What do you do when all the processes that **you** can do fail you? What happens when you get that nagging feeling that "doing this", here isn't working? Perhaps dream of escaping - constantly.

May I leave you with this tip of advice? When life has a little bit less zing to it; when happy things don't get us quite as happy, and sad things lead us to just "suck it up", it's time to remember it's not about you. Look to Jesus! Really! Look at His example - at Christ, whose spirit testifies in this psalm clearly and fully shows us the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that follows. This pattern may be applied to any child of God, pressed down, overwhelmed with grief and terror. While the intensity of the grief, and the completeness and glory of the deliverance and triumph, alike shown in this psalm are an unsuitable representation of the fortunes of anyone less than Jesus Himself, none-the-less we can lean on His understanding and follow His wonderful example.

Jesus poured out his soul before God when he was upon the cross. Jesus was at that time deprived (having taken our place) of the gracious presence of God, of the manifestations of his love to his human soul, and had a sense of divine wrath, not for his own sins, but for the sins of his people, and was for a while destitute of help and comfort; all which were necessary in order to make satisfaction

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“Often, people work long hard hours at jobs they hate to earn money to buy things they don’t need, to impress people they don’t like.”

~ Nigel Marsh

for sin. Being truly man, Christ felt a natural unwillingness to pass through such great sorrows, yet his zeal and love prevailed. Christ declared the holiness of God, his heavenly Father, in the midst his sharpest sufferings; declared them as proof for which we should continually praise our Heavenly Father, more than for all other deliverances we receive, for the gift of salvation given us on that cross, by His Son who died for us! That is the answer I can give you this morning with assurance. Don’t look for the quick fix, the latest craze or the newest antidote. Nigel Marsh is quoted as saying, “*Often, people work long hard hours at jobs they hate to earn money to buy things they don’t need, to impress people they don’t like.*” *The world’s response is to leave it all behind.* Yes, you can move to the other side of the world; you can choose new friends, you can quit your job, quit your family, quit your life – in the end the problems will still be there.

Rather, look to Jesus. Surrender all that you are and all that you have to Him. Never any that hoped in Him were made ashamed of their hope; never any that sought Him have ever sought Him in vain; never any who loved Him were found empty of His love. Let your petitionary praise come from your heart this morning daring to thank Him that He hears you, that He cares for you, that He loves you; asking Him that He “*not be far from me; for trouble is near and there is no one to help*” – no one save the Lord your God – ***and that is all you need!***

Today, if you are troubled, frustrated or fearful; if life is weighing you down, it is time to take the step that will change your life – ***look to Jesus!*** Jesus, God’s Son bore your sin upon the cross and is waiting to hear from you. Do not hesitate to contact us at office.mbbc@xplornet.com if we can be of assistance in any way.

Blessings!