

WHEN WE REACH THE END OF OURSELVES

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: Psalm 61.

1. Christianity is not a life of calm.

Some religions try to screen life out and find a place of inner calm. These religions hold up to people some ideal of being unruffled and not stressed by events. But this is an impossible goal and is not what the Bible holds up to us as what we should expect or seek for. Christianity is about real life. David cries out in verses 1 and 2. He is overcome and overwhelmed. It is all very raw and very real.

It makes us wonder what, when we come to pray, is admissible to bring into the presence of God. It is true we should not be overindulgent of ourselves. We can easily get worked up over nothing and bring unworthy thoughts and feelings before the Lord. Yet at other times, when we are feeling overwhelmed, it is a rational and proportionate response to what is happening around us. This is often the case when it involves other people over whose behaviour we have no control but whose actions affect us deeply. Being overwhelmed is also an appropriate response at times to an assessment of our own personal unfruitfulness, un-holiness and lack of love. Sometimes as well, we feel this way because of the injustices and the wrongs that other people are having to endure.

Other people, news we hear, what enemies of the faith are doing, can all overwhelm us at times. It is like we are then feeling overloaded and wonder how we, our families, our churches, our nation is going to cope and survive.

There have been many times when the Lord's people have had to face great obstacles such as the crossing of the Red Sea, the defeat of giants in the land they were going in to possess, or how the walls of a great city like Jericho were going to give way. There are times when we are to feel the seeming hopelessness of a situation and then cry out to God.

2. The Christian finds help in the Lord.

We are right to cry out to the Lord and to moan noisily before Him. He is not aloof from us and unwilling to show any concern for us. The fact that the Lord Jesus took our flesh shows that the Lord is one with us. Our Saviour wept in the Garden of Gethsemane and felt very much overwhelmed by what lay ahead of Him. He shares with us in our own times of personal difficulty and trial. We can ask the Lord to lead us to Him, that the Lord would lay hold of us and would get inside our minds by the power of His Spirit. We pray to be taken to a high point, to the rock that is above us. That is a good place to get to because there we will be able to see our circumstances from a better perspective. The Lord knows much more than we know and when we gain His perspective more, then we are able to get a bigger perspective. In His light, we see light.

He, as the Lord, the rock that is higher than we are, is above the fray and beyond the feelings that sweep through us. He can help us to discover more why we are feeling what we do and reflect on those thoughts that lie behind them. We are then in a position to learn and move into calmer reflection. Being a rock He is also stable whereas we are often caught off balance by events and respond with confusion and inner chaos. When we find His stability, then we are better able to respond in a more measured way.

He is also a shelter to us (v3). This is something that David had already discovered about the Lord but he now has a present expectation that the Lord will be this to him again. It is a place of safety while the storm rages about us. Hidden in Him, we can actually find safety from ourselves and our self-destructive thoughts which can boil over into self-hate and actual self-harm. In the shelter, you might still be aware that there is a storm raging outside, but we are secure and have the space and time to think. When we are Christians, the devil might try what he will to disturb us but we are safe in the Lord.

It speaks too of His wings (v4). This is like His motherly love towards us. We experience His real affection towards us and this is curative for us. We can hear our Lord's words to us in Scripture and receive understanding of the sympathy He has for us in our trials. It is a safe space where, again, we are able to learn lessons that come to us with His love and blessing.

Our Lord is also a high tower (v3). Such towers were well defended that again, if we take refuge there, we are safe. We know we cannot be lost to the Lord or find ourselves without any defence. We are confident in the Lord that He will uphold us. He is also a tabernacle (v4), the location where the people of God would be able to commune with the Lord. We can find His presence. Now the altar, sacrifice and blood which were part of the original tabernacle, have now been replaced and improved upon because our Lord Jesus Christ fulfills all these things. This is the place where we can give thanks to the Lord and rejoice in Him.

3. We begin to see the future.

As the reality of who the Lord is toward us begins to take possession more fully of our souls, then the future begins again to become clearer. David's prayers and vows have been heard (v5). He is right. He will be able to abide and trust (v4). At the present he is overwhelmed but he knows that he will come through.

He believes, for example, that his days will be prolonged (v6). He does not believe that he will collapse and die but believes that the Lord has a great purpose for his kingship. In this conviction and confidence, he is looking beyond his own reign to the eternal reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has received a promise from the Lord, and he is going to hold to that promise with even greater faith and tenacity.

David believes he will persevere (v7). God will work according to mercy and justice (v7) which we also see in Psalm 40:11. As the Lord's people we are set apart and the Lord knows the way that we will take, and He will preserve us in it. David also foresees being able to praise God (v8). He believes that the Lord will fulfill all His promises and that David will be able to rejoice one day in that fulfillment.