

April 25, 2021
Sunday Evening Service
Communion
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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PRAY WHEN YOU ARE DISCOURAGED

Psalm 55:1-8; 16-19

In Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* the main character, Christian, met and walked along the road to the Celestial City with a very encouraging friend named Faithful. As they talked along the way, they each recounted the experience they had in the Valley of Humiliation and the Valley of the Shadow of Death. For Christian, it was almost a disaster as he ran head-on into Apollyon (the devil) who nearly dealt him the death blow in the depths of the Valley of Humiliation.

Having barely recovered from that frightening experience, Christian had no choice but to walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. About that part of the journey Bunyan wrote, "The pathway was here also exceeding narrow, and therefore, good Christian was the more put to it; for when he sought in the dark to shun the ditch on the one hand, he was ready to tip over into the mire on the other; also when he sought to escape the mire, without great carefulness he would be ready to fall into the ditch. Thus he went on, and I heard him sigh bitterly; for, besides the dangers mentioned above, the pathway was here so dark, that oftentimes when he lift up his foot to set it forward, he knew not where, or upon what he should set it next."

The hard-to-explain irony is that when Christian and Faithful compared stories, they discovered they each had totally different experiences. Faithful said that he had walked through the Valley of Humiliation having met no one, especially not Apollyon. Of his experience, when Christian asked if it could really be so that he met no trials, Faithful replied, "No, not I; for I had sunshine all the rest of the way through that, and also through the Valley of the Shadow of Death."

As is often the case with Bunyan's allegory, the truth of the Christian journey is well displayed. And on that journey we all do not have the same kinds of experiences, the same kinds of blessings, nor the same kinds of trials, tests, or discouragements. Some of that difference is due to differing personalities, some to differing settings, others to differing levels of spiritual growth, and certainly God-ordained differences as He works according to His will in each believer's heart.

But for those who walk along with Christian in life's valleys of testing, there is great comfort and encouragement. It appears to me that David owned and endured one of those personalities that was given to emotional highs and lows. Often his songs (psalms) display the heart of the man who danced with all his might before the Lord. At other times, it appears that David is flat on his back looking up at Apollyon with sword in hand about to dispatch him. Psalm 55 is of the latter scene. This psalm is the expression of David's fear and pain when an intimate friend betrayed or abandoned him. It is the emotional setting in which we find Jesus betrayed by Judas, and denied by Peter.

How should we respond in the painful circumstances of life? Here we find much encouragement to cry out to God in prayer when it seems like the enemy of discouragement is about to overwhelm us. Here we are also assured that the Lord loves His people and will hear and act in our behalf.

Anguished Prayer (vv.1-8).

David, child of God, man chosen according to the desire of God's heart offered a sincere prayer because of sin (vv.1-3). In his prayer, he taught us how we can talk to God about our restlessness. It was a plea for God to attend and answer. *Give ear to my prayer, O God, and hide not yourself from my plea for mercy! Attend to me, and answer me (vv.1-2a).*

The Hebrew word our text used for prayer refers to a very common expression of a plea, a request, a petition. It is the kind of expression that makes up the bulk of our prayers. Most of our praying is requests for God's assistance in one way or another. We should not be embarrassed to acknowledge that we need to plead with God for

wisdom, direction, help. But then, how much help do we need? Often our circumstances give us the answer to that question.

When we are sailing along through life with few hardships or problems, we pray little and lightly. But when the sea of life is raging and the winds of adversity are blowing our little ship toward what appears to be the rocky shore, we cry out to the Master to rebuke the wind and the waves. In the difficult times, we cry out for God's mercy, His kindness and favor, begging Him to reveal Himself to us in full measure.

Begging and crying out to God flow from the inner condition of the one praying. In this psalm David confessed, *I am restless in my complaint and I moan (v.2b)*. To be restless is to feel like you are wandering aimlessly. That is like the picture of a boat that has been cut loose from its moorings. And so, being restless, uncertain, adrift in adverse circumstances, we complain and moan to God. Complaining here is not so much griping to God as it is musing, contemplating, thinking deeply about the situation.

In that contemplative kind of setting we moan, which is more like complaining. We murmur in our souls because we are vexed. The foundation of our hearts is shaken and disturbed by unfavorable circumstances. At this point, we sometimes feel like the rat in the maze. We really believe there must be a way out of the situation. But no matter which way we turn, we run into a dead end. No matter how much time we contemplate the problem, it doesn't go away, circumstances don't change. And so we murmur, not really against God, but to God against life as He presents it to us.

We often have good reason to be restless and to murmur. Sometimes it is because the enemy makes noise. David was moaning *because of the noise of the enemy (v.3)*. In his case, the enemy was a trusted friend who had turned against him. If we read the central part of this psalm (which is not part of the sermon), we discover the details about David's agony. We discover what he was praying about.

David prayed: *Destroy, O Lord, divide their tongues; for I see violence and strife in the city. Day and night they go around it on its walls, and iniquity and trouble are within it; ruin is in its midst; oppression and fraud do not depart from its marketplace. For it is not an enemy who taunts me – then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me – then I could hide from him. But it is*

you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. We used to take sweet counsel together; within God's house we walked in the throng. Let death steal over them; let them go down to Sheol alive; for evil is in their dwelling place and in their heart (Psalm 55:9-15).

In our lives, potential enemies are innumerable. Often the problem is a matter of relationships with others. People are fickle, unfaithful, dishonest, unkind. When they choose to be enemies, they often become slanderous and malicious. At the very least people disappoint. But the ultimate "enemy" is sin and Satan. The principle of sin can make almost any aspect of life contrary or aggressive against us.

And the various kinds of enemies make noise in our lives. Our unfavorable circumstances make a lot of distracting noise. Often the noise is hard to identify and causes fear and uncertainty. It can seem like a loud noise, an explosion, which almost never means good things are happening. This Hebrew word refers to shouting which typically causes us fear. Or most often in life it is just an irritating noise that won't stop, like a dripping faucet. The enemy makes just enough noise to rob us of the peace in our heart that God prefers we have as we fellowship with Him.

Furthermore, we moan and complain to God because the enemy is oppressive. David was crying out *because of the oppression of the wicked (v.3b)*. We are also restless and moan to God because people who are guilty before God (*wicked*) cause distress (*oppression*). At this point David clearly identified the trial as people, not just unfavorable circumstances. The oppression according to the Hebrew is persecution. For us any number of circumstances can cause distress.

But the enemy can get very personal, something more than inanimate situations. *For they drop trouble upon me, and in anger they bear a grudge against me (v.3c)*. We feel discouraged when the wicked person drops trouble, dumps misery out on the child of God. It is not accidental but intentional and planned.

The wicked person dumps misery on us because the wicked person is angry, bearing a grudge. As it was for David, it is for God's people in any age. Something in the past relationship caused a deep, abiding anger. Instead of dealing with it, the person let it fester until now it owns them. The bearer of the grudge cannot let it go, they are

controlled by it. The result of hanging on to the grudge causes the person to become guilty before God by dumping misery on God's child.

Solomon warned us about this common problem. He concluded, *A worthless man digs up evil, While his words are as a scorching fire (Proverbs 16:27 NAS). A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends (Proverbs 16:28). A worthless person, a wicked man, goes about with crooked speech, winks with his eyes, signals with his feet, points with his finger, with perverted heart devises evil, continually sowing discord (Proverbs 6:12-14).* That is the kind of person David was dealing with. And how did it make him feel?

We know how David felt because he gave us a descriptive confession (vv.4-8). His enemies caused him to experience deep fear within. Like all of us who suffer trials, David felt a heart in anguish. He confessed, *My heart is in anguish within me (v.4a).* That word "heart" reminds us that the center of David's thinking, emotions, decision making, and imagination was distraught. His whole being which only God can see was writhing in turmoil.

His heart was writhing to the point of having terrors of death. He confessed, *The terrors of death have fallen upon me (v.4b).* Practically this means that he feared the stress was going to kill him. His feelings, circumstances, and personal attack that was beyond his control overwhelmed him. Picture the disciples in the little boat being tossed by the waves on the Sea of Galilee. The storm was beyond their control. It really appeared to them like they would never arrive safely at shore. Matthew described it: *Suddenly, a severe storm came across the sea. The waves were covering the boat. Yet, Jesus was sleeping. So they woke him up, saying, "Lord! Save us! We're going to die!" (Matthew 8:24-25).* Have the troubles or circumstances of life ever made you feel like that? Have you ever known horrors so that *fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me (v.5)?*

How do we respond when the trials get out of control and it feels like we are incapacitated? Maybe we, like David, have the desires to escape. He expressed the desire to fly away. *And I say, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest" (v.6).* We may well come to the point where we just feel like we need

to escape the trial. David thought about flying away like a dove. Many of God's people think of other ways of escape, some of which are not wise or honoring to God. But the goal is simply the desire for rest. Surely God desires for His people to have rest and peace!

We might have the desire to fly away sometimes, or we might desire to walk away. *Yes, I would wander far away; I would lodge in the wilderness (v.7).* Or there might be simply a desire to find shelter. *I would hurry to find a shelter from the raging wind and tempest (v.8).* In short, David would gladly flee from the whole situation (6-8) but chooses to counter ceaseless opposition (10) by ceaseless prayer (17) and so rests in trust (23). (Alex Motyer) We sympathize with the desire to flee the trouble. Do we identify with the choice to counter opposition with prayer?

Assured Rest (vv.16-19).

The man who moaned to God because of opposition also had firm assurance that the LORD will save His people (vv.16-17). We need to have the assurance that when we call, God hears and answers. *But I call to God, and the LORD will save me (v.16).* Someone has said, "At the end of my tether there is a place called prayer." When will you decide to call to God? All of the meanings and uses of the word "call" emphasize a loud voice, a seriousness that reflects the serious nature of the trial. The verb call is in the imperfect tense which indicates that we have done this in the past and know that it is effective.

We cry to Yahweh the everlasting, eternal, self-existing God because we are sure He delivers His people. The Hebrew word for "deliver" is *yawsha*, which is the root for the name Joshua which means "the Lord saves." In the New Testament the same name is Jesus. And so the angel's message to Joseph regarding Mary: *"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).* Because God has demonstrated the immensity of His love for us through giving us Jesus to die for us, we can be pretty sure that He is concerned about our trials.

We pray in the midst of difficulty because we have the assurance God will hear. *Evening and morning and at noon I utter my*

complaint and moan, and he hears my voice (v.17). Again we find the words complaint and moan. When we are in the fire of the trial, it is good for us to talk to God all through the day. In fact, Paul taught us that this should be the normal standard for our communication with God whether we are stressed or peaceful. We find the command to pray all the time in a context of rapid-fire expectations for the Christian life. *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (1Thessalonians 5:16-18).* And here in our text for the fourth time in this psalm David expressed certainty that God will hear, pay attention, give ear to his plea.

Furthermore, we cry out to God with confidence because we know that the LORD redeems His people (vv.18-19). We have the assurance that God hears and we have the assurance of redemption. *He redeems my soul in safety from the battle that I wage, for many are arrayed against me (v.18).* It is a wonderful, eternal promise that our loving Heavenly Father redeems the soul. To redeem can mean to rescue or to deliver from trouble. We certainly rejoice in that assurance. Surely that is the way David used the word.

But we also know that to redeem is to buy out. That is the ultimate expression of redemption. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit provided redemption, the buying out, from all trouble, trials, distresses of sin. The price for our redemption from all trouble is the blood of God the Son. He has already paid it. Redemption is complete.

Our God loves to put us in safety from the battle. So many times we have experienced God delivering us from our trials as surely as He delivered Job after a period of great suffering. Sometimes God's deliverance is even a bit remarkable. How often has God literally changed our circumstances? For David there were many times that God frustrated the enemy or even killed the enemy. While our situations are not that dramatic, the same God exercises the same redemptive power in our behalf.

And when we acknowledge the strength and number of the enemy, we appreciate the assurance of redemption. In our spiritual warfare, we generally are clueless about our enemies' strength. Whatever the number, they are arrayed against us for bad not for good.

God is the Great Deliverer, but He is also the Great Judge who will always do justly. While there is assurance that God will deliver His people, there is just as much assurance that the same God will judge the wicked. *God will give ear and humble them, he who is enthroned from of old, Selah because they do not change and do not fear God (v.19).*

God listens to the pleas and moaning of His people who cry out to Him for deliverance. God also listens to the noise, the shouts, the slander of the enemy. And through it all, God will humble the enemy of His people because they are also His enemy. There will never be an enemy of God's people who is not also an enemy arrayed against God. God promises to humble them. Earlier we considered Solomon's statement about the worthless slanderers who sow discord with their words. Consider God's response to them according to verse fifteen. *Therefore calamity will come upon him suddenly; in a moment he will be broken beyond healing (Proverbs 6:15).* That is humbling. God also promised the same response through Moses. *Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly. For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants, when he sees that their power is gone and there is none remaining, bond or free (Deuteronomy 32:35-36).*

So let the nations rage. Let the powers that be attack God by attacking God's people. Let the angry grudge-holder slander and try to hurt the child of God. In response to these things, we have these two assurances: 1) We are privileged to cry out to God knowing for certain that He will hear us. 2) We are privileged to let the God of heaven the Eternal Judge take care of "those people." So let's rest in these assurances about God.