

FINISH ON A MOUNTAIN-TOP!

Psalm 41: 1-13 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

You may be confused by the title of this psalm, Psalm 41. In my ESV Bible, the title is “The Psalmist In Sickness Complains Of Enemies And False Friends. But be aware, in some of your Bibles, after Psalm 41: 13, the next word is “Book Two.” It is generally considered that the Psalms are divisible into five books, answering to the five books of Moses. Book One, Psalms 1-41 is the Genesis Book concerning man and his relationship with God. All blessing is bound up in obedience. Book One closes with a benediction and double Amen and Amen. That’s why I call it, finishing on a mountain-top. Book Two is the Exodus Book—Psalm 42--72 concerning Israel as a nation. The counsels of God concerning Israel’s ruin, Redeemer, and redemption. It closes with a benediction and double Amen and Amen. Book Three which is Psalm 73-89 is The Leviticus Book concerning God’s sanctuary. It closes with a benediction and double Amen and Amen. Book Four, which is Psalm 90—106 is the Numbers Book, which is concerning Israel in relation to the nations. It closes with a benediction, Amen, and Hallelujah. Book Five which is Psalm 107-150 is the Deuteronomy Book concerning God and His Word. It closes with five psalms, each beginning and ending with “Hallelujah”. So, it is significant that even though the psalms of David plumb the depths of despair and include calling down judgment in the imprecatory psalms, even so, each of the five books, finishes on a mountain-top.

With that introduction, let me begin by affirming our church for finishing on a mountain-top in hosting our Third IWD Annual Conference. What a job you all did. I congratulate each of you for your part in making the Intermountain West District a significant mission’s emphasis of our church. Did you know that the mark of a great church is not its seating capacity, but its sending capacity. The church must send or the church will end. Evangelism and missions is crucial to the future of any Bible-believing church. As we are located here in these high plains, on the south-western edge of the largest shifting sand dunes in North America, the Great Red Desert Basin, I have one more thought for us that relates to missions. The greatest crime in the desert, do you know it? The greatest crime in the desert is to find water and keep silent. Like the four lepers who discovered that the Arameans who had been besieging the gates of the city of Samaria, discovering they had fled, found all their supplies and food left behind. As they were stuffing their pants and shirts and bags with food, these four lepers remembered that inside the walls of the city the people were dying from a severe famine. II Kings 7: 9 records the words of the lepers to each other. “We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, but we are keeping silent: if we wait until morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come, let us go and tell the king’s

household.” Beloved, we are a sending church, a church that is full of redeemed lepers who are carrying the good news to others. If we stay faithful, beloved, the future of our church is that we will finish on a mountain-top.

This final psalm in the Genesis Book of Psalms will take us down, down, down, into Death Valley, but if you stay with me as we preach, we will finish on a mountain-top. John G. Paton, born in 1824 and who died in 1907, once addressed folk asking him why he would ever risk going to the cannibals in Vanuatu. Have you ever heard of the New Hebrides Islands. This area was discovered in 1606 by a Spanish expedition led by Pedro Fernandes de Queiros. The islands were colonized by both the British and the French. In 1774, Captain Cook named this island group in the South Pacific, the New Hebrides Islands. This nation is known as Vanuatu. Why go risk your life to evangelize cannibals? Do you know the response of John G. Paton? He said, “It matters not if our bodies are eaten by cannibals or worms.” He risked his life, under the threat of death continually, but died a full life at 82 in Australia. David died of old age too, but he lived under the threat of death for many years. But he finished his life on a mountain-top.

As David died, he called his son Solomon to his side. He finished on a mountain-top. I read in I Kings 2: 1-4, “When David's time to die drew near, he commanded Solomon his son, saying, “I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn, that the LORD may establish His word that He spoke concerning me, saying, ‘If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before Me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’” So as we go down into what appears to be Death Valley in Psalm 41, keep the perspective, that just like us, David sometimes found himself at the bottom of the barrel, at the end of his rope, at wit’s end corner, south of the tracks at Fifth and Plowed Ground, in South Overshoe, just north of Frog Pond, wandering what he was going to do.

LEARN THE BLESSING OF THE BLESSER. (I.) Verses 1-3 declare, “Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him; the LORD protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land; you do not give him up to the will of his enemies. The LORD sustains him on his sickbed; in his illness you restore him to full health.” Two troubles have placed David on a sick-bed. One is sickness, that David himself attributes, at least in part to his own sin. We read in verse 4—“Heal me, for I have sinned against you!” The second reason David is on a sick-bed is because of the treachery of the enemy. Verse 9

speaks of a close or familiar friend who has turned against David and lifted up his heel against him. The combination of sickness and treachery is a burden on David that has him down flat on his back.

In a way, it appears David is crying out for affirmation and kindness from his sickbed and at the same time blessing the blessers who were reaching out to him as he was running from his own son, Absalom. Who were these blessers who stood by him? They were loyal followers of God, and of King David, but they were few in number. In Absalom's conspiracy, he succeeded in dividing the kingdom of Israel and talking mighty men into leaving David's side to follow him. In this first strophe, David is declaring that God was going to bless those who considered the poor, namely him as he fled from Jerusalem. David promises that those remembering him, the poor would be delivered by the Lord in the day of battle. David prophesies that God would protect them, deliver them, keep them alive and bless them in the land. Why? David is blessing the blessers who stood by him because, v, 2, they did not give David up and abandon him to the will of his enemies. David even reaches for the mountain-top in verse 3 as he spoke prophetically about God sustaining him on his sickbed and in his illness, restoring him to full health. Who these blessers? They did not wait around too long to decide whose side they were on. Sooner or later we must take a stand. Who wants to stand for a sick man who is on his sick bed because of his own sin?

Beloved, it is so easy to stand around forever, checking the wind to see who we will support. Sooner or later we must decide to say Yes or No to being a blesser—never of a perfect man or woman, but someone God draws us to support, whether that man or woman of God is at the moment, living a model life. This week I read a story that was unforgettable to me—that illustrates the importance of integrity in our lives and finally deciding if we will bless the poor, referring I believe to the poor in spirit. The Hebrew word for poor is **dal**. This little Hebrew word translated poor means one who feels or is low, reduced to being helpless, weak, feeble, someone that senses they are not equal, someone feeling emptied, impoverished, someone whose hopes seem to be dangling by a thread. Such was a man named Tedd Kidd a few years ago. Tedd was a man five years older than the woman he loved, Janet Durham. He finished college before her, and he started to work in a city hundreds of miles away from her. They always seemed to be at different places in their lives. But they had been dating for seven years. The relationship continued, but with some lack of mutuality. Tedd kept feeling rejected and he was growing weaker and weaker in his hopes—he was poor—dal. Every Valentine's Day, Tedd proposed to Janet. Every Valentine's Day, Janet would say, "No, not yet." Finally, they were both living in Dallas, Texas in their own different apartments. Tedd reached the final end of his patience, and his joy was waning.

Nevertheless, his love was still slightly hopeful. So Tedd bought an engagement ring in the seventh year of his dating Janet. On Valentine's Day, he took Janet out to a romantic restaurant, prepared to reinforce his proposal with a diamond. Another "no" would doubtless mean he would have to get on with his life without Janet. After salad, the main entree, and dessert, it was time for him to speak up. Tedd summoned up his courage, but he noticed that Janet had a gift for him, all wrapped. Ted decided to wait and first ask Janet, "What did you bring me?" She handed him her box the size of a book. He opened the package and slowly peeled away the tissue paper. It was a beautiful cross-stitch Janet had made that simply said, "Yes." Janet finally blessed the poor—the man she finally decided to love. Yes - is the word that God, in his tireless pursuit of us, longs to hear. When we honestly and finally and fully and authentically say yes to doing God's will, which is often to stand by those who may be feeling abandoned, then we will often find God saying to us, "My daughter, or My son, "Here are the desires of your heart. I bless the blessers of the poor. Here is the diamond I have been waiting to give you." It may interest you to know, Janet Kidd died after being married to Tedd Kidd, seventeen years later and the story I told you, was first publically revealed at her funeral. Learn the blessing of the blesser—bless the poor in spirit.

Jesus said, in Matthew 5: 3—"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "David here adds the blessing of blessing the poor—you will be delivered in trouble, kept alive and blessed in the land, for not giving up on that man or woman that God has called you to stand by. Ladies, I call you to bless the poor—and often the poor is your man. I give you words you've all heard—"Sometimes it's hard to be a woman Giving all your love to just one man. You'll have bad times And he'll have good times Doing things that you don't understand, But if you love him, you'll forgive him, Even though he's hard to understand. And if you love him, Oh be proud of him, 'Cause after all he's just a man. Stand by your man. Give him two arms to cling to And something warm to come to--When nights are cold and lonely. Stand by your man. And tell the world you love him--Keep giving all the love you can Stand by your man. Stand by your man. And show the world you love him. Keep giving all the love you can. Stand by your man." 2ndly:

LEARN THE SUSTAINING OF THE SAINT ON A SICKBED. (II.) Verses 4-6 state, "As for me, I said, "O LORD, be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you!" My enemies say of me in malice, "When will he die, and his name perish?" And when one comes to see me, he utters empty words, while his heart gathers iniquity; when he goes out, he tells it abroad." This is David's appeal to

God for healing mercy. David admits here that he has sinned, but he confesses his sin, and on this account, David was suffering on his sickbed. David doesn't try to justify himself, or say God has been unfair in his discipline of him. He offers no

complaints before God. David knows that his enemies like turkey buzzards have flown in and are perched on nearby branches, as it were, just waiting for him to die. In malice, these enemies are saying—“Wait a few hours. It will all be over soon. See how his chest is heaving. Listen to his death rattle. He’s almost gone and his name will perish with his last breath. Men and women, have you been here, sensing you have little time to live and the vultures are waiting. Sadly, even parents feel this awful presence sometimes as children can be waiting to possess their part of the inheritance. In some ways, David is another Job, except his suffering is not a test, but his discipline. And God sustained David on his sick-bed.

LEARN THE INNER CONSPIRACY OF OUR ENEMIES IN THEIR COUNCIL-CHAMBER. (III.)

Verses 7-9 continue with these words. “All who hate me whisper together about me; they imagine the worst for me. They say, “A deadly thing is poured out on him; he will not rise again from where he lies.” Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.” God does sustain us on our sickbed, even in the face of treachery as David faced. David’s own trusted counselor, Ahithophel joined forces with Absalom and left David vulnerable. David mentions in verse 7 that folk come to visit and after uttering empty words of comfort, v. 5, words they don’t really mean, they leave the sick-bed room, and go out to tell others that death is near, and whisper, imagining the worst is imminent. Imagine David’s plight in having would be comforters gathering and gloating over his suffering and looking eagerly for symptoms of his on-coming death. Seeing David is bad off, they wish him well and hurry outside to report to those who hate David about how bad he is. Imagine the feeling if one of our most treacherous enemies was our most trusted friend and prophesies we are down for good, and will never rise, v. 8. What should we do when we know we are being conspired against?

Theologian, teacher and preacher J. C. Ryle, the first bishop of Liverpool in England, 1816-1900, once said, “Sickness is meant...to do 9 things: **1. To make us think** that if our soul is not saved we had better never have been born. **2. To teach us that there is a world beyond the grave**—and that the world we now live in is only a training-place for another dwelling, where there will be no decay, no sorrow, no tears, no misery, and no sin. **3. To make us look at our past lives honestly, fairly, and conscientiously.** Am I ready for my great change if I should not get better? Do I repent truly of my sins? Are my sins forgiven and washed away in Christ’s blood? Am I prepared to meet God? **4. To make us see the emptiness of the world** and its utter inability to satisfy the highest and deepest needs of the soul. **5. To send us to our Bibles.** That blessed Book, in the days of health, is too often left on the shelf. But sickness often brings it down from the shelf and throws new light on its pages. **6. To make us pray.** Too many, never

pray at all. But prayer often becomes a reality when the valley of the shadow of death is in sight. **7. To make us repent and break off our sins.** If we will not hear the voice of mercies, God sometimes makes us “hear the rod.” **8. To draw us to Christ.** Sickness has done this for many—they have found Christ in the sick room. **9. To make us feeling and sympathizing towards others.** None are so unable to sympathize as those who have never had trouble themselves—and none are so able to feel as those who have drunk most deeply the cup of pain and sorrow.” Don’t focus on what you know is going on if you are under fire. Use the times of treachery to get closer to Jesus. 4thly, lastly,

LEARN TO TURN TO GOD WHEN ENEMIES PROPHECY OUR DEMISE.

(IV.) Verses 10-12 end the psalm just before the mountain-top saying, “But you, O LORD, be gracious to me, and raise me up, that I may repay them! By this I know that you delight in me: my enemy will not shout in triumph over me. But you have upheld me because of my integrity, and set me in your presence forever.” Much turns on the meaning of repay, v. 10. The KJV uses requite, but the Greek word is shalam, a root word for peace. It could mean—let me prove my enemies wrong by Your deliverance, Lord. Shalam can mean to be safe in mind or body. It can mean to repay or reciprocate. But another meaning is, to make peace. This is the meaning of shalam in Proverbs 16: 7. “When a man’s ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.” Whatever it means, David now is headed for the mountain-top. In faith, v. 10, Lord, raise me up, delight in me, v. 11, don’t let my enemies shout over me. V. 12—uphold me because of my integrity. David may have been a terrible sinner—but beloved, learn with me from him to be a true repentor, facing our sins so we can pray, v. 12—set me in Your presence forever. David is climbing by faith out of Death Valley. Now He closes his last psalm in this Book One—the Genesis Book of Psalms saying, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.” I close with the words to a song we love. “For as long as I shall live I will testify to love I’ll be a witness in the silences when words are not enough With every breath I take I will give thanks to God above For as long as I shall live I will testify to love From the mountains to the valleys From the rivers to the sea Every hand that reaches out Every hand that reaches out to offer peace Every simple act of mercy Every step to kingdom come All the Hope in every heart will, speak what love has done.” Beloved, let’s finish on a mountain-top. With Corrie Ten Boom, let’s agree, “There is no pit so deep, that God’s love is not deeper still.” He’ll bring us out. He will. Amen and Amen—and we’ll finish on a mountain-top – Mt. Zion.