

## **BLESS THE LORD LIFTING HANDS**

Psalm 134: 1-3 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

This awesome little psalm, the last of 15 psalms of ascent, is an invitation to “Come, bless the Lord!” Hezekiah probably wrote this psalm and the other anonymous ten psalms in the psalms of ascent. He made this psalm short and sweet. His heart was filled. He remembered the day when Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, came by the command of the Lord and said, “Hezekiah, set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover.” Oh, how sick King Hezekiah was, at the point of death. In Isaiah 38: 1-6, we read, “In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, “Thus says the LORD: Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover.” Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, and said, “Please, O LORD, remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: “Go (and that meant go back to Hezekiah’s house) and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and will defend this city.”

When Hezekiah wrote this last psalm of ascent, he had to have been thinking about that great day when God turned everything around for him and gave him a new lease on life—and gave him 15 more years to praise the Lord. But I believe Hezekiah was remembering even further back when the king of Assyria had Jerusalem surrounded and that evil king, Sennacherib, and his vulgar general, Rabshekah, knew Judah was going down like all the other nations they had defeated. They were bragging and boasting and taunting king Hezekiah with these words in Isaiah 37: 10, “Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, devoting them to destruction. And shall you be delivered. Have the gods of the nations delivered them, the nations that my fathers destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar? Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, the king of Hena, or the king of Ivvah?

Do you remember what King Hezekiah did when he read that awful letter calling for him to surrender Jerusalem and Judah. The king of Assyria wanted Judah to surrender to Assyria with their hands up? Hezekiah left his palace and went up to

the house of the Lord, and spread out the letter with his hands before the Lord. In a nutshell, Hezekiah said, “Hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God...O Lord, our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone are the Lord.” Then what did king Hezekiah do? He went home and went to bed with all Jerusalem except for the guards of the walls and the night servants in the house of the Lord. What happened? I want to tell you what happened, beloved. God is not only the God of the day but of the night. He works the night shift. Aren’t you glad?

On May 25th, our little 22nd grandchild was born. Travis, Amanda, little baby Abram and Jinny left the Wichita birthing center and headed quickly to the St. Joseph Hospital in Wichita. Abram’s Respirations were racing twice as fast as they were supposed to be. We were praising the Lord for this newborn grandson, but his life was in danger. He was admitted in the neonatal NICU and hooked up to oxygen, blood was taken, labs were read, he apparently had aspirated during his birth and an infection was spreading in his body as nightfall came in Wichita. Jinny texted me, “Pray, pray, pray!” I prayed a lot, but I knew along with the doctors and nurses in that hospital, God works the night shift too. He never slumbers nor sleeps. Psalm 121: 4 tells us, “Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.” I slept. Hezekiah slept. God worked for Abraham Beau Ross in the night and began to counter that awful infection quickly. What happened for Hezekiah?

We read in II Kings 19: 35-37, “And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, (including the king, Hezekiah) behold, these were all dead bodies. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, escaped and departed for home. He lived at Nineveh. And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his idol god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him down with the sword and they escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.” God works the night shift, the shift Hezekiah wanted us especially, to remember in Psalm 134, telling us “Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord!” We know the pilgrims sang this final song of ascent. What lessons does God want to teach us in this tiny psalm? I see three important lessons!

**GOD WANTS US TO BLESS HIM, EVEN WHEN OTHERS ARE NOT WATCHING US.** (I.) Notice again verse 1. “Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord!” This psalm that begins with an invitation, by Hezekiah and the singing pilgrims to the ministers working the night shift in the temple. The psalm ends with the ministers or priests

in the temple singing a benediction back to King Hezekiah with all the returning pilgrims. This call went out from the pilgrims who had attended the feasts and probably were preparing to return home, back to the grind, back to their farms and their jobs. Verse one indicates that the pilgrims with King Hezekiah were especially addressing these servants working through the night in the temple.

We don't know for sure, but it may well be that the pilgrims, just like us, got up before dawn to start their long trek back home. How many of us start our trips and vacations before sunrise? As the pilgrims picked up stakes after the beloved feasts, their minds perhaps were on the temple where lights were on all night in the dark city of Jerusalem. What was taking place in the last couple hours of the night shift for the servants—the priests, God's ministers and the night watchmen, working in house of the Lord? Another scenario perhaps could have been the pilgrims gathered during the last evening of the feast for one final period of worship before they went to sleep in their tents and awoke early to set out for home. Alfred Edersheim in his classic book on the Temple and Its Services writes, "Each of the 24 groups of guards consisted of ten men; so there were two hundred and forty Levites and thirty priests who were on duty every night. The Temple guards were relieved by day, but not during the night, which the Romans divided into four watches, but the Jews, properly, into three watches, because the fourth watch was dawn and daylight, being really the morning watch."

How many night servants there were, for sure, we don't know, but King Hezekiah and the pilgrims who were singing the psalm, were addressing these night servants who served the Lord when no one else was watching. I especially want to dedicate this part of this message to those of us here who are pastors and elders and deacons here in our local church. It is clear that Hezekiah and the pilgrims were addressing these night servants and they wanted these servants of God to speak well of the Lord even at night on the night shift, when language can degenerate. This song of encouragement for the night ministers is for a reason. Is it not because there are particular weaknesses that night caused for those temple workers? What would be the dangers? They just might go to sleep in the night watches if they had not gotten sufficient sleep during the day, when they had to sleep, which is a harder time for us all to sleep. Another danger, would it not be the danger of familiarity with what they were doing, because the priest had ritualistic work to do. Might a priest focus on the ritual and not on God who should be worshipped, even at night? Another danger might be laziness or a slack or lack of carefulness because nobody else was watching as when the priests served during daylight hours. For those of us serving the Lord in a full time way, because of our divine calling, do we resist the

temptation to let familiarity breed contempt and lack of respect. Would we ever try to get by without being diligent, or without having clean hands and pure hearts? When no one else is watching or listening, do we who serve the night shift for God, as it were, where we aren't up in front of others, but behind the scenes, do we come and bless the Lord in private? Are we ready to announce to others how great is our God? Do we speak to God and of God clearly, regularly, thankfully, passionately, and sincerely? This first lesson is for us all, but I call us who serve God most closely in His house as pastors, secretaries, elders, deacons, deaconesses, teachers, nursery workers, worship leaders, youth leaders, missionaries going to Moldova—how is our walk with God on the night shift—when most other folk don't see us?

Men in ministry for Jesus—how do we speak to our wife and our children. Sunday School teachers, what are we doing on our night shifts? Would we blush for those we teach to know what we do in our nights? Do we prepare adequately? Are we diligent for Jesus? Are our hands and our relationships pure before God who is up at night—He sees? Do we want to run and hide when we think of God's people calling to us to Come, bless the Lord? Are we living a sham? Are any of us or many of us ashamed of what God sees us doing when most folk are not watching. God is calling out to us. We sing, "Jesus is calling out to me, My soul longs for a city of peace." There will be no peace for us if we neglect holiness, purity, and devotion to God when others are not watching. Secondly,

**GOD WANTS US TO GET OUR HANDS UP IN HIS HOUSE AND BLESS THE LORD.** (II.)

Notice verse two. "Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord!" I know we all can have differing inhibitions about doing this. I ask you all first of all. Was this an optional suggestion? Was this a strong recommendation? The answer is No to both these questions. Did you realize that this is a command? It is! Who is addressed here? Men or women, young people, children? Verse 1 says "Come, bless the Lord all you servants of the Lord! Are you one of God's servants? Yes, but it's Old Testament, Pastor. So, when we come to bless the Lord, God has a new dispensation for us in 2016 so we can worship Him without even considering raising our hands, is that true? What does the apostle Paul say in I Timothy 2: 8? What does he say? "I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling." Wow! Does that get women off the hook? No, Hezekiah and the pilgrims are singing to all the servants of the Lord. But God is warning us especially men—don't lift your hands to God if they aren't clean hands—(not perfect,) but God wants them not to be angry hands, from a quarrelling man. God forgive us, men if we are ready to

worship God in His house, but not ready to put away anger and quarrelsomeness in our private lives. God wants clean hands, completely yielded hands, ready to do God's bidding hands and consecrated, surrendered hands. The whole world knows the sign of surrender. When a policeman pulls a man over and tells him to get out of his car, and says, "Put your hands up."—is it optional for you to keep your hands in your pockets? Lifting hands is the sign of complete, unconditional surrender. Does Jesus deserve less from us? Was this a command for a certain race or tribe or a certain century? "I desire then that in every place, men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling. Are you glad you are saved? Then I hear God saying—"Raise your hands, get your hands up—lift your hands." You ask when. I cannot tell you, but when might the Holy Spirit inside you, prompt you to raise your hands? If God has answered a huge prayer for you, get your hands up. If the worship song you are singing is making you weep for joy or want to shout for joy—get your hands up? God doesn't say, "Look around and see if others are raising their hands." No, I implore you all. Watch when it is hard not to raise your hands—the message is blessing you. The prayer being prayed is an agreement prayer with what you have been praying—get your hands up to Jesus—and think or say, "Yes, Lord." Maybe you feel empty today, don't hesitate, get your hands up to Jesus and ask Him to fill you afresh today. Thirdly,

**GOD WANTS US TO GIVE HIS BENEDICTION TO OTHERS—HIS BENEDICTION FROM HIM—OUR LORD, AND CREATOR.** (III.) Notice verse 3 which seems to be the ministers, the priests calling out to the King and to the returning pilgrims who are about to head for home. We read, "May the Lord bless you from Zion, He who made heaven and earth!" So you ask, "What's a benediction? This whole set of fifteen psalms of ascent ends in this benediction. A benediction is not necessarily a prayer, but an anointed, Spirit led announcement of God's blessing on others. In a benediction, there is no demand to close your eyes if you are giving the benediction or if you are receiving it. A benediction is a statement of Biblical truth you are led to convey to others from God. It is often a particular spiritual blessing God has reserved for you to give right now. A benediction doesn't have to be at the end of a service. I so often use one of Paul's benedictions in the first chapter of Romans, vs. 11-12. "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine." On May 26th, a week ago last Thursday, Larry Megahey called to ask me out for lunch. I was too swamped to go, but I asked for him to lift me up for the camp meetings in Louisiana and I asked for a rain check. He said I want to bless you right now. He prayed over the phone a wonderful benediction on my camp messages. I needed it.

It encouraged me. Later in the day, Judy Odogwu was filling in for Alyssa, and I shared my desire for the meetings in Louisiana to go well. She said, “I want to pray now!” It was such a blessing.

When God leads us to impart a gift from Him, a gift of encouragement—we need to do it now! Don’t wait. You may not know what to say. I know. Don’t hesitate. If God has called you to give a benediction, He will equip you to do it well. It’s often a wonderful thing when you give a benediction to invoke it by lifting your hand or your hands to convey that God is directing you to do this. The blessing is not yours to give without His giving it. When you give a benediction to anyone, lifting your hands, do it with clean, completely usable hands to God, consecrated, do you know where your pride is? Don’t go after it later. When you obey God, pride is in the trash. When you encourage others, joy breaks out. Use benedictions that prove you are surrendered to Jesus as Lord, which prove you acknowledge Him as Creator of heaven and earth. Bring down the promises of God, the blessings of God. Call them down from God’s throne. Beloved, I urge you especially to bless your children. Bless our young people. Pass on the blessing of the Lord on this upcoming generation. Husbands, bless your wife. Wives, bless your husband. And young people, bless us—bless us older ones like me. Sing to me—I’ll love it. Sing, “Jesus loves the older ones like you, you, you. Jesus loves the older ones like you, you, you. Older ones like you, ought to love Him too. Jesus loves the older ones like you, you, you.” Beloved, hear this cry of the psalmist. “Come, bless the Lord... Bless the Lord now as we come to His holy table, the Lord’s Table. Amen.