

August 30, 2020
Sunday Evening Service
Communion
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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LET THEM SING FOR JOY
Psalm 5

Paul and Silas were real people, with real feelings both emotional and physical. They loved Jesus so much that they left the comforts of home to travel all over Asia Minor telling the good news of salvation. Not everyone likes to hear the good news that Jesus died to pay the penalty for their sins. For example, there were some guys in the city of Philippi who took offense that Paul's and Silas's righteousness was about to run them out of business.

Paul and Silas had gone over to Philippi to begin with because Paul had this vision about someone in that area asking for spiritual help. When they finally arrived at Philippi, they ran into this young demon-possessed girl who kept harassing them. Showing kindness and mercy to the girl, Paul cast out the demon in the name and power of Jesus. That made her owners angry and they stirred up the authorities to beat the two tellers of good news.

At midnight, with backs bruised and bleeding, in abject humiliation, Paul and Silas sat in prison. But they were not discouraged. They were praying out loud and singing hymns of praise to God. How could they do that? I am pretty sure if I had been in their sandals, I would have been thinking about how I was going to contact my lawyer the next day and initiate a lawsuit against these wicked people.

Maybe there is a direct connection between the evangelists' prayers and their praise. In fact, that kind of connection has been found often in the lives of people who suffer for Christ. It was not unusual for the martyrs of the Reformation Era to testify to God's faithfulness and sing praises to Him while they were being burned at the stake. Even in more modern times, our brothers and sisters who

are persecuted and imprisoned for their faith are able to sing and testify praise to God because they spend much genuine, serious time talking to God in prayer.

David was no stranger to trouble. If it wasn't bears or lions or giants who threatened his life, it was his boss the king, or sly citizens who double-crossed him, or even his own son who upset the apple cart of his life. We know what that is like. We, too, live in very unsettling days. I never dreamed that governmental authorities would feel at liberty to tell us when we can go outside, where we can go, and that we have to wear a mask when we do. I never dreamed there would come a day when authorities would claim they had justifiable reasons to forbid church attendance as they do in some states and some nations.

We the citizens of America live in such uncertain times to some extent because there is so much deception, hiding of truth, shading of truth, twisting of truth that we are not sure what to believe. I am honestly not sure that there is a reliable news source that will report exactly what is happening or what is being said. That is partly because the common citizens have more access to reports about what is said and done than we have ever had. And often, no one is really sure what was said or done.

These are indeed discouraging days. And much worse to us are the trials and tests so many of our own people are enduring right now. But in comparison, these are not the most discouraging days in history. The days of the reformation had to be quite unsettling to our brothers who sat in prison because of their testimony. Even in America it is not as bad as the Great Depression or the times when literally millions of our family members were fighting a war across the ocean (over 1.5 million in WW1 and over 16 million in WW2). How do we survive such difficult days?

Our spiritual forefathers discovered that the God who was faithful to Joseph, David, Daniel, Paul, Peter, John the Apostle, then John Wycliffe, John Huss, John Knox, John Bunyan, and a host of other choice servants of God would be faithful to the end. They prayed. They rejoiced in God's care even through the valley of the shadow of death. And so can we, and so should we.

A Cry For Help (vv.1-6).

David demonstrated how the King's subjects feel free to plead with Him. In the first couple of verses, we see how we should pray to our Lord, our God, and our King. *Give ear to my words, O LORD; consider my groaning. Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you do I pray (vv.1-2).*

The request David offered was simple, straightforward and given in three separate statements. It was a request to *give ear to my words (v.1a)*. That is simply a request for the Lord to pay attention. That in itself seems unnecessary since God has revealed that He sees and hears all things. But the person who is struggling needs the assurance that God hears when we pray.

Second, the request is for God to *consider my groaning (v.1b)*. This is a good example of Hebrew poetic parallelism in which multiple statements are synonymous or sometimes contrasted. And while this statement sounds like the first one, it is a more intense request the petitioner asks God to *consider*. To consider is more than just hear, but means to discern, perceive, distinguish. It is actually a request for God to analyze my groaning. This is not "now I lay me down to sleep" kind of prayer. This is the outpouring of a deeply troubled soul. This is how we pray when we feel hopeless.

Third, the request asks God to *give attention to the sound of my cry (v.2)*. To pay close attention is the response God requires from His people toward His law. But here the same word is an example of the pleading child of God asking God to pay close attention with the expectation of response to the cry.

The request is offered to one God with three different names or titles, each of which conveys a different characteristic. We are quite familiar with the first name, *LORD*. That is the name Yahweh (as closely as we can translate it). It is the name God uses for Himself to assure His people that He is the everlasting, self-existing, caring God who is able and willing to provide.

The second term that identifies who David prayed to is *My King*. That might indicate that the ruler is making request of the Ruler of the ruler. We cannot be completely certain that David was king when he wrote this psalm, but it is possible. Whether or not he was, David surely understood the way in which subjects would appeal to

their kings for protection and for justice against personal enemies. He appealed to God for justice in the same way.

Third, the psalmist called God, *My God* which uses a Hebrew term that speaks of the mighty God who rules and reigns. In fact, the word itself appears in the plural and generally emphasizes the plurality of God (that is one God in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). This title expresses a less intimate relationship than the one attached to the name Yahweh. Part of that is because this name focuses on power and authority.

David cried out to this particular God with intent. He essentially said it is "because I am praying only to you." There is no better refuge, yeah, no other refuge to which we should flee in times of trouble, stress, and difficulty. Cry out to God and ask God to hear because you cannot appeal to a more powerful, more loving, more faithful, more caring source.

When we cry out to God, we should pray seriously. *O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch (v.3)*. The word *morning* emphasizes that praying to God was so important to David that it was one of the first things he did each day. Notice that the psalmist attached a sacrifice connected to the prayer. That also was an illustration of the importance of this exercise in David's life. Some English translations do not give the sense of a sacrifice here.

The Hebrew word for *prepare* is used for the act of putting things in order. Here it pictures the priest putting the wood on the altar, slaying and arranging the sacrifice. Indeed our prayers serve precisely that function. They are a sacrifice of praise. *Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name (Hebrews 13:15)*. Our prayers are part of the spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God. *You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5)*. When we pray, we appear much like the Old Testament priest who arranged everything about the sacrifice on the altar in order to worship, praise, and please God. And having offered the sacrifice of prayer, we wait in full expectation that God will answer as is indicated by the words, *and watch (v.3)*.

We pray, we praise, we give this sacrifice to God, and then stand back with full expectation that He is going to answer.

That is an incredible privilege. Sometimes (too many times) we forget that the King's enemy has no such privilege. People estranged from God cannot praise Him or talk to Him in prayer because God's character precludes it. *For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you (v.4)*. Our pure and holy God finds no pleasure, joy, or satisfaction in wickedness. Wickedness is a term that applies broadly to all sin. All sin offends God, so how could He delight in it?

In fact, God will not allow any offense (no matter how small) any matter that is contrary to His righteousness to dwell in His presence. It is true that God is present everywhere in this sin-saturated world. It is true that God the Son lived every day in the presence of sin but never sinned. It is true that God the Holy Spirit lives every moment of every day in the presence of sin while indwelling us on earth. But God will not allow a trace of unrighteousness in His eternal dwelling (we could call it heaven).

And because God is so holy and has such a hatred for all that is opposed to His righteousness, sin brings serious consequences. One of the most obvious, far-reaching consequences of sin is that the LORD hates sinners. *The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers (v.5)*. Most of God's children do not struggle with the statement that the boastful will not stand in God's presence. Boasting is the expression of pride, which is the foundation for all sin beginning with Satan's fall. We just read that God will not allow such wickedness to dwell with Him (v.4).

But many of God's children struggle with the reality that *God hates all evildoers*. The text does not say that God hates the evil (which He does), but more precisely God hates the person who does evil. That is the same truth we read in Psalm 11:5. *The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence (Psalm 11:5)*. That causes a conflict in our consciences. How can God who loves the world hate sinners?

And a further ramification of God's hatred of the sin and the wicked person is that people like David, who desire to follow God and be like God, also hate sinners. The psalmist wrote, *I hate the double-minded, but I love your law (Psalm 119:113)*. David wrote,

Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies (Psalm 139:21-22). How can a saint hate anyone when Jesus taught that we should love our enemies?

Let's try to think this through. That God hates sin is abundantly clear in Scripture. Sin is opposed to God's character. Sin ruined His perfect creation. Okay, then how could it be possible that God would so thoroughly abhor sin and not be effected by the person who commits it? We might illustrate it like this. Do you like wasps? Most people do not. I absolutely abhor the poison of wasps because when those pesky creatures inject their poison into my skin it hurts and I swell up in reaction to it. How can I hate the poison so much and not also hate the creature that "offends" me with the poison? I must also hate the carrier of the poison as well. The only way that could change is if the wasp could be recreated into something different.

This reality is what makes the sinner's reconciliation with the offended Creator so astonishing. God's mercy to penitent sinners is so mind-boggling. That the offended God would forgive all my offenses against Him through the sacrifice of Christ is amazing grace indeed. That is especially so because, as the psalmist rightly concluded, *"If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" (Psalm 130:3)*. Therefore, the sinner who becomes aware of his offenses against God prays, *Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you (Psalm 143:2)*. If God tried our character and not our case, we would have no hope. But out of love, God changed this wasp into a butterfly.

Unrepentant sinners do not have that confidence or hope. In fact, all they have (whether or not they admit it) is dread and hopelessness because the LORD destroys those He hates. *You destroy those who speak lies; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man (v.6)*. To believe in a God who loves outside the boundaries of righteousness is to be deceived.

Hitler died April 30, 1945 after taking cyanide pills and shooting himself in the head. At the age of 56, in the prime of his life, the man who would rule the world and enjoyed power on a level few ever experienced was destroyed as his own wickedness came back on his head.

He was so self-deceived. The slogan *Arbeit macht frei* was placed at the entrances to a number of Nazi concentration camps, most notably Auschwitz. Translated into English, it means “Work makes you free.” The “Auschwitz I” sign was made by prisoner-laborers including master blacksmith Jan Liwacz and features an upside-down B, which has been interpreted as an act of defiance by the prisoners who made it.

Hitler and his wicked henchmen demonstrate the reality that the sinner’s sin will be his or her eternal death sentence when they stand before their eternal judge. And David prayed that God would make His displeasure against sin known even in life.

Assurance God Hears and Acts (vv.7-12).

Verse seven begins with one of the most encouraging words in the Bible, “But.” “But I . . .” he wrote (vv.7-10). The “but” points out that the LORD’s love makes all the difference. So different from, so unlike unrepentant sinners, God’s steadfast love leads us to worship Him. *But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house. I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you (v.7).*

God’s steadfast love is the unchanging love and loyalty He shows to His own people. Sometimes (often) we do not reciprocate His love. Sometimes we act like His love is unknown or foreign to us. But God continues to love us. And so we stand out in vivid contrast to the world around us. Though we are surrounded by troubles, and even troubling people, we still long to come into God’s presence. So unlike our unrepentant peers, we still long to bow before our God in worship because we know that He is, that He is in control, and that His care flows out of His love for us.

Not surprisingly then God’s righteousness leads us away from crooked paths. *Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me (v.8).* Because we are God’s people, we are most comfortable in the path characterized by His righteousness. Indeed, God, motivated by His great love for us, often uses affliction to steer us back into the righteous way. He does this for us so that we will be a living testimony before sinners (even our enemies) that God is righteous.

Obviously, the person so blessed by God is going to be noticeably different. The sinner’s rejection of God and His righteousness highlights the difference. Specifically they reject truth. *For there is no truth in their mouth; their inmost self is destruction; their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue (v.9).*

But God is in control of their future also. He, the righteous Judge, will saddle the sinner with recompense. *Make them bear their guilt, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; because of the abundance of their transgressions cast them out, for they have rebelled against you (v.10).* David prayed that God would do justly. But notice very importantly that David left justice to God. This is in keeping with God’s promise that “*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*” (*Deuteronomy 32:35*). Whether your enemy is a real person or just weird or even predictable, unfavorable circumstances, Yahweh, the King, the Almighty God is able and willing to act according to your prayer.

Therefore, those who rest in God can rejoice (vv.11-12). *But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you (v.11).* We will take refuge in God. We will rejoice. We will sing for joy (even with backs beaten while we sit in a Roman prison at midnight). We will contemplate God’s protection that is spread over us like a canopy shading us from the sun. It is in the stressful times, the testing times that we become most aware of our love for God’s name (His whole character and work).

As a result of knowing this wonderful truth and focusing on it, we rejoice in God’s protection and favor. *For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover him with favor as with a shield (v.12).* God who is mighty and able does bless those who He makes righteous through faith in Christ. And He blesses those who live according to what we are – His new creation clothed in Christ’s righteousness. That righteousness of Christ that God gave to us serves as a shield that covers us with God’s favor.

And so we rejoice sometimes even with tears. We too easily forget that happiness is not the same as joy. Happiness is rooted in and dependent on outward circumstances. Joy is rooted in the calm

assurance that God loves me through Jesus my Savior and nothing can change that or take it away. Trials and afflictions will not make anyone happy. But in the midst of the suffering, we can still have the joy of God and because of God in our hearts.

That is how Paul and Silas could sing in prison. They weren't happy. But they were full of the joy that only God gives. So we, too, rejoice in God's care and protection. How can we not rejoice when we see so much evidence around us that we, unlike the people who are part of a very troubled and sinful world, are the privileged recipients of the moment-by-moment care of our loving Heavenly Father?

We close with our thoughts on an encouraging old song. Many years ago, when I sang with a Southern Gospel Quartet, we sang a song written by Jimmie Davis and Dottie Rambo.

SHELTERED IN THE ARMS OF GOD

I feel the touch of hands so kind and tender.
They're leading me in paths that I must trod.
I'll have no fear when Jesus walks beside me
For I'm sheltered in the arms of God.

So let the storm rage high,
The dark clouds rise,
They don't worry me;
For I'm sheltered safe within the arms of God.
He walks with me,
And naught of earth can harm me,
Sheltered safe within the arms of God.

Soon I shall hear the call from heaven's portals
'Come home my child,
It's the last mile you must trod'
I'll fall asleep
And wake in God's new heaven
Sheltered safe within the arms of God.

So let the storm rage high,
The dark clouds rise,
They won't worry me;
For I'm sheltered safe within the arms of God.
He walks with me,
And naught of earth can harm me,
Sheltered safe within the arms of God.