

BACKGROUND

Today we read Psalm 30. The book of Psalms is a collection of Hebrew songs, hymns, and poems taken from various periods in the history of Israel.

The Hebrew BIBLE or Masoretic text contains 150 separate psalms. The Greek translation of the Hebrew bible called the Septuagint has an extra psalm (151) which relates how David was chosen by Samuel the prophet over his brothers. Although the Masoretic and Septuagint versions contain essentially the same psalms, they are not numbered the same.

The Hebrew Bible credits David with 73 psalms, compared with 84 in the Septuagint and 85 in the Latin Vulgate. Asaph and Korah, the leaders of the levitical singing groups, are connected with 12 and 11 psalms, respectively (although Ps 43 is almost certainly to be attributed to Korah also). Two psalms are ascribed to Solomon (72; 127), one to Moses (90), and one to Ethan (89), while Heman shares the credit for one psalm with the sons of Korah (88). The remainder are sometimes called “orphan psalms” because of their anonymity.

Fifty-five psalms are addressed to the Choirmaster. They used musical instruments, such as stringed instruments (Ps 32:2) and flutes (Ps 5) and different tunes such as “Higgaion” (Ps 9:16) or “The Hind of the Dawn” (Ps 22), “Lilies” (Pss 45, 80) and “The Dove on Far-off Terebinths” (Ps 56).

The Psalter, possibly in conscious imitation of the five books of Moses in the Law, is divided into five sections (1–41; 42–72; 73–89; 90–106; 107–150), separated by four doxologies (41:13; 72:18, 19; 89:52; 106:48).

Our Psalm is a Psalm of David at the dedication of the temple. However, when reading the Psalm, it seems that the title of the Psalm doesn't fit the content. I could not help asking myself why? Well the answer seems to lie in the translation from the Hebrew or Masoretic text into the Greek. When the psalms were translated into Greek there appears to have been some difficulty in translating the titles, possibly because of their antiquity. The apparent disparity between the title and the actual content of some psalms (e.g., Ps 30)

indicates that the titles were supplied by those who knew of a connection which would never have suggested itself to a later editor.

Our Psalm seems to reflect a true picture of King David's life which we all know. He was a shepherd, fugitive, warrior, and king. He was someone who made many mistakes but despite all his mistakes, he trusted God. He always had faith in God which also finds expression in Psalm 30.

Our Psalm begins by a confirmation of faith. The Psalter acknowledges the presence of God in his hour of need. He praises God for helping, and saving him from *Sheoel*, that is the dark place under the earth. It was also referred to as the "pit", or the "depth" and later to "hell". It was also used as referring to death.

And then it seems as if the Psalter is confessing why he thinks he was in trouble. He did something which angered God. But although God was angered he can confess that it only lasts a moment while God's favour lasts a lifetime. He compares it to the image of night and day. He says "weeping may remain for a night but rejoicing comes in the morning".

And then finally the Psalter comes to the truth of the matter of why everything happened to him. When God favoured him, he took it as his right to be proud. His attitude was that he is at the top of the world. Nothing bad can happen to him now. He shall never be shaken again. He felt secure. The word "secure" (*šelew*) implies a careless ease. Apparently he had forgotten his need to trust in the Lord and boasted in self-confidence.

As a result, God disciplined him (30:7). Previously when God had favoured him, He made him secure (mountain is a figure for the strength of his position); but when God disciplined him, He hid His face, an expression that signifies the removal of blessing and protection.

What did he do then? In his moment of despair and grief he reached out to God. He begged God to forgive him. He said to God that when he is dead, he will not be able to praise Him, and he will not be able to proclaim His faithfulness.

The Psalm then comes to a conclusion and it is almost as if the tension is broken immediately when he confirms that God did hear his plea, God saw his sorrow, and God saved him. He says that God turned his wailing into dancing, his time of mourning into a time of joy. When people mourned they usually tore their clothes and put ash on their

heads. God removed his mourning and his grief. He then says that his only wish is that his heart will sing to God and never be silent. He does not want to be silent. He wants to give thanks to God all his life.

This Psalm is a beautiful song that reflects ordinary human life and all the raw emotions that we experience on a daily basis.

Amen

SERMON

The text verses for the sermon are verses 11-12: "You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. Lord my God, I will praise you forever."

When we are discerning what the message of a Psalm is, we need to remember that it is recorded in the Old Testament which means that God's revelation in Jesus Christ was not part of the context.

So when looking at a Psalm we need to think of two pictures, one before and one after. I am sure you have seen these pictures in advertisements. Most of them show a person who was obese and then almost a total transformation after the person has lost a lot of weight...and in both pictures the person has the same clothes emphasizing the huge difference.

It is also true of what the Psalmist is trying tell us. Although God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, although we have been redeemed, we are still experiencing the raw emotions while going through life. Although the picture has totally changed for us, we still experience emotions such as regret, guilt, remorse, anger, grief and hurt.

Being a follower of Jesus does not exempt us from grief and hurt. On the contrary Jesus said that we will be like sheep ready to go to the slaughterhouse.

I think it is fair to say that there are two types of people today, those who have experienced grief and hardship and those who will definitely experience it in the future.

We should not deceive ourselves. No one is exempt from the pain that grief brings to our hearts. Do not say "I will never cry again, My marriage is immune. My kids will never rebel. My job is secure. I am as healthy as a horse. I will never be in prison. I will never be poor. I cannot be shaken."

Muhammed Ali, the great sportsman who died recently, once said: "Live every day like it's your last because someday you're going to be right."

It is a fact that we are mortal beings. We are finite. We need God just like David did. So we have to ask ourselves the very important questions:

What do we do when we cry all night? What do we do when it feels as if we are sinking into a deep pit? What do we do when our grief, tears and pain overwhelm us? What do we do when we fall from our self-proclaimed soapboxes? What do we do when we are shaken by the power of emotions?

Do we lock ourselves away in a dark room, pushing away all those who love us dearly ...

Do we grab a bottle and drink ourselves into a stupor?

Do we wail and feel sorry for ourselves?

Or do we go to God because He has showed us great love, forgiveness and mercy in and through Jesus Christ.

God is reminding us all again today that when we do reach out to Him, He will be there. Yes, although we cry all night, although the tears make us tired and weary, He will be there through His Holy Spirit. He will pick us up and lift us out of our pits of remorse, pain, brokenness and hopelessness. He will lift us to see the bigger picture of which He is in charge and that we will not have to carry a cross that is too heavy for us.

He is a loving God who went through the pits of death to save us from sin, death and hell.

We have received the living hope in and through which faith alone means we will not die but be raised to new life to be with God in all eternity. Yes indeed we can say Amen again and again because we know that the last verses of the Psalm are so true of our situations as well: God has changed our wailing into dancing, He removed our sins and gave us the joy of being forgiven; made new again.

May we indeed take the words of the Psalmist to heart when we experience sorrow and hardship. May we also take God's hand and allow Him to change us. May we always ask Him to help us to sing His praise and never stay silent because He is the Lord our Saviour.

Amen