

12/12/21

"Into Your hands" - Psalm 31:1-16

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○ I know that we're not far off Christmas, but for this morning I have felt led to speak from Psalm 31, which takes us directly to the Cross, and reminds us more of Easter than it does of Christmas. ○ It's a Psalm written by King David and it speaks of the distress that he was facing, and yet a Psalm that calls for praise unto God.

It is written for the Director of Music, and is meant to be a song to be sung that reflects both the struggles of life and the praise that is due to the Lord. It's a Psalm that acknowledges that life is not all joy and celebration, but that although we may be going through some tough times of grief and distress, we too can celebrate the goodness of God.

○ And so, David begins, "**In You, O LORD I put my trust; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness.**" (v.1) Although we later read words of great despair, he begins by declaring his trust in God. And although we read a little later too of his enemies and adversaries, he asks that the Lord would deliver him in order that his shame would not give reason for others to doubt or bring down the name of the Lord. He's asking the Lord to protect His own reputation by delivering him. "**In You I put my trust; deliver me in your righteousness.**" Are we concerned about preserving the Lord's reputation, by the way that we live? Are we aware that the way that we live reflects upon the way that other people see or understand God?

But as we also think of David and his adulterous affair and arranging Uriah's death; his subsequent remorse, we now see a man who doesn't want to ever be in that place again. He's asking the Lord to protect him and keep him in a right relationship with the Lord such that he may not be ashamed before the Lord. "**Let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness.**" Is our love for the Lord deep enough or strong enough to ask Him to protect us from ourselves; our sin that brings shame upon ourselves? Lord, would you grant unto me a righteousness that delivers me. I don't want to be sinful and ashamed as a result.

As Christians we often struggle to rest in the Lord, because we're constantly aware of our weaknesses and sin. We often carry around a sense of shame with us, and the Devil wants us to remain under that weight. But you and I are clothed in the righteousness of God. God wraps us in His robe of righteousness. ○

Isaiah said, "**I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness.**" (Isa 61:10)

God clothes us in His righteousness. That doesn't mean we are now somehow perfect or without sin. And, rather than perfect our weaknesses, God uses them to teach us to depend upon Him even more. As Paul heard the Lord say to him, "**My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.**" In your weaknesses, depend upon me even more and let me deliver you through my righteousness.

Paul says to "put on the breastplate of righteousness," and I think we do that through prayer and our quiet times with the Lord when we allow Him time to recreate us into His image. The more we feed our relationship with God, the more we will be delivered from sin and shame.

David then continues to plead before God, revealing how much he needs God and how His faith is in God and God alone to deliver him. ○ **“Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. Keep me free from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge.”** (2-4)

Would You turn your ear to me; would You hear my prayer; would You come close and hear my feeble request, for I am faltering. Would You come quickly to my rescue. There are times when we feel completely helpless. Whatever we are facing is just too great and all we can do is appeal to God. We don't even know how to pray except “Lord, I need You; would You hear my prayer; would You see my distress.”

David then moves from bringing His need to the Lord, to placing His faith in God. Notice the little transition... **be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, .. lead and guide me. Keep me free from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge.”** I'm trusting You God, to be for me who I believe You to be. This is faith. This is acknowledging that no matter how big the enemy; the battle; the struggle or fight appears, and how defeated and helpless we may feel, we're trusting in God to be our place of refuge and strength; that He will lead and guide and protect us.

But David doesn't just leave it there by expressing his faith in God; he then surrenders himself to the Lord. ○

V.5-8, **“Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, Lord, my faithful God. I hate those who cling to worthless idols; as for me, I trust in the Lord. I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul. You have not given me into the hands of the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place.”**

Jesus quotes this Psalm when He hangs on the Cross. “Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit.” And He breathed His last. The ultimate expression of surrender and of trust. The Commentator Lange says, “Jesus does not surrender his life despondingly to death for destruction, but with triumphant consciousness to the Father for resurrection.” Jesus submits to the will of the Father, but willingly surrenders with a triumphant hope knowing that whatever the Father has planned is the best. This same degree of trust was also shown by Stephen in Acts 7. He too, as he was being stoned to death looked into heaven and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit, and do not hold this sin against them.” **Into your hands I commit my spirit.**

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But these are not words reserved only for those who are facing death. David too, is asking that he be delivered from his enemies and their snares, but at the same time surrendering himself to whatever God may have planned for him. He acknowledges that in the past the Lord has seen his affliction and anguish of soul, and has delivered him into a spacious place. God has been faithful in the past, and so he knows he can trust himself into God's hands for the future.

Often its not until we find ourselves in a place where we are at our wits end, feeling helpless, and wracked with worry and concern or fear, that we are almost forced into this place of surrender. I think that God desires that we might be in this place long before we are forced into it. Whatever our place in life; facing battles or not, God longs that we have a steadfast childlike faith in Him that says, “Into Your hands; into Your care; into Your plans I am trusting my whole being; I am trusting You with whatever lies ahead of me; my future is for you to control.”

When David says, **I hate those who cling to worthless idols**, He's finding another way to express that his faith is in God and God alone – never has he sought out other idols or gods. ○ **“As for me, I trust in the Lord; I am glad and I rejoice in the Lord.”** His hope is that those who might also join in this song will also agree with him and place their faith in God and God alone. For it is God who sets our feet in places of safety and security regardless of the enemy or the battle that lays before us.

He then comes back to outline the battle that lays before him, and you can see in these words why Jesus chose to quote from this Psalm as well. You can picture Jesus on the Cross saying some of these words. ○

V9-13, “Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief. My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak. Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbours and an object of dread to my closest friends - those who see me on the street flee from me. I am forgotten as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery. For I hear many whispering, “Terror on every side!” They conspire against me and plot to take my life.”

These are desperate times that David faces. He's feeling overwhelmed, tired; like he's had enough and just wanted to quit. He's feeling alone and rejected; unsupported and discarded. The kingdom was surrounded by hostile neighbours, and there were constant difficulties within, and demands constantly placed upon him.

Both Jesus and David found themselves in places where they were under attack from other people. And no matter what stage of life we may be in, we are often under the control of others. When we're young, older people make the important decisions for us. In mid life we may find ourselves under others authority or directions. As older folk, we may be being directed by our own children. And we may feel that we have no say. Right through life we can be under others control.

Like Jesus, and like David, can we surrender ourselves into the LORD's hands, and if need be, appeal to the mercy of our Lord? In a similar way to Job, David describes his afflictions and they come upon him in physical, emotional, social, and spiritual ways. And he says, “be merciful to me O LORD.” Don't give to me what I deserve as sinful a man as I am.

Unlike David, when we appeal to the Lord for help and assistance, we often feel that we don't deserve the troubles that we're facing. And as sinners living within a sinful world we often feel that as followers of Jesus that we somehow should be exempt for the troubles of the world, forgetting that we are still sinners, living in a sin filled world. But David begins in the place of asking for God's mercy. Mercy is not receiving what we deserve.

And so, when troubles come our way; why shouldn't they? Why should we be exempt from trouble? And the only place we can surrender to is to the mercy of God. “Please be merciful to me LORD, for I am in distress, but would you deliver me from that which I deserve.”

Only You can do that God, show mercy, and so I trust myself into Your hands. ○

V. 14-16, “But I trust in you, Lord; I say, “You are my God.” My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me. Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love.”

No matter whether he received mercy or not, no matter how great David's troubles were, he declared that he was going to trust in his God. Although he understood well the troubles that he was facing, he was not going to dwell on them, nor allow them to continue to overwhelm him. He knew that God was so much greater than his troubles – in fact God held him and his times in his hands. It was God who was in control and he was going to trust God, and accordingly asked God to look favourably upon him.

In a way, David was saying in this Psalm, "I will carry my cross." Are we prepared to carry our cross? No matter what you may be facing do you truly believe that God is in control? Or is He only in control if things are going well? Do you believe that God is good? That God is much greater than whatever you're facing? Do you believe that God can and does look upon you with favour? David then goes on with the rest of the Psalm to express his personal praise for the Lord and calls for others to join him in their praise too.

○ And so, although we are moving toward Christmas, a time of great celebration, the reality is that we all face struggles and some of you are in the midst of some very real and big battles right now. Christmas itself can be a struggle for some, but can I encourage you to surrender yourselves, your situation; your fears and anxieties; your futures into the Lord's hands. Into your hands Lord, I commit my spirit, for my times are in your hands. Regardless of whatever I face; regardless of whatever the result, I will trust You!

Song: Hymn 457 All to Jesus