

Thanks and Praise Psalm 30

Thanksgiving – it's a time to count our blessings. This time of year we especially give thanks for the abundance and variety of food we'll enjoy at our Thursday feasts, but I think we all know we have many more reasons to give thanks – for the family and friends around us, for warm clothes and houses and beds, for health and wealth beyond the wildest dreams of most people around the world, and many of our neighbors as well.

But the danger in counting our blessings lies in verse 6 – it's easy for us in times of prosperity to think it will always be that way. It's also easy when things are going well for us to take the credit for the good times, to become proud of our hard work or our prudence.

I don't know if we Americans are in so much danger of this kind of complacency this year. After all, we have economic growth slow enough to be mistaken for a recession, especially in places like this. The instability of our financial markets is only exceeded by the level of political unrest around the world. Terrorist attacks on three continents in two weeks – in the capitals of Lebanon, France and Mali – make it plain that security and even life itself can never be taken for granted.

No, we know the truth of verse 7 all too well – in the good times, it is God Who makes our mountains stand strong, but when He hides His face, we are troubled. God is the One Who brings prosperity, and that means He is just as capable of withdrawing His favor as well. He's the One Who gave our farmers such bountiful harvests last year, and the One Who sent the drought this past summer. In recent times it has become obvious to us that prosperity, and even life itself is fleeting – after all, how many funerals have we attended since last Thanksgiving?

But having such a perspective doesn't mean we are out of spiritual danger. For if we admit, as Job did, that the Lord gives and the Lord takes away, it would be easy for many of us in difficult times to give in to disillusionment, to despair and to bitterness, coming to the false conclusion that things never will get better, or perhaps even that God doesn't care about us at all.

But David didn't do that, did he? For when he was troubled and dismayed in verse 7, what did he do? Verse 8 says that he cried out to God. In other words, in his time of trouble, he didn't turn away from God, but toward God in prayer. He sought a solution from the One Who he had already confessed in verse 7 had made his mountain stand strong, the One Who has the power to fix his problems, and ours as well.

But how did David pray? Well, verses 9 and 10 have a lot to tell us. Now, verse 10 is familiar enough, and indeed provides the outline for many of our own prayers. When David says, "Hear, O Lord," he reminds us that he is praying to a person, albeit a divine One – for the word "Lord" is a translation of God's covenant name, "Yahweh," the name by which He is known to His people. David is thus reminding us that God is not some

insubstantial, impersonal force, but is capable of hearing the prayers of His people. Verse 10 thus reminds us about the nature of our God.

But it also tells us something about His character. For He is not only a personal God, who hears our prayers – He is also merciful to answer our prayers in a way that is good for us. Because of the truths we find in verse 10, even in our times of greatest difficulty we can pray to our God with confidence.

Yes, verse 10 is clear enough. But what about verse 9? For here we find David giving God another reason to answer his prayers. He says that the reason he wants to live is not so that he would receive a blessing, but so that God would. He wants to live so that he can go on praising God.

In other words, his prayer for help is not exclusively self-centered. Instead, it is also God-centered. Even in his time of greatest need, David is expressing a desire that God would receive glory and honor. And when the crisis is finally over, in verse 12 David says that he has been delivered not so that he can enjoy life, but so that he can praise God. He will not be silent, but will give God thanks forever.

Well, how about us? Sure, we're ready enough to pray the prayer of verse 10, but what about verse 9? Do we really want God to save us from our problems so that we can give Him praise and glory? Or do we just want to feel better? And if so, what does that say about our relationship with God? Is our praise and thanksgiving conditional on us getting what we want? Or do we really love God no matter what?

We should. After all, even in times like these, times of uncertainty and even of suffering, we are all richly blessed. Like David, we have many reasons to give God our thanks and praise. No matter what is going on in our lives, we still have many reasons to give God the glory He deserves.

For why does David praise God? At the beginning of the psalm, we learn that God has helped him in the past. Verse 1 tells us that God has saved him from enemies. Verse 2 says that God has saved him from sickness or injury. Verse 3 goes so far as to say that God saved him from all-but-certain death – and for a battle-tested warrior like David, that was no poetic exaggeration.

So, how about us? No matter how troubled we may be right now, during this Thanksgiving season, how many of us can testify to God's deliverance of us and our loved ones in the past? I'm sure if we were to go around the room, giving God's praise for the mercies He has shown to us, we would be here well into the evening.

And what a joyful time that would be! David uses beautiful poetic imagery to express the joy of this sort of deliverance in verse 11: "You have turned for me my mourning into dancing. You have loosed my sackcloth" – a rough material people wore to express their grief and sorrow – "and have dressed me with gladness." We see another beautiful description of God's mercy in verse 5: "For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the

morning.” Surely during this Thanksgiving season, we have many reasons to put on robes of gladness and shout for joy before the Lord as we recall the many ways He has delivered us in the past!

But verse 5 also reminds us of another reason we have to praise God, even during difficult times. For even when His deliverance has not yet come, we must remember that our sufferings are only temporary. Yes, we may weep now. Yes, the way may seem dark now. But the morning is coming, and with it the joy of God’s deliverance. Even if times are tough now, isn’t that another reason to praise God? Isn’t that another reason to give Him thanks?

But there’s something else we can learn from verse 5: sometimes our sufferings spring from God’s anger. That means that sometimes the problems in our lives come as a result of our own sin. And we all know that too, don’t we? If we can all testify to the many ways God has brought deliverance into our lives, haven’t we all experienced, in one way or another, the negative consequences of many of the poor choices we’ve made?

Yes, God’s anger is real enough. But why would that be a reason for us to praise God? Why would that be a reason to give Him our thanks?

Well, think about it. What if God never displayed His anger at our sin? What if He let us go on living just the way we wanted to? What if He never let us experience the negative fallout from our bad choices? Would we ever repent, turning away from our sin and self? Would we ever have a reason to turn back to God?

No, the anger that God shows at our sin is often the means He uses to bring us back to the right way, to the way of those whom David calls “saints” or “godly ones” in verse 4. And however much it may hurt at the time, as our repentance brings us more and more into line with God’s own holiness, isn’t our suffering also a reason to give God our thanks and praise?

And because our sufferings often bring us more into line with God’s truth, God’s faithfulness, David praises God for that truth in verse 9. The word he uses is a rich one, including the ideas that God is steadfast, reliable, and faithful. And when you think about it, God’s truth may in fact be the best of all reasons for us to give God our thanks and praise.

For at the end of the day, our own faithfulness, our own attempts at holiness don’t save us, do they? We are saved because God is truthful, because God keeps His promises. God promised Eve that one of her descendants would one day crush the head of the serpent, even though He would be wounded in the process. God promised Abraham that in his seed, by one of his descendants, all the families of the earth would be blessed. God promised David that one of his descendants would sit on his throne forever. We’ll take a closer look at these promises next week as we begin a study of Matthew’s account of the coming of Christ.

Because in Jesus Christ God fulfilled all those promises. And because God was faithful, those who trust in Christ will receive all those blessings, and so many more. In Christ, we have a King Who rules and reigns not just over us, but over everything in Heaven and Earth, and without whose permission nothing can happen to us or our loved ones. In Christ, we have the inheritance not just of the small area west of the Jordan River, but of the whole earth. And most importantly, we share in the triumph Jesus experienced over sin and death, as we are joined to His cross and His empty tomb by faith. And because God is truthful, because God always keeps His promises, we can have full assurance of our salvation. We can be confident that God will accept the sacrifice of Christ offered on behalf of all who trust in Him.

And it is a life based on this assurance, a life lived in fellowship with this faithful God that is the firmest foundation for our praise and thanksgiving. For that is the sort of life that will inevitably be filled with shouts of joy in the morning, a life confident of His favor for a lifetime, a life that has cast off the sackcloth of grief in favor of gladness, a life that has given up mourning for dancing.