**Praise for being kept from the pit** 22/10/23 dkm

Read: Psalm 30, Luke 17:11f

Text: Psalm 30

Psalms: 122,37:7-11, 121, 72:17-19

Hezekiah was king of Israel sometime after David, the writer of this psalm. Like David, he did what was right in the sight of the Lord. One day Hezekiah got sick and the prophet told him his sickness would lead to his death. Hezekiah wept bitterly and prayed earnestly. The Lord heard his prayer and gave him fifteen more years to live. He graciously gave Hezekiah a sign from heaven. Hezekiah’s response to God’s mercy was similar to that of David here in Psalm 30 (Isa 38). Thinking he was about to die, David cried to the Lord and was healed (30:2).

This psalm is a psalm of thanksgiving and praise in response to the Lords’ mercy, although the title says it is a song at the dedication of the house of David. Was this the palace David built for himself, or the temple that he prepared to build but which his son Solomon built? We cannot be sure, but as a vibrant and majestic song of praise it was probably sung on many occasions. Apparently the Jews still sing this psalm at the feast of Hanukkah. We will mediate on this psalm under three subheadings: ‘Kept from the grave’, ‘Confession and cry to the Lord’, and, ‘Celebration before the Lord’.

**1. Kept from the grave**

This psalm is a song of joyful and jubilant praise to the Lord. The focus throughout is on the Lord, with no less than six cries of, ‘O, Lord’. This praise or extolling of the Lord arises because the Lord heard David’s cry and saved him from the grave. David thought he was going to die. He was afraid of going ‘down to the pit’, to the grave or Sheol (30:3). He uses this vivid expression of going down to the pit again in verse 9, and indeed in other psalms. It is obvious that our dead body will be put in the grave, but for David there was a sense of darkness, spiritual darkness, in this term ‘pit’, as there is in the term ‘Sheol’. Psalm 49:15 speaks of God ‘redeeming my soul from the power of the grave’ but still there was a fear of being cut off from the land of the living. David will later argue that he cannot praise God from the grave (30:9).

The Lord in his mercy healed David from whatever sickness he had (30:2). He lifted him up from what he thought was his death bed. The Lord brought his soul or life up from the grave or Sheol, the place of the dead in Hebrew thought and language (30:2). David was personally pleased and thankful to be healed and still alive. But he also thought of his witness as God’s servant, and indeed as king of Israel. He wanted to keep serving and praising the Lord, as just mentioned.

David was also concerned that his enemies, and God’s enemies, would gloat over him if he died (30:1). To us it seems terrible to gloat over a person’s death but wicked people have no such qualms. These enemies were probably taunting David as he lay sick and near death, telling him that his God had forgotten him, or had no power to heal him. Death was seen as God’s judgment, which it is when we remember that we are born in sin and also commit sin. This is why death came into the world. ‘The wages of sin is death’, but as we know, and as David knew, ‘The gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord’ (Rom 6:23). David did not speak as the apostle Paul does in Philippians saying, ‘For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain’ (Phil 1:21), but he did speak of his life being in God’s hands, of God’s power to deliver him from death in this time of sickness.

People in David’s day, like some today, thought that sickness was God’s hand of punishment upon them for their sin- which it may be, but not necessarily (see Job 1 and John 9:3). In verse 5 David speaks of God’s anger, presumably anger towards his sin resulting in his sickness. So his healing was not only a message of mercy or covenant love from the Lord, but a message of forgiveness. In anger the Lord turned his face away (30:7) and David suffered, but his anger was just for a moment, or at least it seemed but for a moment (30:5).

Do you remember the last time you were sick and maybe thought you were going to die? The days, and especially the nights, were long as you lay on your sick bed, but it was probably only a few days, days that you have now forgotten? I pause to remember the time I was unable to sleep because of a very painful rash all over my body- it was just a year ago, but now, like David, I rejoice ‘in the morning’, giving praise and thanks to the Lord for his healing mercies.

David reminds us that God’s ‘favour is for life’ (30:5). In terms of eternity our suffering in this world is but for a moment. Paul writes, ‘Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory’ (2Cor 4:17). Joy or rejoicing in the morning ultimately refers to waking up in the presence of the Lord, waking up in heaven where there is no more pain or crying or sorrow or death (Rev 21:4). David speaks of weeping enduring for a night or visiting us briefly. Weeping will give way to rejoicing in the morning, to singing praise to the Lord.

David calls upon others to join him in giving thanks to the Lord and praising his holy name (30:4). He did not attribute his healing to personal strength or good medicine. The Lord healed him, so he gave thanks and praise to the Lord. Is this how you respond to the Lord’s healing mercies? It is not wrong to thank skilled and dedicated doctors and nurses, but remember, all praise and glory belongs to the Lord. Too many people, even Christians, are like the nine of the ten lepers that Jesus healed (Luke 17:11-19).

**2. Confession and cry to the Lord**

David admits to feeling self-sufficient and secure in his prosperity; in fact, this is what the word ‘prosperity’ means (30:6). If we have everything we need in terms of shelter, clothes, and food, we have sufficient. We may have some ‘luxuries ‘also but the term prosperity has the sense of trusting in ourselves and our possessions. David proudly said, ‘I shall never be shaken’ (30:6). He was like most people around us, and maybe like us if we have not repented of such pride and self- sufficiency. We must be looking to the Lord as a servant looks to his master. We had a house servant in India whom we are still helping; helping her children and now grandchildren get an education. Remember, the kingdom of God is not a federation of little kings and queens; it is a family of poor and helpless individuals looking to and depending upon the King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you think you are standing firm and tall in your own strength or riches, you are heading for a fall (1Cor 10:12). The only firm and secure rock to stand on is the Lord himself. This is what David realised after the Lord delivered him from death. When the Lord ‘hid his face’ from David troubles came into his life. He fought to overcome these troubles in his own strength but thankfully realised, before it was too late, that the Lord provided the only firm footing for his life. All the good things he enjoyed, including good health, was because of the grace and power of the Lord (30:7).

‘I cried out to you, O Lord’ admits David (30:8). He reminds us, and himself, that he was close to death, to going ‘down to the pit’ (30:9). David’s confession and plea for mercy is now accompanied by a rather bold claim; David declares that his death will be no profit to the Lord but will in fact result in less praise being given to the Lord (30:9). Do you see this as a bold claim? Have you ever made such a claim? It does make sense when you think about it, providing you are regularly and openly praising the Lord. It is a bit like Abraham pleading with the Lord not to destroy Sodom where his nephew Lot lived among wicked people (Gen 18). It was bold but it was based on his knowledge of God’s justice. David’s boldness was based on the covenant the Lord had made with him. He knew God’s holiness, his justice and his mercy.

David loved to be in the temple praising the Lord with the rest of God’s people. David knew God had ordained praise from him and all his people. So as one who praised God in song and in prayer, David reasoned that if he was dead God would not receive such praise. The lesson and challenge to you is this, would the Lord miss the praise you give to his holy name? Will your death make a big difference to the worship and witness of this church? If this question seems a bit blunt, it follows from David’s reasoning before the Lord here in this psalm.

The Lord heard David crying to him for mercy, and for the Lord to be his helper or strength (30:10). Has the Lord heard such cries from you? When? David had received healing mercies and was praising the Lord with his people. Here in God’s house is the place to give thanks to the Lord and praise him. Are you joyfully shouting praises to the Lord from your heart? If not, how will those around you know that you belong to the Lord and are glad to be in his presence? When we were told by the authorities not to sing we kept singing, even with masks over our faces. When my throat is sore and I am told not to sing, I cannot stop myself from singing his praises!

**3. Celebration before the Lord**

The dedication of the temple or palace, like that of a new home or church, is a joyous occasion, a time to sing and even dance before the Lord. This psalm is one of thanksgiving and praise to the Lord for healing mercies, for being lifted up from the sick bed in victory over gloating enemies. But it seems to have become a psalm and song of thanksgiving and praise for any and every occasion.

David began by extoling and praising the Lord, and calling the saints or holy ones to join him. The Lord had turned his weeping into joy, his mourning into dancing. The Jews put on sackcloth and covered themselves with ashes when in mourning. David dispensed with his sackcloth and put on clothes of gladness, in a figurative sense at this time. The Lord clothed him with gladness. It was like having his heart washed clean of sin. This is how David the poet expressed the Lord’s forgiveness of his sin in Psalm 51:7, and how John also describes the Lord’s forgiveness in Revelation 1:5- ‘To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood’.

Greater than gold or silver, and greater than healing of the body, is the healing of the soul, the washing away of sin and becoming a new creation in Christ Jesus (2Cor 5:17). I hope you remember to thank and praise the Lord for healing mercies, but above all that you remember the Lord for saving you from sin and death. Jesus gave a special meal, that we call the Lord’s Supper, for us to remember him and his precious blood, shed for the forgiveness of our sin.

Let us be praising the Lord from the depths of our being whenever we can, for our great salvation in the blood of Jesus Christ. If you are still in your sin, heading towards death and hell, you have every reason to mourn, but if you have confessed your sin and received forgiveness in the blood of Jesus Christ you have every reason to sing and dance before the Lord. Do not remain silent like the nine lepers healed by Jesus, but sing with all your might for all your days, ‘O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto you forever’.