

PRAISING THE LORD

Psalm 34:1-10

These remarkable verses contain David's song of trust and praise. Reviewing the circumstances under which these verses were written, we recall that David had allowed the fear of Saul to get into his heart. When the fear of an enemy is in one's heart, he soon changes his behavior. Because the fear of Saul was in his heart, David fled into the land of the Philistines and took refuge, not with God, but with Achish the king of Gath. Some of the people soon recognized him, whom they considered their deadly enemy, and they said to Achish, "Do you know whom you have in your court? That man there who is seeking your friendship and taking refuge with you is none other than David of whom the women sang, 'Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.' He is a very dangerous man to have in the court."

Not only did David fear Saul, but he was also afraid of King Achish, the man with whom he had taken refuge from Saul, so he feigned madness. He would have been as good as dead had he not acted the part of a crazy man. Probably out of superstition, for many ancient people looked upon a madman as a person who should not be molested, the king told David to depart. Immediately David went to his place of concealment, which was the cave of Adullam. In that cave, surrounded by his four hundred loyal subjects who were also in distress, in debt and in discontentment, David was bent upon having a praise service.

David boldly asserted his determination to sound forth praises to God Who had so graciously delivered and wonderfully blessed him. He resolved that nothing would stop him from letting others know what marvelous things the Lord had done for him. With him the giving of thanks was to be a fixed habit. Every day was to be a day of thanksgiving and praise. He dedicated his whole being to the one task of praising God. We certainly admire and honor David because he dedicated himself to such a worthy task. One is at his best when he is praising God. It does something to him. David said, "I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth."

What David proposed to do was certainly right, but it is often difficult to "bless the Lord at all times." It is easy to sing a song of praise in the day of prosperity, but it is often difficult to do so in the night of adversity.

We can learn this lesson of continually praising God from the birds also. With each recurring dawn they sing. If the sky is clear, they sing as the stars go down and the radiance of the rising sun is spread over land and sea. If the sky is dark, they sing their songs, remembering the days of brightest glow. Far better than the birds in teaching the lesson of constant trust is the follower of Christ who, from morning through evening, is praising God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Writing in the latter half of the seventeenth century, Thomas Ken voiced for all Christians the most satisfying single statement of praise to the Lord which is found outside the Bible:

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

David was not grateful to God because of any goodness or greatness which he saw in himself. He boasted, but he did not boast of his own achievements. We do not like boasting that is born of self-importance. Such boasting is an evidence of bad taste. It is a mark of conceit. It is thoroughly offensive. But not so is the boasting of the joyous singer who exclaimed, "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord." I wish that our church membership, as well as that of the rest of our Lord's churches, was composed of such boasters. Such boasters do not offend, but they delight and bless.

After his beautiful solo of praise, the joy of the Psalmist was so intense that he felt a genuine hunger to have others join him in praising the Lord. Yearning for fellowship in worshipful praise with those of like mind, David challenged God's people with the words, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together." God's praises always sound best in concert. The praise that lifts its voice in solitude is beautiful, but it is far more beautiful when heard with the praises of one's fellow-Christians. If we know the joys of salvation, how can we refuse to join with other joyous souls in singing praises to our wonderful Saviour and precious Lord?

Let us magnify His name as we think of His forgiveness of our sins. To me, the greatest hymn in Christian literature is "When I Survey The Wondrous Cross" by Isaac Watts. As I stood one day in Westminster Abbey and looked at the plaque honoring Watts, I thanked God for the message which he gave the world:

"When I survey the wondrous cross," etc.
"Forbid it, Lord! that I should boast," etc.
"See, from His head, His hands, His feet," etc.
"Were the whole realm of nature mine," etc.

In another great hymn of praise Watts wrote:

"Thus might I hide my blushing face
While His dear cross appears;
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness,
And melt mine eyes to tears."

Every redeemer sinner should seek to magnify the name of the Lord. He should also strive to get every fellow-Christian to join in this praise. "Let us exalt His name together."

David was always ready and glad to tell of that hour when God brought deliverance and joy to him. Any child of God who willingly and sincerely testifies to the Lord's deliverance will always have some interested listeners. Why should any speaker apologize when he relates the story of God's deliverance? The word of personal testimony is powerful.

Verse four reveals something of the depths to which David had fallen, his helpless condition, his misery, his earnest prayer, and then his marvelous deliverance from fear. In his darkest hour he cried out to God in faith, thrust forth his trembling hand into the darkness, and there he found that God gripped it with His own strong hand. What a glorious sensation came to him when he realized that God was there! He must have been a happy man when God delivered him from all his fears. Although he mentioned his fears, he did not tell us of what he was afraid. He may have been afraid of the loss of his health, his wealth, his usefulness, or of some loved one.

Fear is man's number one enemy. What a multitude of fears people have! Among them are the following: the fear of sickness, the fear of criticism, the fear of the consequences of wrongdoing, the fear of losing a job, the fear of failure, the fear of poverty, the fear of bereavement, the fear of old age with its fading enthusiasms, failing strength, certain loneliness or possible dependence on others, and the fear of death. Fear is an unnerving quality. One cannot do anything great in life until he has trampled it beneath his feet.

David was not content to enjoy God's blessings alone. He wanted to share them with his friends, and rightly so. In verse six he tells us of one who was overwhelmed and bowed down under an avalanche of trouble. It was more than he could bear. He did exactly what he should have done under the circumstances. He cried unto the Lord. His doing so indicated the fact that he sincerely believed that God both could and would deliver him. The happy

result was that he was delivered from his troubles. David had various friends whose faces were darkened by constant worry or deep sorrow, but to them a marvelous change had come. So with gratitude he sang, "They looked unto Him and became radiant." Radiant faces are sorely needed in our gloomy world today. Such faces result from Christ being enthroned in the heart.

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full into His wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace."

God has promised to defend those who fear, love, obey and serve Him. Their enemies may be numerous and mighty, but their Defender is mightier still. Deliverance by the Lord is as certain as His promises. He will never fail us in any hour of need. In spite of his environment and the fact that he had known suffering and heartache, David had come to realize two things for certain, namely, that God was good and that He was near. He had discovered that God was always adequate for every need. God had never failed him. However, he did not ask us merely to take his word for these things, although he had gone to great lengths to give both his personal testimony and that of his friends who had found so much joy and so many rich blessings. He suggested the final test that must eventually convince anyone who will honestly submit to it. He appealed to us to put the Lord to the test of experience and let Him demonstrate His saving and keeping power. All who have ever tried the Lord have found Him sufficient for every need.

"Come, every soul by sin oppressed,
There's mercy with the Lord,
And He will surely give you rest
By trusting in His Word.

"For Jesus shed His precious blood,
Rich blessings to bestow;
Plunge now into the crimson flood
That washes white as snow.

"Yes, Jesus is the Truth, the Way,
That leads you into rest;
Believe in Him without delay,
And you are fully blest.

"Come, then, and join this holy band,
And on to glory go,
To dwell in that celestial land,
Where joys immortal flow.

"Only trust Him, only trust Him,
Only trust Him now;
He will save you, He will save you,
He will save you now."