

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

Psalm 34:1-10

These remarkable verses contain David's song of trust in and praise of God. Reviewing the circumstances under which these verses were written, we recall that David had allowed the fear of Saul to get into his heart. The fear of an enemy soon changes a person's behavior. Because the fear of Saul was in his heart, David fled into the land of the Philistines and took refuge with Achish the king of Gath.

David found that he was unwelcome among the Philistines. Apparently he did not have any place that would afford him cordial hospitality. He was as a man without a country, even though he had already been anointed king. Doubtless he reasoned, "They do not want me at home, and they do not want me abroad. What shall I do?" Have you ever felt like that? We sometimes use the expression, "Like a fish out of water." Haven't you felt like that at times, as though your environment was far from congenial, and you had actually come to the end of the road? David was in trouble, but there wasn't anything unusual about that. "Man that is born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7).

All of us have troubles. Some of our troubles are inherent in us. We do not have to look for them because we carry them about with us all of the time. In a certain church was a couple — the man a gentlemanly fellow and the lady a splendid Christian. Frequently this man would get out of sorts and "climb the miff tree." There would be something wrong, and nobody would know what was the matter with him. One day their pastor said to this lady, "Mrs. So-and-So, you know how I value your fellowship, but if your husband is not happy here, how would it be if you were to take your letters and go to some church where he would be happy?" She said, "Pastor, your predecessor gave me that advice again and again. He said, 'If you are not happy here why don't you go where you will be?'" Then she added, "We didn't for the reason I at least knew that we should take our miserable selves with us."

Some people carry their troubles about with them. They are always in trouble because trouble is always in them. Have you read the story of the Quaker who, standing on the crest of a hill, was approached by a stranger with a pack on his back? Looking down on a village in the valley he said to the Quaker, "What sort of people are living down there in the valley?" "Well," said the Quaker, "what sort of people did thee leave behind thee?" "They were dreadful people. That is why I left them, I wanted to get away from them." "Aha," said the Quaker, "And thee will find exactly the same kind of people down there." Of course he would. He was a man who carried his troubles with him.

Fear of King Achish caused David to feign madness and act like a crazy man. Like many others in ancient times, the king did not think that a madman should be molested, so he told David to depart. Immediately David went and concealed himself in the cave of Adullam. In that cave, surrounded by his four hundred loyal subjects who were also in distress, David decided to have a service of praise and thanksgiving.

David boldly asserted his determination to sound forth praises to God Who had so graciously delivered him and wonderfully blessed him. He resolved that nothing would keep him from letting others know what marvelous things the Lord had done for him. With him the giving of thanks was going to be a fixed habit. Every day thereafter was going to be one of thanksgiving and praise. We certainly admire and honor him because he thus 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 boasted, but not 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 was the boasting of the joyous singer who exclaimed, "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord." I wish that our church membership was composed of such boasters. They 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.

David's gratitude was born out of his own personal experience. David had his fears. His statement in verse four, "I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears," reveals something of the depths to which David had fallen, his helpless condition, his misery, his earnest prayer, and then his marvelous deliverance by the Lord 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 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, David 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 worst 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. One cannot do anything great in life until he has trampled this unnerving quality 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.