

The Song You Are Meant to Sing
Psalm 30
Cornerstone Community Church
October 8, 2023

We are all writing songs to God. What is the opposite of a song of praise? Cursing God? Or silence? I don't want to be too technical about it, but I do want you to consider what you do in your life when it comes to God. Are we singing songs of praise? If so, why? Are we singing songs that curse God? If so, why? Or are you simply silent before God? If so, why? Everyday, you are writing and singing a song to God. What you write and how you sing will depend on how you see him.

David has a song for us in Psalm 30. And it is a song he wants us to sing with him. He is inviting us and teaching us how to worship. What does this Psalm, then, teach us about worship?

1. Worship is rejoicing in God's kindness (1-3)

Psalm 30 begins by David making his intentions known. He aims to worship and declare how great God is. "I will extol you, O LORD," he declares in the opening of verse one. But this isn't worship that he merely conjures up. Worship is not conjuring up feelings, but a response to experiencing who God is through his works. David is saying that he will praise God because he has experienced who God is through his kind acts. He says, "God has drawn me up," and says to God, "you have healed me. O LORD, you have brought up my soul from Sheol; you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit." In short, these verses indicate that David was sick but that God brought about his recovery. And from the expressions used by David, this was no small illness. Verse 3 shows us that he essentially counted himself as dead—he was restored from those who go down into the pit of death. His enemies, those eager to jump on the power vacuum that the death of the king would bring, were preparing to rejoice over him.

But then, as verse 2 tells us, David cried out to God for help and God healed him.

This gracious act of God is the well spring of David's worship of God. Now, we will look a little more into the elements of this illness in the following verses, but in these first three verses I want us to note something important: you cannot conjure up the worship of God out of your own heart. Looking within is not how you worship God. Looking at God is how you worship God. In fact, praise is always a reaction to something and not a forced response.

A few years ago I remember being at an event in which the speaker came to the stage and said, "let's get excited! Everyone scream!" It got very loud, but it was really just a show. Worship is not loudness or happy yells for the sake of loudness and yelling. It is a response to something of real substance. Worship, then, is connecting to the substance of praise. It is connecting with God.

Consider yourself in light of this fact. Do you remain unmoved by God? Do you see everyone else around you rejoicing in singing, prayer, and meditation on God, but you yourself feel indifferent? The problem rests not with God. The problem is in your own heart. A blind man remains unimpressed in front of the Grand Canyon. A leprosy man feels no pain when his fingers fall off. And a man with a calloused heart feels nothing before God.

What you need is instruction in how to encounter and understand God, and that is exactly what David leads us to next.

2. Worship instructs others so they may worship (4-5)

If you look at the introduction of Psalm 30, you will see that this is "a Psalm of David," but it is for the "Dedication of the Temple." David's experience, then, is not just for David. He views it as instructive for the people. In order for those cold to God to worship, they need someone who has experienced God to lead them to God, that's what David is doing in verse 4. You need someone who knows God to correct your thoughts and feelings about God, and that's what David does in verse 5. How does David do this?

First, David instructs the people as to what they are to do and why: those who belong to the holy one, the saints, should praise the holy one *because he makes them who they are*. David is worshiping because God has acted on his behalf and now he is reminding Israel that God has acted on their behalf to make them his holy and set apart people.

Second, David clears a hurdle to worship: the experience of God's anger is unpleasant and it often disturbs worship. People will experience some hardship, loss, or suffering and immediately think, "God obviously doesn't care about me." But, as David will point out in verses 6-10, God's anger isn't pointless. For those who belong to him, God's anger is not an end. It is a means—a righteous means—to experience his favor. So David exhorts us to worship in the midst of difficulty, remembering that God's righteous anger is short lived for the believer, but his favor is for life. Your hardship may last for the night, but it will not last forever. Joy comes in the morning.

The story of Horatio Spafford helps us understand both of these elements. Spafford endured great hardship and tragedy in his mortal life. In 1871, his son died of pneumonia. After this, he nearly lost all of his investments in Chicago in the Great Chicago fire. In 1873, his wife and four daughters were in a shipwreck when traveling to Europe and all four of his daughters perished. Can you imagine the fear, pain, and dread that filled his heart? Yet, when traveling to Europe to be with his grieving wife, Horatio Spafford penned these lines when over the spot that his daughters perished:

“When Peace like a river attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come
Let this blest assurance control
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate
And hath shed his own blood for my soul.

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part, but the whole
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, o my soul

Do you see what Spafford was doing? He called his own heart to worship by using the reality of the gospel to remind himself of who God really is and what God has done. God is not out to destroy those who are his. His favor will endure. While sorrow may come, it will not stay. Joy comes in the morning and ultimately in the return of Christ.

Trust God and Wait

Whatever trial you face, let the voice of God call you to worship by reminding you of who God truly is. It is ignorance of God or our sinful thoughts about God that kills our worship. We need, then, the word and we need each other to see God rightly. We need to stand with each other in our trials to remind each other of exactly what we read earlier in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” By this reminder we are playing the role of those who help others join us in our worship.

Christ himself is the one who helps us see and know God rightly. In Jesus the fullness of deity dwells. So when we doubt the goodness of God, turn to Jesus to see who God is. Remember what God in Christ has done for those in Christ. Romans 8:32 makes this plain. If God would give his Son for us, why would he withhold ultimate resurrection hope from us? No trial or hardship is a mark of God's permanent displeasure. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

3. Worship is the object of God's discipline (6-10)

In verse 6, David tells us how he learned this lesson of discipline leading to worship. We see that David's sickness, to which he referred to in verse 2, was caused by God's discipline. David felt secure because his kingdom was prosperous. He surveyed his situation, felt safe and thought that he could not be moved from his present situation. Note what he trusts: his prosperity, not God's promise. He didn't think he was safe because God promised him security. He thought he was safe because his kingdom was materially strong. Ultimately, David was trusting himself.

He looks out at the people of his kingdom and, seeing death, thinks, "that can't touch me." Instead of trusting the unchangeable God, David trusts himself as being the unchangeable one. Only God will remain unmoved and we will only remain unmoved as we are secure in God. That's what verse 7 is telling us. In reality, as verse 7a tells us, David was only secure because of God's favor. So what does God do? He withdraws his security by letting him fall ill. This is what David means by saying that the Lord "hid" his face.

How do you know if you are in this state of trusting yourself as David is trusting in himself here? Let me just give you two tells: You play with sin and you do not pray.

Playing with sin is saying out loud to others because you know it is right, "sin is dangerous. Sin always brings friends with it and does not stay alone—other sin follows." But then you give lame excuses, "Maybe that would be a problem for someone else, but I can handle it." You say, "I just did that one time, I don't really need to ask for help. I'm not as susceptible as other people." You probably don't say any of those things with your words, but your actions do. Playing with sin and treating it lightly is saying, "I shall never be moved."

Prayer-lessness contradicts any profession that you are a dependent creature because you are living as if you do not need God. You can say all day long to others, "I need God." But getting on your knees to pray is the way you say to God, "I need you." When you do not pray, you are walking into your day saying, "I shall never be moved."

Something Worse Than Discipline

If God was not steadfast in his love for you, Christian, he would let you continue on unmoved. But for those who have him as Father, he lovingly disciplines when we do such things. This is what happened to David. In verse 7b, "you hid your face; I was dismayed." God was all of his security. God was really the reason he remained unmoved. So when God removed his protection, the mighty David got sick. It wasn't a battle that brought him low. It wasn't a plot against his life. It was illness. Sickness is one of the ways that we, as finite creatures, quickly come to know how small and weak we are.

And this sickness was not God's hatred. It was God's love. David was forgetting God, trusting himself, and thus moving away from the source of life and joy. So God graciously showed him what was real so that David would live in the reality of God's care and love.

The Two Truths We Need in Order to Understand the Goodness of God's Discipline

Does that seem strange to you? How is David's sickness God's affectionate care? How is bringing David near to death loving? It won't make sense until you absorb into your heart two things that the Bible assumes here:

First, you are a creature made to worship God. This discipline won't appear loving to you if you think of God as an equal or even just as a being slightly further along than yourself. You are not made for yourself. You do not belong to yourself. You belong and were made for God.

Second, saying that this is a loving act won't make sense to you if you are a materialist or a functional materialist. Here's what I mean: if you think that all that exists is merely in the here and now, then sickness and near death are two of the worst things that can happen to you. If death is the end, then such discipline is cruelty. But it isn't. Your life is but a breath and you are not a mere mortal. You have a beginning, yes, but you will have no end. There is an eternal destiny before you and it is only good if you are with God because you were made to find your all in him!

In light of these two realities, we should beg God to do whatever it takes to keep us with him. Suffering wakes us up to plead with God about his promises that we will find our all in him. This is what suffering does for David, look at verses 8-10: he pleads with God based on his promise to him.

In verse 8 we see that David turns solely to the Lord as a creature dependent on him. Then in verse 9 David asks, "What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit? Will dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?" This is more than David trying to say to God, "Spare me because you need worshippers!" That wouldn't work. God could raise worshippers from rocks. So what is David's plea? He is saying that he is uniquely placed by God himself to proclaim God's faithfulness. God had made a promise to David in 2 Kings 7 that he would establish David's kingdom and from him give him an heir that would sit on his throne. David is saying, then, "God you made a promise to me. Be faithful to it! Give me the joy of declaring your faithfulness." In fear, David pled and trusted God's promise. And, as verse 10 shows us, he did not see this as a right. He solely appealed to God's mercy: "Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me!" Discipline moved David from trusting his prosperity to pleading and trusting God's promise.

Like David, we have a promise that we need to point to in our times of pain and loss. We trust the promise of Jesus that he will not leave us as orphans. We trust his promise that in him we will be raised from the dead if we die. We may die, but we plead faithfulness to the promise of the resurrection. And we do so not as people saying we have a claim on God. We do so pointing not to ourselves, but solely to his mercy.

The point is this: there is never anything in ourselves that we can point to that will obligate God to do something that he does not want to do. When we speak God's promises to him, we are not twisting his arm. We are setting our hearts as dependent on his fullness. Our hearts are being reordered. When we point to his promises, we are moving from people that forget his promises to people that say, "I want you to be who you have shown yourself to be in your promises." We are pointing to his goodness and asking to humbly enter into his goodness as needy people.

This is living as we really are: dependent creatures. What happens when we, as dependent creatures, throw ourselves into the infinite and independent God? We are satisfied with his fullness. That is what worship is, which leads us to our last point...

4. Worship is satisfaction in God (11-12).

Worship is satisfaction with God and satisfaction in God. God changes us so that we may rejoice in him eternally. See how this is laid out in verses 11-12.

In verse 11 we see that God changes our state. We move from dead to alive, hopeless to hopeful, lost to found, blind to seeing, empty to full, stingy to generous, envious to

grateful, thieving to giving, lying to truth telling, ashamed to secure, mourning to joyful, clothed with sorrow to clothed in gladness.

And this happens for us in Christ. We undergo an absolute reversal in who we are because of God's work. Some of these changes are sudden. Some over time. But the fact is undeniable: he changes us first by changing our destiny from one of death to life. And by changing our destiny he changes our disposition to one of worship. That's what we see in verse 12.

He changes our destiny so that all my glory—that is, all that I am—may go toward praising God. Now don't get this wrong. Giving praise is not losing, but gaining. Praise is gain for you when you live as God's creature, but it seems like a loss when you are living as God's competitor. As a competitor, when you are called to worship, you feel like you are losing something by giving something. But as a creature, when you are called to worship, you are gaining God himself as you give him your empty heart. And when you live as God's competitor, then the call to live for his glory is a call to lose and miss out. But you are not God's competitor. You are God's creature and you are made for the purpose of reveling in his magnitude. But you default to being God's competitor because you have banished yourself from enjoying his glory through sin. But here is the good news: God is so glorious, so good, so beautiful, that he sent his Son so that his goodness would swallow whole your evil; his beauty would wipe away your filth; his glory would burn away your shame; and his love would extinguish your hate.

Salvation is not merely being excused of sin. It is being brought into communion with God where we continually experience his fullness. The desire to continually praise that is spoken of in verse 12 comes from eternally enjoying the fullness of God.

Praise, then, is not giving to God something he lacks. It is giving the proper response to who he is. It is a joyful recognition of his splendor. God saves not because he lacks. He saves because he is perfectly full. This is exactly what is stated in Ephesians 2:1-7. Listen to what we are told of God in that passage,

"And you were dead in the trespassers and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and

raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

This is God's goal in saving you: not that he may get from you something he lacks, but that he may eternally show his great glory by lavishing you with the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward you in Christ Jesus.

What Song Are You Singing?

The suffering that refines and disciplines you now is turning your heart to sing the song of praise that you will one day never be weary of singing.

What material—what losses, hardships, and sorrows—has God given you in order to tune your heart to sing his grace?

You are prone to wander, don't you feel it? You are prone to leave the God you love. So in your suffering and sorrow, don't turn from God. Don't question his goodness. Instead, turn to him and say, "here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it. Seal it for thy courts above."

And one day, you will sing songs about your sufferings because God was good to you in them. Your greatest sufferings and your greatest failures will become the material for your greatest praise. Does that sound unbelievable? Sometimes the material seems impossible to use for a song of praise. Just imagine telling Peter on the day he denied Christ, pointing him to the cross and saying, "Someday we will sing songs of praise about that Cross. How impossible that would sound to him. But now, what do we sing? "Forbid it Lord, that I should boast, save in the death of Christ my God"! If God can raise Jesus from the dead, can he not raise praise from your sorrow and loss? By trusting him now you will join in the song that all of his saints are meant to sing.