

SOME CURES FROM THE PSALMS

4. "A Cure for Doubt"

Psalm 73

August 2, 2015

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I began this summer sermon series back in June with some "cures" for fear, worry and depression. I said then that I might be overstating it a little to say there are "cures" in the Psalms for these maladies. However, I wanted to get your attention and encourage you to challenge yourself and ask, "Why do I allow these things to bother me so?" It was also to draw our attention to the book of Psalms and remind you about the powerful words found there. I suggested on the first Sunday in June that you might think of reading through the Psalms this summer. If you started back in June reading two Psalms a day you should be about two thirds of your way through the book of Psalms and ready to finish by the end of summer.

Doubt is our word today. "A Cure for Doubt." Do you have some doubts? About what you may ask? I know some people who doubt just about everything. They doubt if the earth is round, if Alan Shepherd actually stepped onto the lunar service, if everyday existence is real? They doubt if anyone really cares about them. Teenagers doubt just about everything. Have our parents and teachers been square with us about how life really works? Thomas doubted Jesus had reappeared to his disciples after his crucifixion. His name has become synonymous with the word doubt in some minds. Others doubt whether or not there is justice in the world.

Speaking of justice, a certain defense lawyer was defending a client in a murder case. The trial had not gone well and there was strong evidence indicating his client was guilty. Resorting to a trick, aka Perry Mason, he began his summation to the jury by saying, "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury I have a surprise for you as he looked at his watch, within one minute, the person presumed dead in this case will walk into the this courtroom." The lawyer looks at the door. The jurors somewhat stunned, all look on eagerly. A minute passes and nothing happens.

Finally the lawyer says, "Actually I made up that statement. But you all looked with anticipation, therefore there is reasonable doubt in your minds whether anyone was killed and I insist that you return a verdict of 'not guilty.'" The jury, clearly confused, retired to deliberate. A few minutes later they returned with a verdict of "guilty." The lawyer asked, "How could you find him guilty you had reasonable doubt?" The foreman looked at the lawyer and said, "We all looked at the door thinking maybe the deceased will come walking through it, but your client never looked."

Some of us doubt our very existence and doubt the existence of God. I too have my doubts from time to time. When the world just doesn't seem to be going along the way I think it should I have my doubts as to who really is in charge. Why does God allow bad things to happen? Either "we have a powerful God who doesn't care or we have a caring God who is not that powerful" is how some have said it.

The Psalmist is having his doubts as well. He is asking one of the deep theological questions of any age? “Why do evil people get away with it?” To him God doesn’t seem to notice the evil that they do or how they live their lives. And so he has his doubts about the goodness or the justice of God. However, God has a clear answer for him. He doesn’t have an intellectual answer that only a few can comprehend, God does not want only intellectuals to believe in him. Confidence in God’s love is meant for everyone including children and uneducated people of the world.

The Psalm begins with what most people believe about God. “If you are good, God will care for you and love you.” A parent says to a child, “If you are good, God will love you.” Then the Psalmist says, “I can’t buy that. The world doesn’t seem to operate that way. When I look around the world it seems as though God doesn’t care what the wicked do or how they live their lives. I almost lost what faith I had trying to figure it all out. Wicked people seem to have the best of everything.”

The Psalmist is not alone among biblical characters who had their doubts. Abraham had his doubts that God was going to give him and Sarah a child. He took matters into his own hands and took the handmaiden of Sarah, Hagar, and they had a child Ishmael whom Abraham assumed would be his only child. God ask, “Why did you doubt me?” Moses had his doubts out in the wilderness and wondered aloud “Why did you bring these people out here into the wilderness to die?” David doubted whether God was with him or was going to make him king after Saul through twenty years of guerilla warfare ... “how long must I wait, O Lord.” We are in good company with our doubts.

The psalmist was about to lose his faith; he felt his grip upon God was breaking; and in a sour bit of temper he was ready to jettison the whole idea of God. But then in what seems like a spur of the moment decision, when he felt his feet were almost gone, when his steps had slipped, he went into the sanctuary of God and then he understood. He made a transfer of perspectives. And now he saw the world and life in God’s context, not his own. In the sanctuary he put himself where God could get at him and have some chance with him. Then he could face Monday as a different person because he had been straightened out spiritually, and the good life was no longer a jumble of senseless things going at it blind, but God-centered and God-controlled.

The Psalmist said in verses 16 & 17 (our text of the morning), “when I tried to understand the whys of the way of the world, ‘it seemed to be a wearisome task, until I went up into the sanctuary of the Lord; then I perceived their end.’” He obvious saw something that calmed his doubts.

I think the first thing he learned in the sanctuary was—it is what a person is and not what a person has that is of primary concern. We read constantly that the gulf between the rich and the not so rich is growing greater every day. We want to make sure that we are not left behind and there is pressure to be on the correct side of the collecting of things. We live in a nation where collecting things is a priority. The more you have the more highly esteemed you are. It’s hard not to get caught up in the culture of gathering more and more. Then we enter the sanctuary of the Lord and relearn that Jesus of Nazareth brought us a life not measured in what we have collected not in stocks and investments or in second and third houses for our pleasure but that life is measured by a quality of spirit.

This is the spiritual essences that gives people character that claims our energy that grips our imagination and soul. That is what we find in the sanctuary of the Lord. A new dimension of life opens before us and we go out into the hurly-burly of Athens, not saying what belongs to me, but in the witness to a new life, we declare that we “belong to Christ.” Instead of working on the fix-up job at home on Saturday morning, you go over to the Habitat for Humanity build on Carter St. and swing a hammer or lift a wall there for a few hours. Instead of going out to lunch this Wednesday you go to First Baptist kitchen and serve food to the hungry in the “Our Daily Bread” program. Instead of reading the Sunday paper at 9:00 on Sunday morning before coming to church you drive down to church and serve with our children’s ministry in Sunday school for an hour. Our world is no longer our own possession; our joy is that we are possessed by God. The psalmist realized this when he said, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you.” (Ps. 73:25)

Then the psalmist discovered as he was leaving the sanctuary to enter the workaday world that God was holding him by his right hand. Let that sink in for a moment. Have you ever left this place and felt that God was holding you by your right hand? That is feeling the presence of God in your life—that is the moment when God leaves this place with you to help you live your life. That is inviting God into your life so that the other six days are not living two lives one for yourself and selfish interest during the week and the other day only for God on God’s day. You and I come to worship to receive and then to give, and the climax of it all is when we give ourselves. And if we give ourselves to God’s purpose in worship, there is no telling how far this action will go after church if our lives out in the world go hand in hand with God’s purpose and will.

In the little village of Blantyre, Scotland, a common laborer by the name of David Hogg taught a small children’s Sunday school class with a devotion that was a wonder to all who knew him. Out of that class David Livingstone went to Africa to live out his life going through the jungle from village to village, witnessing to the Christian faith. Sometime later another missionary came to one of those villages to tell the story of the ministry of Jesus Christ, and as he talked of the Master, one old lady said, “That man was here.” A little village in northern Scotland, a young boy in church, a consecrated Sunday school teacher, and after they left the sanctuary of the Lord you get the footprints of Christ in and out of a muddy village in Africa!

Livingstone wrote in his journal near the end of his life, “I place no value on anything I have or possess, except in relation to the kingdom of Christ. If anything will advance the interests of the kingdom, it shall be given away or kept, only as by giving or keeping it shall promote the glory of Him to whom I owe all my hopes in time and eternity.” (Neill, A History of Christian Mission, p. 315.)

“Trying to understand life was a wearisome task,” said the psalmist, “until I entered the sanctuary of my Lord, then I understood.”