

Service Transcript

16th August 2020

Leader: Steve Lineham

Speaker: Rev Powney

Intercessory Prayers: Rev Mark Reid

O burning mountain, O chosen sun,
O perfect moon, O fathomless well,
O unattainable height, O clearness beyond measure,
O wisdom without end, O mercy without limit,
O strength beyond resistance, O crown of all majesty,
the humblest you created sings your praise.

Mechtild of Magdeburg (1207-1294)

Item on the International Justice Mission and on work amongst Turkish speaker in London.

Prayer thank you great God that the pandemic and lockdown are no barrier to your working – we thank you for all that you are doing to touch people's hearts and minds and bring them to you. Thank you that you are sovereign, nothing can stop or prevent your touch, your working in the world. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Steve has already prayed about situations relating to coronavirus, so in our intercessory prayers this morning, let's think about a couple of international and national issues we need to lift before the Lord. First of all the country of Lebanon where Beirut was recently rocked by a huge explosion caused by illegally stored volatile chemicals in a warehouse at the port. Let's pray shall we?

Father, we pray for Beirut and the country of Lebanon, as the country tries to pick itself up from this awful tragedy. We pray for the families of those killed and healing for those who were injured. We pray too for political peace in this divided country. We pray that people may come together to deal with this tragedy. May the resources come internationally to help with the recovery operation and to take pressure off stretched medical facilities. May your church be an example in these days. Thank you for so many stories of Christians spared awful injury and death. Be with your people in Lebanon we pray. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

We think too this week of the tragic derailment in Scotland where three died and six others were injured.

Lord, our hearts go out to the families of the three people killed and also to those who were injured in this awful accident. Be with them we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's come closer to home and think about our local Baptist Association. We are grateful for being able to use two sermons from Beth Powney and we think of the work of all our RMs in this unusual time.

Father, thank you for the fellowship we have with other churches in our Association and for our Regional Ministers, Beth, Graeme and Nick, and the leadership and service they bring to it. We thank you for Beth's ministry these last two weeks and for the challenge of her sermons. We pray for the work of our regional Ministers in these unusual times, particularly where they are trying to help churches struggling because of the pandemic. Give them wisdom we pray. We also bring before

you this week's Prayer Focus Church, Brentwood Baptist Church. We pray for their Diaconate as they bear the dual challenges of finding a new Pastor as well as trying to get church building re-opened after lockdown. Give them wisdom and clarity to see your will and way for that church. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Finally, we think of our church and its ministry. We plan to re-open the building for Sunday services on 13th September, with Brian's home group using the building earlier than that. The first Sunday will be a special London City Mission service. Let's pray too for other activities where re-opening is more distant, including Walton Parish Nursing activities. Finally we also need to pray for those currently isolated or not being able to participate in what activities we have, and also the family of Marian Usher whose funeral will be at Seven Hills on 28th August. To pray for all these, we are going to have an opportunity to bring them before the Lord in silent prayer, as well as anyone or anything else. I'll put on some quiet music to focus our minds.

Father, thank you for the opportunity you have given us as Your church to minister here in Felixstowe and hopefully soon to be doing that at Maidstone Road again. May we bring glory to Jesus in all our ministry and mission. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Reading: Psalm 30 (NIV)

- ¹I will exalt you, LORD,
 for you lifted me out of the depths
 and did not let my enemies gloat over me.
- ²LORD my God, I called to you for help,
 and you healed me.
- ³You, LORD, brought me up from the realm of the dead;
 you spared me from going down to the pit.
- ⁴Sing the praises of the LORD, you his faithful people;
 praise his holy name.
- ⁵For his anger lasts only a moment,
 but his favour lasts a lifetime;
weeping may stay for the night,
 but rejoicing comes in the morning.
- ⁶When I felt secure, I said,
 “I will never be shaken.”
- ⁷LORD, when you favoured me,
 you made my royal mountain stand firm;
but when you hid your face,
 I was dismayed.
- ⁸To you, LORD, I called;
 to the Lord I cried for mercy:
- ⁹“What is gained if I am silenced,
 if I go down to the pit?
Will the dust praise you?
 Will it proclaim your faithfulness?
- ¹⁰Hear, LORD, and be merciful to me;
 LORD, be my help.”
- ¹¹You turned my wailing into dancing;
 you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,

¹²that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent.
LORD my God, I will praise you forever.

Sermon “I will give thanks forever”

This Psalm begins and ends with praise, it is a Psalm of thanksgiving. It is not at all clear when it was written or why, the title given to it could have been added at a later date. It was probably written by David, but is not one that can be tied into a particular date or time.

What becomes clear as you read it is that the Psalmist experienced terrible sickness that brought him to the edge of life, instead of feeling abandoned he gives testimony to God's goodness in answering his prayer and healing him. The theme of this Psalm is what does it mean ‘to give thanks forever’ in all things?

To take a closer look then.

The beginning and the end form bookends of praise vs1 ‘will exalt you’ and vs 12 ‘I will give you thanks forever’. This is an example of a life lived in the praise of a living God, but coming from a life that had also experienced personal hardship and pain.

We will all know something about the sinking of the Titanic in 1912. The stories of the survivors show that there were those who viewed their life as a waste and were full of guilt at their survival and others who chose to live every day as if it was their last and to give all they could to those around them.

This Psalm is written by someone who has also experienced deep pain, but realised he needed to surrender to God and the outflowing of that is profound life-filled thanks.

The Psalm can divide into 5 Sections and we will look at each of these:

1-3 – healed of an illness

4-5 – calls God’s people to join him in praise

6-7 - returns to the illness to explain why he believed it happened – describes his pride and self-sufficiency

8-10 – a plea to God for mercy and healing

11-12 - praise following the healing.

Verses 1-3

This Psalm tells of someone with a close relationship with God and who is keen to share his experience with us. What is it that he wants to share? It is that he has been seriously ill and he has been healed.

The Lord reached down from the pit and rescued him. The language here literally means that God let down a bucket and drew it up from the depths. What a wonderful picture of Almighty God on high coming down to rescue us, no matter what our state and condition. What does that remind you of? Well I hope it reminds you of Jesus leaving heaven to come and save us. God did not wait for us to be whole, complete or sorted before sending Jesus: ‘While we were still sinners Christ died for us’ Paul writes in Romans (Rom 5:8). It is like a mighty hand reaching down and picking us up, or imagine those survivors of the Titanic as they saw the rescue vessels coming towards them.

Verses 4-5

The Psalmist is keen for us to join in with him in his praises of the Lord.

"Sing the praises of the LORD, you his faithful people; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favour lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."

He uses contrasting language in verses 4-5 to emphasise the change that he has experienced:

Anger to favour

Moment to lifetime

Weeping to rejoicing

Night to morning

God's restoration experience is like the morning light after a night time of weeping, the light being a metaphor for healing and restoration. Do we know of this kind of change in our lives? Have you been rescued or healed such that you want to give thanks forever?

The Psalmist knows that this change did not result from his own efforts, he was incapable of changing his lot "I will exalt you, LORD, for you lifted me out of the depths" (1-3)

It is through the favour of the Lord alone that he is restored (vs 11 & 12 You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, 12 that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. LORD my God, I will give thanks forever.)

Verses 6-7

But the crux of the issue or the central point of the Psalm is the thing that the Psalmist believes has caused his illness or separation from God and this is found in the middle of the Psalm vs 6-7.

He recognises that he had been full of pride and self-dependence, vs 6 'I said in my prosperity I shall never be moved, 'I was a strong mountain'. He may have acknowledged that it was God who had got him there, but when he is in his prosperity he forgets all that God has done for him and exalts in his own abilities and position.

In this position he was alienated from God and unable to receive from him. He was full of pride and self-sufficiency. In the ancient near east, which is the cultural context of the writer, it was common to associate all illness with sin or as a punishment. Obviously we have to be careful about making this correlation today, now that we have more understanding of modern medicine, although we can certainly recognise the connection between things like stress and physical symptoms which follow. But to the writer the connection between his self-reliance and distance from God and his illness is very clear.

This part of the Psalm where the writer let's go of his pride and self-sufficiency reminds me of an old legend, which may or may not be true, about how to catch a monkey. The story goes that if you take a jar with a narrow opening and place some nuts or fruit in the jar and place it in a secure place, then a monkey will come long and put his hand into the jar to get the food. However once his hand is in the jar the only way to bring his hand out again, is to let go of the food. It is said that the monkey won't do this and therefore he starves. You see all the time the monkey holds onto the food he could not receive the food.

I think this can be such a strong image for us and how we often are with God, when he is challenging us to let go of something in order to grow deeper with him or to move on in life.

Verses 8-10

The Psalmist shows us that he had to let go of his pride, and dependence on himself and call out to the Lord vs8. 8 To you, LORD, I called; to the Lord I cried for mercy:

At the bottom of the pit you will let go of it all, you will no longer hold on to what is ultimately meaningless, but you hold onto the one who makes life ultimately meaningful. Going back to the Titanic, there was pride in what was considered to be the best ship in the world, but in the end, in order to be saved, the people on the Titanic had to let go of all they possessed, including pride of their amazing ship.

This is what the Psalmist has experienced and it is this he wants to share with us, for it is through this letting go that he has received his healing and this is the reason that he will give thanks forever.

We have to let go in order to let God in and in order to receive from him.

I think in the life of our churches at the moment it is a good time to ask the question:

What have we been forced to let go of? and What should we not be picking up again?

What has changed for your church during lockdown? Some of these things will make you sad, but others perhaps you should never pick them up again

What is God saying to you as a church about what you may still be holding on to which is actually preventing God from releasing you and moving you on?

The same question applies to us as individual too of course, what should we let go of?

Poor attitudes, unforgiveness, things have always been done this way? All of these things can keep our hand stuck in the jar and prevent God from working in our lives, so you will never know the spirit of thankfulness that the Psalmist gives testimony to.

Sometimes God is asking us to let go of our self-reliance, this may be our wealth, our comfort, or it may be our solutions or our abilities. Is God trying to say something new to our churches and could we possibly be like the monkey desperately trying to hold onto the food which we think we need, when God has something greater and better in mind for us, our church and our communities?

Actually letting go is fundamentally releasing, as this Psalm goes on to show us

Verses 11-12

When we come to a place of recognising that God is the all sufficient one then we will understand what it means to 'Give thanks forever.' In this phrase at the end of the Psalm, we discover the depth of the relationship that the Psalmist has with God:

Vs 11&12.

'You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
12 that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever.'

Looking again at verse 11 the Psalmist's heart of praise comes from a place of knowing complete dependence and peace on God for all things of his life and therefore he gives thanks forever
Those who were rescued from the Titanic were forever grateful, are we forever grateful for what God has done in our lives? Or are we more like the starving monkey with our hand stuck in the jar?

We need to let go of that which is far from sufficient for feeding and sustaining us both as individuals and a church and to turn to the one who is all sufficient, ever loving and totally faithfully in his covenant to his people, that is God. He has the very best future in mind for us.

It's our choice, thankfulness and sufficiency in God or being stuck and clinging on to the best of what was. What will you choose?

For Reflection & Discussion

Read Psalm 30

1. What do we learn of the readiness of God to forgive and restore when we sin, go through a difficult time of doubt or falling away from Him? (3-4) Have we ever had an experience of this in our lives? How does this verse help us as we think of family and friends who don't know the Lord or who have fallen away?
2. The psalm is about healing from an illness. The wording suggests the psalmist saw the illness as a product of God's anger. Is there a connection between sin and sickness? Or sickness and punishment?
3. What does the passage tell us of God's willingness to forgive and restore? Have you any experiences of God's healing or of restoration in your life? How did that affect your spiritual life afterwards?
4. Beth talks about the way in which we often have to let go of things we think important in order to move on in our spiritual lives. In the context of the situation right now as far as coronavirus and lockdown is concerned, is God trying to show us what sorts of things may God be asking us to let go of? How might the closing verses on dependence on God help us as we reflect on this?