

Real Humility in A Proud World

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[0 : 0 0] Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to our lunchtime. When's the lunchtime talk? Well, my name is Paul Brennan. I'm one of the associate ministers here at the church and we'll be speaking today and we're looking at Psalm 30.

So if you have your Bible there and please turn up Psalm 30 and you'll find it on page 461. And as you're turning there, I'm going to pray and then we'll read this together. So let's pray.

Our Father God, you are the great restorer, the great redeemer. And you are rich in mercy and abounding in steadfast love and how we need to hear these truths again and again.

All we most need in life and in death is found only in you. So humble us this afternoon. Keep us from prideful self-reliance and instead come to know and love real dependence in you for all the things that we need in this life.

Humble us so that we would know true and everlasting joy and sing your praises with our lips and live lives that honor you before others. So help us, Lord, for we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

[1 : 3 5] Okay, let's read Psalm 30. A Psalm of David, a song at the dedication of the temple. I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up and have not let my foes rejoice over me.

O Lord, my God, I cried to you for help and you have healed me. O Lord, you have brought up my soul from shale. You restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.

Sing praises to the Lord, O Lord, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment and his favour is for a lifetime.

Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning. As for me, I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved.

By your favor, O Lord, you made my mountain stand strong. You hid your face. I was dismayed.

[2 : 5 5] To you, O Lord, I cry. And to the Lord, I plead for mercy. What profit is there in my death if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you?

Will it tell of your faithfulness? Hear, O Lord, and be merciful to me. O Lord, be my helper. You have turned for me my mourning into dancing.

You have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O Lord, my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

Amen. Well, I'm sure you've known that moment, as I have, when you're exposed, when the veneer of having everything under control and together is shattered, and the reality of your life is laid bare.

You're faced, as David was in this psalm, with your own mortality. Now, maybe for you, that was, or is, a serious, debilitating illness.

[4 : 11] Cancer, a stroke, something undiagnosed. It may be a life-threatening situation. You're in danger. And many of you have no doubt faced those moments when you've had to come to terms with your own limits.

Your health has been taken from you. Maybe it's a work situation where everything has fallen apart. Your job, your very livelihood, is in danger. Or maybe your relationship has crumbled, and everything else feels like it's unraveling before your eyes.

It's never a good moment, is it? You hit rock bottom. You perhaps thought you had it all together. You thought you could manage life on your own.

Now, of course, you never say it that way, but isn't that the reality so often? We think that we can do it. We get on with life, coping on our own, making decisions, doing life, without much thought for the Lord, or for the fact that every breath we draw is because of His sustaining.

But something happens to expose the reality. You realize you never did have it all together. You never really were managing life. You were never in control of things. It's all fallen apart.

[5 : 28] And the Lord seems absent. And it's a moment like this, a moment of utter despair that lies at the heart of our psalm this morning. Just look down there at verses 6 and 7.

As for me, I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved. By your favor, O Lord, you made my mountain stand strong. You hid your face. I was dismayed.

And then he cries to the Lord for his very life. Verses 8 and 9. A moment when David's imagined security in his own prosperity is suddenly stripped away, and he's left exposed, disheartened, dismayed, knocked for six.

He's pleading to the Lord for mercy. Now, perhaps that's surprising. That first read-through, this psalm is packed full of praise, isn't it? Loads of praise to the Lord.

Look at the start. Look at how it finishes. Overflowing praise. And yet, if we stopped at that, we'd be missing the very bite of the psalm.

[6 : 31] If we merely observed the fact of praise in this psalm, we'd be missing the answer to the why question. Why is David so exuberant in praise? Well, the psalm gives us the reason.

David is so full of praise because the Lord has graciously restored him from the very depths of despair. So we'll trace David's journey from dismay to praise.

So our first point, and we're beginning in the middle, verses 6 and 7. We see here that David's prideful self-reliance is exposed. Central here to the whole psalm is David's complacency.

That's the source of his despair. That is where the bite of this psalm is to be felt. So what's going on? We'll look down there at verse 6. David is recounting a time when he enjoyed great prosperity.

He looks back on a time when life was really on a roll. Life was good. So much that he was able to say these words, I shall never be moved. And yet, in a few short, sharp lines of poetry, David descends from prosperity to dismay.

[7 : 46] Look at the end of verse 7. Three lines, and his whole world is turned upside down. What's happened? Well, it says there, end of verse 7, the Lord has hidden his face from David.

And David fears for his very life. You see that in verse 9. And why has the Lord done this? Well, we see in the start of verse 6 there that David has become self-reliant, self-confident, complacent.

Reliant not on the Lord. There's no mention of the Lord in verse 6, is there? As for me, he says, as for me, I, said in my prosperity, I, shall not be moved.

David's reliance is on himself, not the Lord. And he's been blinded, seduced by his own prosperity. Someone said it this way, prosperity can mask a fatal complacency which sudden trouble exposes like nothing else can.

Have you ever noticed that in your own life? When sickness comes, or danger, or a life-changing situation comes along, it uncovers our complacency.

[9 : 03] It exposes our thinking that basically amounts to self-reliance. Now isn't it the case when trouble comes, people start praying. Maybe they never believe in God up to that point, but suddenly something happens and they find themselves praying, asking God for help.

Well, it's a sign of our complacency, isn't it? You see, God often seems closest when things are going well. And yet, often don't we attribute all the things that are going well to ourselves.

Don't you sometimes echo David's words in your own thoughts? As for me, in my prosperity, I shall never be moved. It's so easy, isn't it, to slip into that way of thinking and feeling.

I know I can do that so quickly. Things are going smoothly. I can think to myself, you know what? Things are good. I've got my plans in place, the pension's sorted out, insurance, that's all sorted.

I shall not be moved. But then something happens and your frailty is exposed. When we're happy, we think God's close.

[10 : 11] But that's complacent foolishness. Our circumstances do not determine how things are with the Lord. how we feel things are going does not determine how things actually are with God at all.

And we set ourselves up for a fall if we think that way. Because when things go bad, when things get tough, and they will, when things go wrong, we think God must have therefore withdrawn from us because we messed up.

Our complacency is exposed. Now, perhaps you're a believer here, and on an intellectual level, you perhaps know that your standing before God depends only on His grace and of your union with Christ.

You know that, but on an emotional level, on a functional level, day to day, perhaps you slip into operating as if God is well pleased with you because things are going well for you.

It's a very easy equation to slip into, isn't it? Things are going well, God must be happy. Are you tempted to behave or think that God draws near to us as our performance improves?

[11 : 22] Is that how we think sometimes? But when we stop for a moment, we see the reality, as David puts it there in verse 7. The reality is, it's by the Lord's favor that He's become strong, that He's enjoying prosperity.

And for you and me, that's true as well. All good things come from our Heavenly Father by His favor. But it seems that the David of verse 6 has forgotten that.

And so, with devastating brevity, we see the Lord's response to David's prideful self-reliance. You hid your face. I was dismayed.

This is the Lord's loving discipline in action. And the Lord does it to teach His child that self-reliance is utter folly and to drive him back to repentance and faith.

Perhaps you know this yourself. A humbling experience that drives you to seek the Lord afresh. Perhaps you know that experience of going through a really difficult time as the Lord teaches you that self-reliance is utter folly.

[12 : 35] And so, when hard times do come, don't waste those moments of the Lord's loving discipline. Perhaps this very afternoon you know that in one area or another of life you've been complacent.

Well, we can respond by confessing it, repenting, humbling ourselves. But perhaps your self-reliance is exposed on a smaller daily level.

Christopher Ash describes them in a recent book as pinpricks of grace. Little reminders that we are human and weak creatures after all. Perhaps it's a bad night's sleep.

Maybe it's a loss of temper. Or you catch the cold. Little reminders that we're human after all. Pinpricks of grace that ought to drive us to dependence on God.

Pinpricks of grace that shatter the illusion that we have everything under control. Well, let's not waste those moments of the Lord's discipline, hard as they might be.

[13 : 39] Perhaps he's exposing a foolish complacency. Well, that was David's experience there, verses 6 and 7. His prideful self-reliance had led only to despair.

We'll look on then to verses 8 to 10. We see here David's plea for mercy. David sees his folly. As we've seen, he experiences the despair of the Lord's turning away.

And so he does the only thing he can do in verse 8. He says, To you, O Lord, I cry. And to the Lord, I plead for mercy. All of David's imagined security has quickly evaporated.

But his real security, well, it emerges there in verse 8. He appeals to the Lord. To him, he cries for mercy. And the exact words of his plea we see there in verses 9 and 10.

What profit is there in my death if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness? Hear, O Lord. Be merciful to me.

[14 : 44] Be my helper. David knows there's nowhere else to turn to, nobody else to turn to but the Lord alone. And you and I have nowhere else and no one else to turn to either when our imagined self-security crumbles away and we're left exposed in dismay.

Whatever it is that's brought us to that point, maybe it's death itself. Your own mortality has become so clear to you what does David do?

Well, he turns to the Lord, he cries to him for mercy, for help. And so one right response to a severe illness might well be to confess to the Lord that now you see what you've always been, his frail creature who needs him to sustain your every breath.

And that's not to say that every difficulty in life, every moment of dismay is God disciplining you because of self-reliance but sometimes, sometimes that might just be the case that the Lord is wanting to shake you from your complacency, shaking you for thinking you can do it all on your own.

That might be why it's happening, perhaps. Perhaps the Lord is shaking you to bring you to the depths of despair that David experienced so that you turn to him.

[16 : 10] You turn to him in utter dependence, crying out for deliverance, crying out for restoration. And so you do what David does. You turn to the Lord crying for mercy, pleading for rescue.

You recognize you can't earn any favor. He must rescue you. And so you must turn to him in repentance and plea for mercy. Well, that's the real bite of the psalm, isn't it?

David's complacency, his prideful self-reliance is exposed. He's brought to the rock bottom and he turns to the only one he can, the Lord, and he appeals to him for mercy.

That's the bite of the psalm. But here's the balm. It's our final point. David's praise because of his restoration. We see this at the beginning and the end. And without grasping what we see in the middle there about David's reliance is being brought to the rock bottom, we miss the reason for this joyful outpouring of praise.

Without grasping the center, we miss the real emphasis. David's plea for mercy is met by the Lord's favor and restoration. That is the great source of joy for David here and for every Christian believer.

[17 : 31] He's surely right, isn't he, there in verse 5 that the Lord's anger is but for a moment. That's David's experience in verses 6 to 10.

The Lord's anger is but for a moment and his favor is for a lifetime. Or as David puts it in another way in that verse, weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

That is, weeping is just an overnight visitor. In fact, it doesn't even stay the whole night because joy comes with the morning. But of course, during the night, as I'm sure David found, that morning feels an awful long way off.

Sometimes, that diagnosis that tears away our self-reliance is one which isn't just going to disappear overnight. For the Christian, tested by terminal cancer, the night will be long.

It will be lonely and bitter at times. But even then, David's promise here is real, isn't it? Joy does come in the morning. Even if it's not till that great and wonderful morning when Christ returns, when every tear is dried, it may not be till then.

[18 : 57] Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy, joy comes with the morning. And here, in Psalm 30, the Lord graciously restores David. Just note the wonderful contrast at the end there, which speaks of this magnificent restoration.

Look there in verse 11, you have turned for me my mourning into dancing. You've loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness. And so for David, in that moment, because of the Lord's kindness, he's been taken from the scene of a funeral to the joy of a wedding.

Such is the contrast from sackcloth to gladness and dancing, from mourning to joy. And it's all been brought about by the Lord's mercy, his help.

And David's response to that wonderful favor shown by the Lord is to sing. He sings the Lord's praise. He's not silent, verse 12. And let's just notice here the purpose of all that we see here, the purpose of the Lord's discipline.

It's not limited to bringing about repentance in the life of David, that seeking the Lord for mercy, that confession of sin and turning from it. The purpose, the purpose of the Lord's discipline and his restoration here is primarily to bring praise and thanks back to the Lord.

[20 : 25] It's not primarily for our own well-being and comfort, but rather it's for the glory of the Lord. Look again at verse 11 and 12. David says, you've turned for me my mourning into dancing.

Verse 12, of that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. Oh Lord, my God, I will give thanks to you forever. And so when we are restored, we are restored in order to bring him praise.

That's the ultimate purpose, to speak of him, to give thanks to him forever. And so David's profoundly personal experience here, this being restored from the absolute depths of despair and dismay to joy beyond measure, it moves him to urge his people likewise to rejoice and praise the Lord.

That is why he's writing this psalm, so that his people will likewise join with him in praising the God he's restored him. And the Lord who restored David, he is also our Lord.

And so we can know with absolute certainty as we turn our face towards the Lord Jesus Christ in faith, we can have confidence that in Christ, God's face is turned not away from you, not away from me, but towards us, towards you.

[21 : 55] His anger, it is but for a moment joy, sorrow, comes in the morning. So for the Christian, any sorrow, painful, and necessary as it might be, that exposes a sinful complacency, it is temporary, as you turn to your Lord whose favor is unending, you can know restoration forever.

favor. So don't waste the loving discipline of the Lord when he exposes your own complacency, when you take for granted the Lord's favor, don't waste that.

Don't waste those days when the clouds feel heavy over you, when life feels like one long Glaswegian winter. It's true, isn't it, as you look back, as you look back to those days, those moments of darkness, it is those days, rather than those glorious days when the sun shines brightest, it's those days when we learn most and grow most in our dependence on the Lord, isn't it?

It's true for me, I'm sure it's true for you. And so it may be that when you're brought low, it may be the Lord is pointing out to you, turn to me, and so will you turn to him.

His anger, it is but for a moment, his favour is for a lifetime. The writer to the Hebrews puts it this way, he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

[23 : 32] For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Our God is gracious and he delights to restore his people. Let me pray. Let me pray. Our Father God, forgive us for those times where we are proud and self-reliant, thinking that we have it all together, Lord, in your mercy, would you expose those attitudes so that we would turn again to you, realising that every breath we breathe is because of you.

And so may we know the great joy of being your restored people, and may we respond with overflowing praise, giving thanks to you forever.

Help us, Lord, we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.