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Psalms of Life, VII

From Mourning to Dancing

Psalm 30

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Let's imagine that you own a business and you meet someone who is basically living in abject poverty, has no real marketable skills and is really down and out, and you decide to take on this person. So you bring this person into your business, you help this person go to college, you train him and pour all your knowledge into him. Little by little this person evolves to the point where you make him a full partner in your business. Everything seems to be going well and you're prospering, until one day he informs you that he is leaving. He's breaking off to start his own business—the exact same business. As a matter of fact, for about the last three months he's been working on employees and customers and he's basically taking everything with him. He's taking your secrets, your knowledge, your customers, your employees. He's taking it all! You're just stunned that this is how he has rewarded your favor.

Well, the next several months for you are extremely difficult. You have to sell off your property. You have to downsize your house. It's hard. You've lost your customers and you've lost your employees. In the meantime you see this person flourishing. He buys a brand new home and everything just seems to be going great. You struggle with the emotions and the feelings of all this.

Time passes and you start to get back on your feet. You start hearing these little rumors that things are not so well with this other business. Little by little, it seems like things start to come unraveled for him. He starts to lose customers. He starts to lose employees. Pretty soon the whole thing comes crashing down. He goes bankrupt—he loses it all. At that moment, what would be in your heart? Not what should be, but what would be? Now imagine that this person comes to you in despair and asks if he can once again be your business partner. Now, I want you to think about what you would be feeling in your heart at that moment. I just want you to hold onto that thought of what you'd be feeling for a minute, because I'm going to come back to it.

What we are going to talk about again is our view of God. Psalm 30 really isn't about something you need to go out and do. It's about something you need to *believe*—something you need to *know*. We've talked oftentimes about the fact that there is nothing more important in our Christian walk than our view of God, because it affects everything else. The problem is oftentimes we maintain a view of God that just simply isn't correct.

I think the process kind of goes like this. If you talk to a very young child, what you often find is that a child has a very pure and honest faith in God. We would call it “childlike faith.” The child just simply believes that God is good, that God tells the truth, that God is faithful. And I think the reason for that is because a child really hasn't experienced a lot of the negative stuff in life. The child really has never been burned...never really been betrayed...never really been used...never really experienced those heartaches we experience in our relationships with people.

But as that child begins to grow up, that child begins to experience hurt. Somebody betrays him. Somebody takes advantage of him. And little by little that child learns that people can't always be trusted, people aren't always good, and people are very selfish. All of that not only affects how that child looks at the people around him, but that begins to then

affect his ability to trust God, because now he's experienced some things in this life that makes it harder to trust God. It becomes harder to believe that God is good. It becomes harder to believe a lot of the things that came so easily those early years. The reality is, many of us formulate our view of God based on our experiences. And we often project experiences onto God, and we struggle.

There are several different ways of assessing that or looking at that. For example, this weekend there will be thousands upon thousands of people in our community who not only will not attend, but they *wouldn't* attend church. They will keep church at a distance. They do not want anything to do with God or His church, and the reason is because they hold views of God that simply are not correct. Maybe they had a neighbor that was a Christian who burned them. Maybe they had a business partner that was a Christian who treated them unfairly. Maybe they once were in a church and they were hurt very deeply. Maybe some Christian leader took advantage of them. Whatever it was, they are at a point where their view of God is all messed up and they really want nothing to do with it.

Now the problem isn't with God. The problem is with their *view of God*. There may be some of you who would say that just for you to walk in these doors and sit in church is a major step. But if you were honest, you would still say you're holding God at a distance, because you hold some views of God that simply aren't true.

I recently heard someone say that the thing that keeps him from surrendering fully to God is the belief that, *If I did that, God would take one of my children*. You can hear in that statement that there's a problem with that person's view of God. That person's view of God is, *God is waiting to take advantage of me. God is waiting to pounce on me. God is going to do to me what people in this world have done to me*. When we have that view of God, we hold back.

Be honest in your heart of hearts: can you say that you have fully surrendered absolutely everything in your life to God? Have you said, "God, you can have my spouse... You can have my health... You can have my children... You can have my business... You can have my money"... whatever you want to put in there—nothing held back? Now, most of us would say no. I mean, that raises the anxiety level a little bit. We understand there are things we are holding onto. I would suggest to you the reason you're holding onto those things is because you have a view of God that is not correct. There is nothing in the character of God that would cause us to hold back. But we are on this lifelong journey of trying to process our experiences in life through God's self-revelation, the Bible, and trying to continually correct what we believe about God. We are trying to arrive at a view of God that is really in alignment with who God is.

Now go back to our opening story about your business partner splitting off, taking all that from you, and then coming back and wanting to be put once again in that position of favor. The question is: How would you respond to that? The reality is, probably most of us have done that to God. And the tendency is to think God is going to respond to us the way we would respond to that person. Part of what we need to walk away from here today with is the understanding that God is not like us. He's different.

Psalm 30 is called "A Psalm of David." In the little writing under the number, the superscription which was added at a later date, it says it is "A Song at the Dedication of the House." It's very helpful, only nobody knows what that means. It was David's son that built

the temple. Was this David's house? Nobody knows what it means. Since we don't know the background, we really don't know what exactly was going on here.

One thing we do know, though, is that this psalm was used in the life of the people of Israel—the Hebrew people. It was used with some of their festivals, and one of the places where we know it was used consistently was in the celebration of Hanukah. In 165 B.C., when the temple was re-dedicated back to the Lord, this psalm was used, and it was used as part of the Hanukah celebration every year after that. Even though this is an individual psalm where David is telling his story, there is a sense in which the people of God enter into this story. It's the story about David's favor with God, how he then sinned against God and suffered the consequences of that, and how God then restored him back into favor. When the people re-dedicated the temple in 165 B.C., they understood that, *We as a people have not been faithful to our God and we've suffered the consequences of that. But once again, God has been faithful and He has restored us.*

That's what this psalm is all about. It's about seeing the character of God and how God is not like us, and how God responds to His people. This is also a very difficult psalm to outline and to organize. About the best we can do is just flow through it and understand the way it's written. David opens in verse 1:

I will extol You, O LORD, for You have lifted me up. (NASB)

That Hebrew phrase “lifted me up” is very interesting. It literally means “you have drawn me up out of the water.” We'll see a little bit farther in the psalm that David is imagining this experience in his life when he drifted away from God in this period of sin. It was like he was in the bottom of a well and he was about to die there. This Hebrew phrase really is the picture of God lowering the bucket to the bottom of the well and pulling it out, when David deserved to die.

You have not let my enemies rejoice [*we could say “gloat over me”*]. (v1b, NASB)

David was a powerful king. He had conquered the enemies around him, and his enemies hated him for it. But when they saw David going through this disease where it looked like he was going to die, they were rejoicing in that. The unrighteous love to gloat when the righteous suffer. But David said, “God, you didn't let them gloat over me. You rescued me.”

O LORD, my God, I cried to You for help, and You healed me. O LORD, You have brought up my soul from Sheol; You have kept me alive, that I would not go down to the pit. (v. 2-3, NASB)

“Sheol” in the Psalms is just a reference to the grave. We talked about the fact that one of the things you look for in Hebrew poetry, specifically in the Psalms, is parallelism—which means one line immediately follows the other. There are different kinds of parallelism. This would be what's called synonymous parallelism, which means the two lines say the exact same thing. So, in verse 3 you have:

O LORD, you have brought up my soul from Sheol [*which is the grave*];
You have kept me alive, that I would not go down to the pit.

Those two lines are saying the same thing. “Pit” is really synonymous with “Sheol”—which is just a way of saying David was on the threshold of death. It was all but over for David. He knows that, and he is crying out for God to rescue him.

Sing praise to the LORD, you His godly ones, and give thanks to His holy name. (v. 4, NASB)

In verse 4, it's interesting to notice this is an individual psalm and David knows that the people are going to read this. So he calls the people to celebrate God as he unfolds this picture of who God is.

Verse 5 is, in my opinion, the heartbeat of this psalm. As a matter of fact, when we walk out these doors, this is the verse we really need to understand to bring correction to our view of God. David says:

For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning. (v. 5, NASB)

We talked last week from Hebrews 12 about the reality that God doesn't discipline us out of His anger. But that doesn't mean our sin doesn't make Him angry. Just like a parent, when my children disobey it makes me angry. But I don't want to discipline out of that. I want to discipline out of my love. My emotions aren't to punish. It's not punitive, but it is to correct.

David understands that his sin has angered God, but "His anger is but for a moment." The reality is, there is such a thing as righteous anger. God has righteous anger. But I would suggest we need to be very careful about calling *our* anger a righteous anger. Because, even though sometimes we're angry about things we should be angry about, we are so selfish and sinful that our anger is very contaminated with all kinds of selfish stuff. It's not pure and righteous like God's is. Sometimes people who have been hurt can justify their anger under the umbrella of righteous anger for weeks, months, years. And it is not a stretch to see where anger becomes bitterness and runs its course.

Some of you have been hurt deeply. Maybe it's a spouse that betrayed you—walked away. Maybe it's a parent that betrayed you and took advantage of you. If some of you were to be honest, you have been angry for years. You've been angry for years, and you can justify that under the umbrella of righteous anger. But let's face the fact that God is angry for a moment—just a *moment*. I don't think you can make the case that somehow you have been offended more deeply than God has—that somehow your standard of holiness is so far greater than his, that you have to be angry for a long time, even though He is just angry for a moment. The New Testament is pretty clear about this. It says don't let the sun go down on your anger. It says do not be angry, because you give the devil a foothold in your life. It says be angry, but do not sin.

You see, the reality is, God isn't like us. What characterizes God, even when he's been deeply offended, is that His anger is but for a moment, but His favor is forever. His favor is forever! Sometimes when people talk about the Old Testament versus the New Testament, they say, "Well, the Old Testament is the God of judgment and the New Testament is the God of grace." That isn't true at all. The Old Testament is the God of grace. When you read through the Old Testament, there are periods of judgment, just like there are in the New Testament. But the overwhelming picture of God is a God of favor and grace. Over and over and over again His people offend Him and rebel against Him. And God extends His favor and He restores them. That was the whole point of using this psalm at Hanukah—to show that once again, even though we've been unfaithful, God has restored us as a people.

God isn't desirous, when we sin, of punishing us. It isn't punitive. He just wants to correct us and get us back on track so He can extend His favor to us. Can you imagine how many times and how many ways in the last 24 hours that people in the world have offended God? It's just staggering! It's just a tidal wave of stuff. And yet, what characterizes God is not His anger, but His *favor*. It is His *grace*—because that's who He is.

Some of you have sown your wild oats. You've walked away from God and you've gone through the valley. And now you're trying to kind of claw your way back, but in your mind God looks too much like you. You have a picture of God as still this angry, vengeful God who is somehow going to make you pay before He ultimately extends favor.

That's not the God of the Bible. If you understand what you have done and if you have repented of your sin, that's what God wants. Now He wants to give you His favor. You don't have to live in the shadow of God's anger all the time. You can never be intimate with God if you think He's angry at you. But maybe you think God's angry because you're angry, and you can't imagine how God would be different from you. But He is.

Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning.
(v. 5b, NASB)

That raises this question: What was this great sin that David committed? What was his great sin that caused God to reach down and discipline him and finally bring him back to his knees in repentance, so God could again pour out His favor? We might say, "Well, it probably was his adultery before Bathsheba—that's probably what it was." No, that isn't what it was. Look at verse 6:

Now, as for me, I said in my prosperity, "I will never be moved." (NASB)

That's it right there. David in his prosperity forgot who made him prosperous and said, "I will not be moved." In other words, he said, "*I am great. I am the great king. I am the all-powerful. Nobody can move me.*" You know, the story of David is very much like our opening story. When God found David, he was just a little, obscure shepherd boy. And God took him, and for God's reasons, He put him on the throne in Israel and made him the most powerful king. In his great prosperity, David forgot who did that, and David said, "*I am great.*"

It's a picture of our redemption, isn't it? When we were lost in the muck and mire of our sin, it was God who reached down and grabbed what was a pretty disgusting thing. He washed us clean with His blood and seated us in the heavenlies as His child. But sometimes over time we forget that. And we start to think, *I made myself like this. I'm good; I'm righteous.* And we're guilty of the same kind of pride, because we're taking credit for something we didn't do.

David says in verse 7:

O LORD, by Your favor You have made my mountain to stand strong.
(NASB)

David is realizing now, in his repentance, that it was God who did this.

You hid Your face, I was dismayed. To You, O LORD, I called, and to the LORD I made supplication: "What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your faithfulness?"
(v. 7b-9, NASB)

In other words, David is not now saying, “I will not be moved.” David is pleading for his life. He remembers now he’s nothing, and God is everything. And he’s pleading for mercy.

If you were to list the sin that should be the greatest concern to the child of God, what would you put at the top of the list? What is the greatest sin in terms of offense to God? Adultery? Lying? Cheating? What would it be? I think it would be the sin of pride. Self-righteous pride. Proverbs 6:16 says:

There are six things which the LORD hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him. (NASB)

Number 1: Prideful eyes. What is it that caused Satan, Lucifer, to be cast out of heaven? It was pride: “I will be like God.” In Genesis 3 what was it that caused Adam and Eve to sin against God? It was pride: “You can be like God.”

What would really help us with this is if God would just come down to this earth and become flesh and walk among us. Who would He yell at? Who would He rebuke? Well, you know, He did do that. He sat and ate with the prostitutes...with the tax collectors...with the cheaters. But He did save His most stinging rebukes for the self-righteous religious leaders, who somewhere along the way believed they had made themselves righteous and came up with this idea that, *We’re not nearly sinners like you’re sinners. We’re good sinners; you’re bad sinners.* And they had drawn a line. Those are the ones who Jesus rebuked over and over again. Those are the ones who nailed Him on a cross.

To believe what Jesus did for us and to allow that to somehow, over the years, become a position of self-righteous pride, I believe is the greatest offense that we cause God. It’s standing before people and saying, “I did this. I’m a little sinner. You’re a big sinner.” We have completely forgotten. I know I’ve talked about this a lot in the last several months, but it just seems like God keeps laying this on my heart—that we have to really remember who we are as a people of grace. David’s sin was that he forgot *God* made him prosper. And so God took him down until David realized that David wasn’t great, but God was great.

Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me; (v. 10, NASB)

That word “gracious” connects with the word “favor” in verse 5—that’s what it means. David is not saying, “God, I deserve to be helped.” He’s not saying, “God, deliver me because I’m so good; I’m the king.” The word “grace” implies, “I don’t deserve this. I’m asking for something I don’t deserve.”

O LORD, be my helper. (v. 10, NASB)

That’s a statement of dependence, indeed. The question is: How does God respond? Does God say, “You know, I took you in off the street; I gave you everything you needed; I caused you to prosper and you betrayed me. I want nothing to do with you”? That’s not what God says at all. Verse 11:

You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness... (NASB)

I grew up in the Fundamentalist movement where we were taught that dancing is evil. David is dancing in worship celebration before God, because God has turned his mourning into dancing. That’s what God wants to do. His anger is for a moment, but his favor is forever. Once we have understood what we have done and we have repented, we have been corrected.

God has no desire to punish us and to be punitive. He wants to see us dance again—that’s what He wants. It would be like you as that business person, looking at that person who betrayed you and saying, “There’s nothing I want more than to see you once again prosperous.”

God isn’t like us. God’s different from us. And God responds in a way that is hard for us to even imagine.

This is a great imagery for understanding church discipline. It’s not punitive. It’s not to punish. It’s because our desire is ultimately to take this person who has walked away from God and to see them dance again. That’s what we want. We don’t want to punish them. We want to see them dance again. From mourning ... to dancing.

When it says “You have loosed my sackcloth” that’s actually a rather mild interpretation. It really is more the idea that “You have torn off my sackcloth.” It’s the idea that God has reached down to David in his repentance. He’s torn off these marks of sorrow and said, “Take it off. I’m going to clothe you with gladness.” Because that’s who God is. That’s what He wants. That’s what He’s all about.

That my soul may sing praise to You and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to You forever. (v. 12, NASB)

David is saying, “I can’t keep quiet!” He’s so excited about this he just can’t help himself.

You need to understand that God is not like you. God is not like me. God operates at a level that is hard for us to really even imagine. Some of you have gone through the valley; you’ve drifted away; you’ve sown your wild oats. And now you’re trying to come back. There’s a tendency to think God somehow is going to make you pay. You think that somehow you have to put forth enough penance that God is going to say, “Okay, okay—that’s enough.” But that’s not God at all. If you understand what you did that offended Him and if you’ve corrected that and said, “I don’t want to live that way” then God wants to turn your mourning to dancing. That’s all He wants. He wants to see you dance again. He wants to pour out His favor—for His anger is for a moment, but His favor is forever.

God is a God who forgives. Just because you can’t forgive doesn’t mean He can’t. Just because you can’t get over your anger doesn’t mean He can’t. Just because you carry a grudge doesn’t mean He does. God wants to set you free to dance in His presence, because you are His child.

Our Father, we are so thankful that You are not like us. Lord, we nurse our anger. We harbor our bitterness. We struggle to forgive. We carry grudges. Lord, it is hard to imagine that when we so deeply offend You, Your anger is for a moment, but Your favor is forever. What’s really in Your heart is not the desire to punish us and make us pay, but to see us dance again. Lord, I know there are many who have been struggling with how You view them because of past sin. Lord, I just pray that You would help them to understand who You really are, that they might go from mourning to dancing.
In Jesus name, Amen.