

Midweek Message

“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.”

(Psalm 42:11 ESV)

This past Sunday we spent some time looking at the Psalmist’s introspection regarding his sense of discouragement or perhaps even depression. As people who are cursed and, because of our fallenness into sin, it can be easy for many to feel down, especially in times such as these where a pandemic has disrupted our normal way of life. Many medical professionals are already experiencing mental health issues as well as being inundated with those who are seeking help. Sometimes depression can arise within us due to medical imbalances for which we might need some medical assistance. Other times this down in the dumps feeling can arise simply because of our circumstances, especially our current isolation due to this pandemic. However, even though we might fall into times of discouragement and depression, as we saw last Sunday, we can find a way out of the pit of despair when we look to the Lord who alone is our salvation and our source of help in times of anguish. So, in this short message, I’d like to share with you a few principles that I believe should help us in those times of deep personal sadness.

First, we should remember God’s passion for us. Our God is a God of unconditional, sacrificial, selfless, sustaining, eternal, love. His love is so strong, so powerful, so wonderful, that He sought us out even though we didn’t seek Him. The Apostle John tells us,

“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9,10 ESV).

Isn’t it amazing that God came to us in love even though we had no love for Him at all? The Apostle John is utterly amazed as he writes this when he recounts that truth. God’s love is so great that He initiated the restoration while we were still running away in rebellion. He came after us to win us back to Himself through His love. That’s what the incarnation is really all about. God entering time and space in the person we know as Jesus so that He could remove the barrier of sin that stood between us and our Creator. When God spoke through Jeremiah to His Old Covenant people, Israel, he said, *“I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you”* (Jeremiah 31:3 ESV). We can depend fully upon God’s love because He is faithful to love us with an everlasting love.

Second, we should remember God’s presence with us. Sometimes I think we forget that God is always close at hand and never abandons us. Moses reminded Israel of that great truth when he told them and us, *“It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed”* (Deuteronomy 31:8 ESV). At this time Israel was just about to embark on the adventure of their lives as they entered the promise land. God was telling them not to fear and never be dismayed, no matter what obstacles they might have to face, because He would go before them and always be with them. God never leaves or forsakes His people. He never abandons them such that they would have to fend for themselves. He walks with us up to the mountain tops of life and journeys with us into the darkest valleys. He’s an ever abiding presence with us regardless of what we might have to face along this journey we call life. And that’s especially true right now as we continue to move along through our current crisis. In fact, He’s working in this crisis for His glory and our good.

In those times of emotional darkness, I'm often reminded of what the Psalmist wrote when he thought about God's ever abiding presence. Let me remind you once again of what he said.

"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you" (Psalm 139:7-12 ESV).

Did you notice the wondrous claim in that passage of how our ever present God will guide us and hold us as we struggle in the difficulties of life? God knows everything about us and even everything that will happen in and around and through us. Nothing surprises Him and as such, we can take great comfort knowing that He's just a prayer away.

Finally, we should remember God's power in us. Getting up out of the dumps isn't an easy battle we can win in our own effort. The truth is, we might climb part way up to the point where we might feel somewhat better, but the real question is, how long can we maintain it? If you're anything like me, for the most part, you're up and then down and then up and then down. We can easily get discouraged to the point where we might just find ourselves in deep despair and no matter how hard we might try we simply cannot climb back up out of the pit of darkness. Listen, I don't believe we were ever meant to go it alone, striving to live in our own strength. The reason why we fail so often and fall into the pit of despair is because we think we can do it all alone. One of the things I believe God is teaching us through this pandemic is the truth that we're to find our security in Him and not in this world. In some ways, He might be weaning us off the world's idols of security where we trust in our resources more than we do in the Lord. And when God then removes our worldly security from us, we can either fall into despair or we can turn to Him and learn to lean on His mercy, grace, and love. You see, God has given us sufficient grace that will enable us and empower us to experience joy in our lives even though our world might be falling completely apart. I know I've talked about this before, but it's so important for us to understand. The Apostle Paul wants us grasp God's power at work in us when he writes,

"I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come" (Ephesians 1:16-21 ESV).

Listen, those times of discouragement and despair will come as we continue on the journey of life in our world. However, as the Apostle Paul points out we have every reason to hope because we have a Savior whose power has been unleashed through the cross and who is ruling all the affairs of this world for His glory and our good. We don't have to stay in the pit of despair. God has given us new life and in that we have all we need to live with unending joy even though the world around us is in such a crisis.

Pastor Mark