

The tedious and paradoxical nature of life with its countervailing tensions is the focus of Psalm 30. If Psalm 29 re-calibrates worship by affirming the sovereignty of God and the matchless power of Yahweh's voice and glory, then Psalm 30 reminds us of our utter dependence upon this all-powerful God for help and healing. True worship testifies to the all-sufficiency of the Lord and offers up praise to God. Without Yahweh's salvation, David is in danger on all sides, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and relationally. He sees himself in need of rescue from the abyss, protection from his enemies, healing for his body, and saving for his soul. The tension that runs through this psalm is between human frailty and divine redemption. The people of God live on the knife edge of the abyss and the key to salvation is Yahweh. If the Lord is not our "first-responder" we have no hope. Our confidence is in the Lord who always puts the threat in perspective: "Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Ps 30:5); "You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy" (Ps 30:11).

There is plenty of ambiguity and debate that surrounds this paradoxical psalm. Psalm 30 is introduced as a David psalm with a superscription that identifies it as a song to be sung at the dedication of the temple or house. We don't know whether "house" refers to the House of the Lord or David's palace. Did David write this song to be sung at the dedication of the temple? Since he did everything he could to prepare for the building of the temple, he may have also written a dedicatory hymn for the eventual dedication the temple. This psalm is a praise song. Yahweh's power is celebrated and the people of God are exhorted to praise his holy name.

Some scholars have speculated that the psalm was written after David counted the fighting men of Israel. This wilful act of royal pride and vain self-sufficiency was judged harshly by the Lord.¹ Seventy thousand people died in a plague. David confessed, "I have sinned; I, the shepherd, have done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall on me and my family" (2 Sam 24:17). David was not afflicted physically, but he surely suffered emotionally and spiritually. David expressed his repentance by purchasing "the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite" (2 Sam 24). It was there that he built an altar to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the Lord. Eventually the Jebusite threshing floor became the site of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. It seems improbable that this tragedy would lie behind David's dedicatory psalm. There is no allusion to the seventy thousand people who died and the massive suffering experienced by the people of God. Psalm 30 does not reflect the extreme nature of this social tragedy nor does David's serious culpability square with David's confession (Ps 30:6).

The dedicatory impact of Psalm 30 lies in the linkage between real worship and the mess of the human condition. Human frailty and depravity are such that we know we need the Lord – desperately. Everyone finds themselves on the edge of the abyss. Our bodies break, our enemies gloat, our hearts weep, and from time to time our world falls apart. In worship we meet the Lord who removes our sackcloth and clothes us with joy. Psalm 30 is honest about the human dilemma and honest about the necessity of worship.

¹Ross, *Psalms*, 666.

Out of the Depths

*I will exalt you, Lord,
for you lifted me out of the depths
and did not let my enemies gloat over me.
Lord my God, I called to you for help,
and you healed me.
You, Lord, brought me up from the realm of the dead;
you spared me from going down to the pit.
Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people;
praise his holy name.
For his anger lasts only a moment,
but his favor lasts a lifetime;
weeping may stay for the night,
but rejoicing comes in the morning.*

Psalm 30:1-5

The first line out of the worshiper's mouth is a bold, personal pronouncement of praise. Yahweh has drawn the individual up out of danger. The phrase "you lifted me up" literally means "to draw up with a bucket."² You might picture a rough water rescue by a team of Coast Guard first responders to capture the trauma conveyed by the psalmist. Without the Lord's help the situation is dire. These desperate images of distress imply the full range of maladies that afflict the human condition, such as drowning, depression, disease, and death. The psalmist extols the Lord for hearing his call for help and drawing him up out of danger, preventing his enemies from gloating over his demise, bringing him back from the realm of the dead, and healing him. Since the psalmist does not describe a physical illness or injury, healing may refer to any form of divine restoration.³ The psalmist leaves the specific danger and deliverance open so as to include all worshipers in this dedicatory psalm of thanksgiving. The first stanza drives home the truth that worship is always predicated on deliverance. We are never not in need of saving and healing. All worship is a cry for help and an occasion for praise and thanksgiving.

The redemptive, healing power of the Lord inspires the psalmist's call to worship. The people of God are commended as faithful and exhorted to praise the Lord for his faithfulness. The exhortation is positive and uplifting. The people of God are not shamed or bullied into worship. The psalmist's invitation to worship respects the worshiper and anticipates the solidarity of the people of God praising Yahweh's holy name. The human response to a personal saving encounter with the living God was intuitively simple, "Sing the praises of the Lord." It is that simple, "Praise his holy name."

The fundamental incentive for true corporate worship is the enduring mercy of God in spite of our sinfulness. The reason we are drawn into worship is because Yahweh's anger is short-lived and his love is long-lasting.⁴ We all are in need of rescue and Yahweh is our savior, healer, and

² Ross, Psalms, 668.

³ Goldingay, Psalms, 426; Ross, Psalms, 670.

⁴ Goldingay, Psalms, 428.

redeemer. Sin provokes the anger of God, but the psalmist offers no specific reason for his near death experience. The psalmist's situation is reminiscent of Job who felt the anger of God but did not know why he was subject to such extreme suffering. Job attributed upheavals in nature to the anger of God. In a fallen and broken world, Job asks, "Who can say to God, 'What are you doing?'" adding an ominous note, "God does not restrain his anger. . ." (Job 9:12-13). The personal dilemma facing the psalmist need not have a specific cause or be attributed to something he did wrong. It is misleading to infer from the reference to Yahweh's anger that the dire situation the psalmist found himself in was due to his sin.⁵ We live in a world given up to God's wrath because of evil. Therefore we come to worship God, to praise his holy name for his daily deliverance from all the forces, spiritual and physical, that threaten to undo us. Psalm 6 offers a similar understanding of our vulnerability in a sinful and evil world. Every faithful follower of the Lord Jesus can identify with this urgent prayer for deliverance. If David, a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14) and God's anointed king (2 Sam 7:5-16), suffered in this way, so can we! David is walking down a road that we all will travel.

There are so many things that can put us over the edge and land us in the pit of despair. But the testimony of the psalmist is that evil does not have the final word. Yahweh does. So, we worship the Lord in the real hope of deliverance. We cry for help and we sing his praises in the midst of heart attacks, car accidents, mental illnesses, bankruptcies, job losses, and hospice care. The people of God praise Yahweh's holy name when the bottom falls out of their world and when their enemies hunt them down like prey and when they "speak maliciously against [their] good behavior in Christ" (1 Pet 3:16).

Worship insists on the big picture of God's deliverance. Hope defeats despair. "We do not lose heart" (2 Cor 4:16). We cannot avoid the harsh realities of a fallen and broken world, but in worship we come to know that God's favor lasts a lifetime. "Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Ps 30:5). When life turns bad, as it did for the psalmist, instead of asking, "Why me?" we ought to ask the opposite question, "Why *not* me?"⁶ If we want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, we also must know the fellowship of his suffering (Phil 3:10). "Though outwardly we are wasting away," explains Paul, "yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Cor 4:17-17).

All Things Fall Apart

*When I felt secure, I said,
"I will never be shaken."
Lord, when you favored me,
you made my royal mountain stand firm;
but when you hid your face,
I was dismayed.
To you, Lord, I called;
to the Lord I cried for mercy:*

⁵ Goldingay, Psalms, 428.

⁶ Sittser, A Grace Disguised, 108.

*“What is gained if I am silenced,
if I go down to the pit?
Will the dust praise you?
Will it proclaim your faithfulness?
Hear, Lord, and be merciful to me;
Lord, be my help.”*

*You turned my wailing into dancing’
you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent.
Lord my God, I will praise you forever.*

Psalm 30:6-12

Psalm 30 divides evenly in half with both stanzas delivering the same message. Hebrew parallelism extends to the theology of the psalm as well as the poetry of the lines.⁷ Like a dedicatory symphony, the second stanza is a variation on the preceding theme. We see why this psalm lends itself to the dedication of the house of the Lord. Worship rediscovers the mystery and wonder of God in the mess of the human condition.

Some commentators find in verse 6 “the only clue to what might have caused the problem.”⁸ They attribute the psalmist’s suffering to “his sinful self-confidence.”⁹ They argue that David became prosperous and complacent. Success dulled his spiritual sensitivities. Calvin concludes that his “foolish and rash security” has caused David to forget “his mortal and mutable condition as a man,” and set his heart on success.¹⁰ Calvin concedes that the faithful “consider themselves liable to the common troubles of life” and they are “prepared to receive wounds, – to shake off their sluggishness, and exercise themselves in the warfare to which they know that they are appointed, – and with humility and fear put themselves under God’s protection.” Calvin denies that David put himself under the Lord’s protection. He alleges that David was “ensnared by the allurements of his prosperous state” and in his own feelings, he “promised himself unbroken tranquillity.”¹¹

Commentators seem to base this negative interpretation on David’s reference to anger (“For his anger lasts only a moment” 30:5) and to the Lord hiding his face (“but when you hid your face, I was dismayed” (30:7). But surely both of these references might be attributed to an earnest believer – one who is blameless and upright, a person who fears God and shuns evil (see Job 1:8). Even the most faithful believer, when blind-sided by a tragic accident or a grave diagnosis, is bound to feel shaken and dismayed. The psalmist speaks of being dismayed when the Lord hid his face implying that unbroken fellowship with the Lord was very much a part of his life. The concern of the psalmist recalls the words of Job, “Oh, for the days when I was in my prime, when God’s intimate friendship blessed by house, when the Almighty was still with me and my

⁷ Goldingay, Psalms, 429. Goldingay writes, “The psalm could have stopped at v. 5, but vv. 6-12 repeat the story.

⁸ Ross, Psalms, 673.

⁹ Craigie, Psalms, 254.

¹⁰ Calvin, Psalms, 490.

¹¹ Calvin, Psalms, 492.

children were around me. . .” (Job 29:4-5). Like Job, David attributed his blessings to the Lord. He recounted, “Lord, when you favored me, you made my royal mountain stand firm. . .” Throughout the psalm there is no hint of self-sufficiency or self-confidence. The psalmist’s focus is entirely on the Lord. The Lord does all the heavy lifting, shows all the mercy, and cloths him with joy. Matthew Henry was right, we must “learn to accommodate ourselves to the various providences of God that concern us.” Learning to be content in every situation is a spiritual discipline that requires plenty of practice (Phil 4:12). But even the most mature believer is often blind-sided by their human frailty. All of us have to learn obedience by the things that we suffer (Heb 5:8). We need to hear the Lord say to us what the Spirit said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). This is what makes Psalm 30 such a splendid dedicatory psalm for the household of faith. In worship we learn that God favor lasts a lifetime and rejoicing comes in the morning. It is in worship that the Lord removes our sackcloth and clothes us with joy. Worship trains our hearts to sing, and not be silent.

The passionate single-minded devotion of Psalm 27:4 is echoed here in the psalmist’s reason for living. He wants to go on living to worship the Lord. His purpose is clear: “[I want] proclaim your faithfulness,” “sing your praises and not to be silent,” and “praise you forever.” Although Christians have a greater hope in everlasting life than did the psalmist, we can identify with his earnest desire to use whatever years we have left on this side of eternity to praise his name.

Psalm 30 re-orientes our self-talk. When we are left to ourselves and to our own inner monologue we can easily fall into despair, but true worship pulls us out of the little trinity of me, myself, and I, and brings us into the hope and the deliverance that only God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can give.

Hope Heals tells the moving story of Katherine and Jay Wolf. Seven months after Katherine’s near fatal brain stem hemorrhage she found herself on the day before Thanksgiving wondering:

Has God made a mistake? Should I have died? I’m caught between life and death. I can’t even walk or eat or play with my child. I’ve gone from making lasagna in my little kitchen to being fed all meals through a tube in my stomach. I’ve gone from going on playdates with girlfriends to attending courses on disability adjustment. I used to power walk the hills of Pepperdine; now I have two physical therapists and a walker while I agonize to walk one step. I’ve gone from wearing a cute outfit every day to wearing adult diapers and hospital gowns. I want my old life back! . . . [Life] isn’t working. It isn’t ever going to work. . . . I should be in heaven right now.

Katherine writes that “suddenly, before those thoughts had even fully landed in my head and heart, I felt a deep awakening of the Word of God, which I had known since I was a little girl. I could almost hear this rapid-fire succession of the truths of Scripture, like a dispatch from God himself.” In that moment God met her in the midst of the messiness and tragedy of her life. She heard God say, “Katherine you are not a mistake. I don’t make mistakes.” God reminded her that she was fearfully and wonderfully made in her mother’s womb, and that included the AVM

formed in her brain. “There is purpose in all of this,” the Lord said. “Just wait. You’ll see.” The Lord affirmed her as a wife and mother. “Trust Me,” God said. “I am working out everything for your good. . . . I will complete the good work I began when I gave you new life. I will carry it on to completion. Believe that. My nature is to redeem and restore and strengthen. This terrible season will come to an end. You will suffer for a little while, and then I will carry you out of this. You will see My goodness in the land of the living. Lean into this hope. . . .”¹²

Psalm 30 is not the confession of a self-confident person who needs to be awakened from his or her spiritual complacency. On the contrary, Psalm 30 is a faithful reminder that the people of God live on the edge between the mystery of God and the mess of the human condition. To know Christ and the power of his resurrection, means we belong to the fellowship of his suffering. Blessing and suffering go hand in hand. Like Katherine and Jay Wolf we share something of the experience of Job and destiny of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We live in a fallen and broken world and we run to the Lord for deliverance. Only the Lord can lift us up out of the depths and snatch us from the realm of the dead. Only the Lord can turn our wailing into dancing. Only the Lord can strip off the sackcloth and cloth us with joy. Psalm 30 is a beautiful call to worship and dedicatory psalm, reminding us of our deep need to worship and exalt the Lord.

¹² Katherine and Jay Wolf, *Hope Heals: A True Story of Overwhelming Loss and an Overcoming Love*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016. 163-165.