

***Looking Up While Lying Down...***  
**DAVID SINGS HIS FINAL PSALM**

**2 Samuel 21:1, 15-17**

**2 Samuel 22:1**

**Psalm 18:1-6, 46-49**

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**Sermon preached by**

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Surely the long shadows of age and constant trouble were beginning to take their toll on David's now wrinkled face. He had lived a full life, experiencing both the highs and lows...the joys and sorrows that accompany every life...but particularly a life as prominent and significant as David's. And now, he has entered into what might be called his "twilight years."

Throughout his life David had had to learn to trust God in what seemed like impossible circumstances. But never more so than when David faced the ebbing tide of his years. Recently, things had occurred that kept him on his knees...or more appropriately, flat on his face in the muck and mire of life. And yet, despite the events that had knocked him off his feet and sent him sprawling, David, who was a singer of songs long before he was the King of Israel, sang a song of triumph and trust...and sang it to the glory of God. To be sure, it is an example we would ALL do well to follow, even when the circumstances of OUR lives lay us low. Clearly, for David, and for us as well, it is a matter of "looking up while lying down."

David's trouble began, of course, when he lusted after another man's wife and took her for his own pleasure. When she became pregnant, instead of confessing what he had done however, David had Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, the Hittite, killed in battle in an attempt to cover up his dastardly deed. But God knew what David had done and sent the prophet, Nathan, to confront David with the cold hard truth:

*You, David, are the man! You are the one who had disobeyed God and sinned against both God and man. And now you will pay the consequences. The child in Bathsheba's womb will die and turmoil and chaos will plague your family as your own children rise up in rebellion against you... all because you have sinned and done what was evil in the sight of the Lord. (2 Sam. 12:7-12)*

Well, Bathsheba's child did die and scarcely was the child cold in the grave before the rest of Nathan's prophecy began to come true as well. David's oldest son, Amnon, raped his half sister, David's only daughter, Tamar. Then David's second son, Tamar's full brother, the beautifully handsome Absalom, murdered Amnon in revenge. And while David was still reeling from all of that, Absalom started a rebellion against his father by declaring himself king and driving David from his throne, from his palace and from his beloved Jerusalem. The forces that were still loyal to David fought back, however, and though David pleaded with his generals to go easy on the rebellious Absalom...for whom David had always had a soft spot in his heart...they killed Absalom none-the-less – running him through with their spears and swords time and time again as he hung in a tree where he had been ensnared when his beautifully long flowing hair got caught up in the low-hanging branches.

*"O Absalom, my son, my son!" David cried out. "Oh my son Absalom. Would that I had died in your place, O Absalom, my son, my son!"*

And then, before David had even BEGUN to get over the anguish of losing his beloved son...the grief of which nearly ripped his heart out and destroyed him...ANOTHER blow hit him in the gut and drove him to his knees. His nation of Israel was struck with a drought and famine which lasted for three long years, adding suffering to calamity and chaos to confusion. And on top of all of that, Israel once again went to war with their age-old enemy, the Philistines.

*“Then Israel went to war with the Philistines once again. And David and his men went and fought the Philistines. And as they fought, David became weary.”* (2 Sam. 21:15)

Or as one translations puts it, *“David fell on his face, EXHAUSTED.”*

I would imagine! After all he'd been through, who WOULDN'T have been exhausted – physically...emotionally...and, no doubt, spiritually as well. In fact, after the death of Absalom, there was never a time when David was NOT exhausted. For though he was *“a man after God's own hear,”* he was still just a man. And he fell flat on his face, exhausted on the battlefield. And he would surely have been killed by the Philistine giant Ishbibenob...who no doubt was looking for revenge for David having killed his cousin Goliath...had not Abishai, son of Zeruah, come to David's defense, attacking the giant and striking him dead. After that, David's men made him promise he would never again go out with them to battle. And for an old warrior like David, hard as it was, he also knew it was time to hang up his sword and shield. His fighting days were over!

But his SINGING days were not! For even in the midst of all that had happened to David...even after all his grief...after all the violence...after being overwhelmed by the turmoil, chaos and rebellion within his own family...even after falling flat on his face exhausted on the battlefield and nearly being killed by the Philistines...David could STILL sing to the glory of the Lord. And the song that he sang – which is found in both 2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18 – offers us four themes which weave their way throughout not only the psalm, but David's entire life as well, enabling him to look up to the Lord, even while lying flat on his face with troubles.

So, I invite you to join me this morning we take a look at David's final psalm. For within this psalm by Israel's greatest singer, we find some tried and true principles, which, if WE can live them, will enable us, like David, to also *“look up while lying down.”*

The first principle we can learn by looking at David's final psalm, I believe, is this: **WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, THE TOUGH GET GOING – TO GOD!** (vss. 2-20)

*The Lord, is my protector and my fortress, David wrote.*

*God is the rock in which I find refuge and safety. He is my shield and defender.*

*God is my savior. When the troubles of life besiege me, I call to the Lord who saves me!*

*So praise the Lord! The Lord's name be praised!* (Vss.2-4)

Now surely, David knew about tough times! Facing the giant Goliath when he was scarcely more than a boy. Being hounded and chased for years by a delusionally jealous King Saul, his father-in-law no less, who had given orders to his soldiers to kill David on sight. The death of his newborn son. Turmoil within his family. The rape of his daughter by her brother. The murder of his son by another of his sons who then rebelled against his father and attempted to seize his father's throne by fratricide. And then the death of that son...his beloved son...by his most trusted aide who had been sworn not to harm even a single hair on the beautiful boy's beautiful head. And on top of all of that, a drought and a famine which devastated his nation...and a war...ANOTHER war...one more in a long string of wars his people had had to fight with their sworn enemies for their very survival. It was simply more than David could take – on his own...by himself, that is.

And so, David takes refuge in God...as he had done so often throughout his life. And so he sings to the glory of God:

*In my trouble, I called upon the Lord. I called to God for help!*

*And from His temple, God heard my voice. He listened to my cry for help.* (Vs.7)

To David, God was no distant deity, preoccupied with other galaxies or concerned only with the change of seasons. God HEARD David's voice! God HEARD David's cries for help! Though some of it had been the result of David's own sinfulness, David's anguish and suffering STILL got God's attention. And God came to David's rescue! Listen to how David describes it:

*God LISTENED to my cries for help.*

*Then the Lord reached down from above and took hold of me and pulled me out of my troubles!*

*He RESCUED me from my enemies when they were too strong for me.*

*When I was in trouble, the Lord CAME to me.*

*He HELPED me out of danger and SAVED me from destruction!*

Now, can you HEAR what David is saying to us? We have no problem relating to what David is saying about trouble and tribulation, danger and distress, destruction and death. Like David, we live with those realities all the time. But can we ALSO believe, as David did, that the Lord really

HEARS and CARES about us, even in the MIDST of our trials and tribulations? That's the way David lived his entire life. Even when he was going through the WORST of times...even when NOTHING was going his way...David KNEW...knew beyond a shadow of a doubt...that God was with him...that God was his rock and his fortress...that God would see him through. God was for David, "a very PRESENT HELP in times of trouble!" (Ps. 46) And what David is telling us across 3,000 years of time is that exactly the SAME thing is true for us today. Oh, our circumstances may be different from David's. But the REALITY is not. God IS our strength and refuge. So when you've been laid low...when trials and tribulations, the headaches and heartaches of life have knocked you off your feet and you're flat on your back with the wind knocked out of you...LOOK UP! GOD is there for you!

Secondly, David's final psalm reminds us that **WHEN OUR DAYS ARE AT THEIR DARKEST, GOD'S LIGHT SHINES BRIGHTEST!** (vss. 21-31)

*"YOU, Lord, are my light! YOU dispel my darkness!"* (vs. 29)

When I was a kid, my family used to go camping. And one summer, we went up into northern Canada where you are so far away from any city lights that the nights are as dark as dark can get...especially when the stars and moon are hidden behind the clouds. I was about 8 or 9 at the time and my brother, who was several years older than me, took great delight as we lay in our tent at night in telling me what was out there in the dark...beyond what I could see – lions and tigers and bears, OH NO!

Well, I knew he was lying about the lions and tigers cause I was smart enough to know they were only in Africa and India and if there were any in Canada, they were in a zoo in Toronto or Montreal or something. But the bears, you see, well...they were a different matter. Because I had SEEN the bears that very day. They had, in fact, come up to our car looking for something to eat. The park ranger had warned us not to feed the bears, so I KNEW they were out there and I KNEW they were hungry and I KNEW they were probably angry at me for not feeding them.

Well, seeing how God had created me with a tiny bladder in those days, I woke up during the night having to answer the call of nature but absolutely terrified to venture out into the darkness where I just KNEW those bears were out there waiting to have me for a midnight snack! But before long, it was either getting up and facing the bears...or enduring the discomfort and humiliation of sleeping in a wet sleeping bag.

Finally, my dad heard my whimpering and crying and came to my rescue. He got the kerosene lantern and together we ventured out into the darkness to find the latrine. The problem was, however, I kept stumbling and falling because, instead of concentrating on the light directly in front of me, I kept trying to see what was way out in the darkness to make sure there were no bears around! So my dad, I remember, told me to concentrate on the light that was right around me and not to worry about the darkness "out there." And when I did that, that lantern, dim though it was, provided just enough of a warm circle of light so that I could see where to walk, but not much beyond that. And at least I knew there were no bears in the next step I had to take. And that made all the difference in the world!

The SAME is true, of course, of the light we receive from God. At times, we stumble along, trying to peer FAR into the darkness around us. Yet God tells us to concentrate on the light that is right around us so that we can see to take the next step. That's all the light we're blessed with sometimes. But, in reality, that's all the light we really need!

That, you see, is what David was trying to say in his final psalm. *"You are my light, Lord! You give me just enough light to see what is right around me so I can take my next step. You are the one who illumines my darkness so I can see my way ahead! I can deal with what's right in front of me because YOU are the lamp that lights my way!"*

To be sure, ALL of us have things out there in the darkness of the unknown that scare us – whether it's a debilitating illness...or being alone without a loved one...or losing our job...or the breakup of a relationship...or dying...or even the darkness of an unknown future. You name it, we fear it. Yet God promises to light our way...in fact to BE the light which no amount of darkness can EVER overcome (John 1:5) It is an assurance to which David held tightly in HIS time of darkness. And it is an assurance to which WE can hold tightly as well...no matter how dark the darkness

around us might see. *“The Lord is my light and my salvation. I will NEVER be afraid.”* (Psalm 27:1)

Now, the third theme I see running through not only David’s final psalm, but his entire life is this: **WHEN WE ARE AT OUR WEAKEST, GOD IS AT GOD’S STRONGEST!** (vss.32-40)

*For who is God, besides the Lord? And who is a rock, besides our God?*

*GOD is our strong fortress! GOD is our strength and refuge!*

Now clearly, David is not describing himself here. He’s just fallen on his face exhausted, not only physically, but mentally and emotionally as well. The battle with the Philistines, as well as everything else he had gone through in recent years, had just about done him in. So it’s not his OWN strength he’s talking about here...it God’s!

*GOD makes my feet secure like the feet of the deer, and sets me on high places.*

*GOD give me strength in my hand and power in my arm to fight  
against the enemies of the Lord!*

In other words, David is saying, whatever strength he has comes from God, who is the source of David’s strength...and of ours as well.

Ten centuries after David, the Apostle Paul echoed the same affirmation.

*“When I am weak,” Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “the power of God in Christ dwells in me.*

*Therefore, I am content in my weakness - with insults...distress...persecution...and difficulties.*

*For when I am at my weakest, God’s power is at its greatest!”* (2 Cor. 12:7-10)

Now, did you get what Paul is saying here? GOD’S POWER is best displayed in OUR WEAKNESS. But that’s so hard to remember, isn’t it? We want to be strong...self-sufficient...independent. Why, strength and independence go right along with *“truth, justice and the American way,”* don’t you know! Who wants to be a wimpy Christian, for heaven’s sake?

But the truth of the matter is that in our effort to be strong and self-sufficient, we often keep God from doing God’s best work within us. We keep God at arm’s length. We close the door and lock God out. And yet, a key principle in not only David’s life, but our lives as followers of Christ, is that God is never stronger than when we, in weakness, turn to God for help. When we come to the end of OUR strength, it is THEN that God can step in and show how strong God really is. The prophet Isaiah said it something like this:

*“Whoever would be strong in his own strength, will end up falling flat on his face.*

*But whoever would look to God for his strength, will find his strength renewed.*

*He will rise up with wings like eagles. He shall run and not get weary.*

*He shall walk and not grow weak!”* (Isaiah 40:31)

Though David lived some two hundred years before the prophet Isaiah, somehow, he instinctively knew what Isaiah was talking about. David’s strength was with God, even when he was at his weakest! Maybe it’s a truth David can teach US as well.

And finally, David’s final psalm, like his life, teach us that **WHEN THE FOCUS OF OUR FUTURE IS UNKNOWN, WE NEED A FUTURE FOCUSED ON GOD!** (vss. 50-51) Look at how David brings his final psalm of his life to its grand finale:

*Therefore I will give thanks to You, O Lord, And among the nations and the peoples,*

*I will ALWAYS sing your praise!*

David KNEW he was nearing the end of his days. No longer could he go forth to fight with his armies against Israel’s enemies. His nation faced a severe drought and famine. Two of his sons were dead and his successor to the throne was still uncertain. The focus of his future was simply unknown. And yet, David CONTINUED to keep his future focused on God. Despite not having the slightest idea what the future held in store for him, David STILL chose to trust in the Lord...to lean upon God...to find his security...his light...his strength...and his hope in the God who had been with him in the past...and David knew...would be with him in whatEVER lay ahead. David chose to approach the end of his life NOT with bitter grumbings or regrets about his past...but with praise on his lips and a song in his heart...a song sung to the glory of God. No WONDER the scriptures call him *“a man after God’s own heart.”*

Now, to be sure, none of us are David. But my friends, David was NO MORE and NO LESS than WE are. WE TOO are people after God’s own heart. The only difference between David and us

is that WE sometimes have trouble BELIEVING that God is our security...our light...our strength...our future. We find ourselves looking to and finding security and strength in anything and everything OTHER than God. But not so with David. Even when he was flat on his face in the muck and mire that life brought his way...knocked down by the trials and tribulations of life – many of which he had, admittedly, brought upon himself – he STILL chose to look up to the Lord and sing to the glory of his God.

Well, David died not too many years after this final song was composed...died in the company of a beautiful young woman named Abishag who was found to keep the old king warm in bed (1 Kings.1:1-4). And he was buried in the city that bore his name...Jerusalem...the city of David. The traditional site of his grave can be visited on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem even today...for along with the Wailing Wall...at the foot of the old Temple mount...it is the holiest spot for the Jews in all of Israel – great David's final resting place.

What a worthy example God has laid before us in this "*man after God's own heart.*" Not a perfect man, mind you...not by a long shot. But a man of God who always...ALWAYS looked to the Lord to be his security...his light...his strength...and the hope for his future –no matter WHAT the outward circumstances of his life may have been. And that's what makes him so real and relevant for OUR lives today...even some 3000 years later!

May the example God offers us in His servant David inspire us, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to be people who are ALSO known as men and women after God's own heart...men and women who sing to the glory of the Lord throughout ALL the days of our lives, both now and forever more! To God be the glory, ALWAYS! Amen...and AMEN!

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