

Psalm 30

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[0 : 00] I'd like us now to turn to the book of Psalms, chapter 30, and look particularly at the first verse, although we'll be looking at the psalm as a whole.

Psalm 30, that's on page 558 of the Q Bible. Psalm 30, verse 1, I will exalt you, O Lord, for you have lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me.

Today, as all of us realize, is Remembrance Sunday, a time when we remember those who died in military service fighting against tyranny to preserve the civil freedoms that we enjoy today.

Remember especially the two great national deliverances in the world wars of the 20th century. And as we honor the memory of those who made the supreme sacrifice in these wars, we also pay our respects to the memory of those who gave their lives in later continents which took place, such as in Palestine, the Yangtze River in China, the Korean War, the Malaya Emergency, Egypt, Kenya, the Suez Invasion, Cyprus, the Borneo Campaign, the Aiden Emergency, Dothar, the Falklands, Northern Ireland, the First Gulf War, Afghanistan, and the current conflict in Iraq.

Now this psalm, I believe, is an appropriate psalm for a day such as this. And I hope that in the course of my comments on it, the relevance of this passage of scripture will become clear.

[2 : 07] But to begin with, I would like to draw your attention to the title of the psalm, which says it's a song for the dedication of the temple. Perhaps this was a psalm which was used when David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem.

As we read in 2 Samuel 6, and set up the Lord's house there in the form of a tent for the Ark of the Covenant.

I'll come back to that as I go through my remarks. I would like to demonstrate the relevance of this psalm by inviting you to take a journey through time.

A journey through time and also through geography. So a journey that is historical and also geographical. First of all, I would like you to take a journey to Flanders, to the battlefields there in 1915, when John McRae wrote his well-known poem, which has given us the symbol of the poppy. And today we give God thanks for that deliverance, and for later deliverances. And we give him thanks for giving those who died the courage and the strength to make the supreme sacrifice on behalf of others.

[3 : 38] But it's important for us, I think, to recognise that a service of remembrance is not a prayer meeting on behalf of the dead.

Paying our respects for the dead is not the same as praying for the dead. I think it's important to remind ourselves of this important principle.

Praying for the dead is unscriptural. There's not a single example in the Bible of a prayer offered on behalf of someone or of some people who had died.

Nor is there a single command for anyone to do this. So, although there's a command for us to pray for our enemies, there is no command to us to pray for the dead.

And the reason for this is that such prayer is unnecessary, not only unscriptural, but unnecessary, because the Bible makes it clear that human destiny is fixed in this life.

[4 : 41] And it is in this life that we have a window of opportunity. And that's a very important point for all of us to remember. That now is the day.

Today is the day of salvation. Now is the accepted hour. But it is right, of course, for us to recognise the bravery of those who died or were left disabled in the course of defending our freedoms and to give God thanks for them.

As I said to the children, the Bible lays great stress upon remembering the past. Remember, says the Lord in the second edition of the fourth commandment, which is given in Deuteronomy chapter 5, Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there

with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

Again, in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the people, Be careful, lest you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

He led you through vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land with its venomous snakes and scorpions. Again and again we have this theme of remember in the prophets.

[6 : 00] Remember. It's crucial for us to remember. And as I told the children, that's why we have the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and the ordinance of the Lord's Day.

We are to remember not only these two key events in the drama of redemption and God's master story, we are also to remember the way in which the Lord has intervened in our own lives, the way in which he has delivered us individually as families and as a nation.

History contains important lessons for us. It is important for us as a nation as we look back to give God thanks for his goodness to us. To thank him for the evangelisation of Scotland by the Irish Celtic missionaries from Iona way back in these early centuries.

To give him thanks for the reformation of the 16th century which rediscovered the supreme authority of scripture. To give him thanks for the covenanters in the 17th century who discovered the democratic value of the individual against the divine right of kings as was claimed by the Stuart monarchs.

To give thanks for the impact of the evangelistic campaigns of John Wesley and George Whitefield in the 18th century. And also for the revivals of the 19th century which preceded and followed the disruption of 1843.

[7 : 40] It is important for us to look back and to remember and to give God thanks. Especially today because we live in an age in which history is at a discount.

We live in a period of time when many people believe that history doesn't really matter. Our concern is with the present it's not so much with the future and it's certainly not with the past.

And we need to look back as God calls us to look back. We must not become nostalgic in the sense of looking back all the time. For example, those of us who drive know that we use the rear view mirrors in our car.

We use them to see what's coming behind, what is behind us. But we don't use them all the time. And it's important, I think, as we live our lives to look forward. We look back in order that we might move forward.

And it's very important for us to have that focus. Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish Christian philosopher who lived at the beginning of the 19th century, said that life is lived forwards but learned backwards.

[8 : 54] And that's an important focus, I think. We must learn from the past in order that we might move into the future. And we must have that balance.

But we cannot have the balance if we ignore the past. And so today, as we are encouraged to remember the national deliverances with which we have been blessed as a nation, we must also look back to other ways in which God has blessed us.

And above all, look back to what he has done for us in Jesus Christ. So this psalm is a psalm of remembering. A psalm that helps us to look back.

But I would like to take you now on the second stage of the journey. This time, I would like to take you not to the fields of Flanders, but to the city of Jerusalem in the year 165 BC, when the purification of the temple was being marked after its desecration by the emperor, the Greek emperor, Antiochus Epiphanes.

He had waged a terrible campaign of persecution against the Jews. He desecrated the temple in an appalling way. And Judas, a campaign led by the Maccabees, were able to resist and to overturn that situation.

[10 : 25] And in 165 BC, Judas Maccabees celebrated the inauguration of the temple.

And we read in the Talmud that this psalm was used in that celebration. A celebration that gave God thanks for the deliverance of the past and was committing the house of God to a new future. And so what was a personal song of David became a national song of the people. It may also well have been used at the dedication of, the rededication of the temple by Ezra in the year 520 or thereabouts.

It may also have been used by Solomon at the dedication, the original dedication of the temple. We don't know. But we certainly know from Jewish tradition that this psalm was used by Judas

Maccabees at that key celebration as the people give God thanks for the deliverance from the Antiochus Epiphanes.

The reference in the second verse of the psalm to being healed is sometimes used in this altar as a metaphor of restoration from any situation of crisis.

[11 : 49] And there are other instances of this. And so this psalm is an appropriate psalm for a national an event which celebrates a national deliverance.

It's a psalm not only of remembrance it's a psalm of thanksgiving to God. And the primary action on a day such as this is to give God thanks.

And that's why remembrance is a religious ceremony. means we recognize that we must thank God above all others for the privileges and the blessings that we enjoy.

The psalmist here recalls his deliverance. He says in verse 1 you've lifted me. He said you've lifted me you've taken me out you've lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me.

This verb to lift up was used of lifting a bucket of water from a deep well. And sometimes these ancient wells were used as prisons.

[13 : 03] Jeremiah knew that. Joseph knew that. And in fact Jeremiah tells us that he was sinking in the mire at the bottom of that well and he was lifted up by his friends came and they had sheets and they made these sheets into a rope and they gave him that sheet rope of sheets and he put it under his arms and they lifted him out.

And this is how David is here explaining his deliverance and this may well be used for our national deliverance as well.

And we thank God for the way in which he has intervened in order to give us the freedom which we now enjoy. We might ask ourselves whether we are sufficiently thankful for the freedom that we enjoy.

We do have many freedoms in this country which some countries don't enjoy. And we must always be in our alert that we might continue to pray for these freedoms.

We might ask ourselves the question for how long will we be free as we are free now to tell a Muslim a Hindu or a Buddhist that Jesus is the Son of God and the only Savior.

[14 : 27] There are some people in our land who feel that we ought not to do that. They say that to say that to a member of another faith is to insult them and therefore to incite religious hatred.

We need to pray that we may be able to continue to maintain the freedom that we enjoy but to maintain it of course in a sensitive and a respectful way but nevertheless to be able to be free to preach the gospel to witness to our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a very real issue. There is already talk about changing the law about racial hatred and religious hatred. And of course no one wants to incite hatred but at the same time we need to have the freedom to witness faithfully to our Lord Jesus Christ and to witness to the gospel of his grace. So the psalm is a psalm not only of remembering it's also a psalm of thanksgiving. So let us give God thanks for the freedom that we enjoy and let us continue to pray that we may continue to be blessed by these freedoms.

But this I think has yet another lesson to teach us and in order to discover that I invite you to take another stage in this journey through time and geography.

[15 : 55] Going back this time not to the year 165 BC but to much earlier to 1000 BC approximately to the time of David.

David is in his palace. He has conquered Jerusalem. He has built his palace. And David is in a reflexive mood. He looks back over a recent crisis from which the Lord delivered him from his enemies and he writes this psalm.

And this psalm is David thinking reflexively. He's looking back. Especially we see this from verses 6 to 12 in this psalm in which David is looking back at the crisis that he describes in verses 1 to 3.

And so this psalm is a psalm of heart searching as well as a psalm of remembering and a psalm of thanksgiving. And as David looked back he is ashamed of what his own attitude had been.

He recalls the complacency and the arrogance with which he viewed himself and the success that he had gained. In verse 6 he says when I felt secured I said I shall never be shaken.

[17 : 18] O Lord you favoured me. You made my mountain firm. You made my mountain stand firm. And he had this sense of complacency.

And although he in fact was praising himself rather than praising God. And although he may have been formally speaking to God as he says himself O Lord you favoured me. you made my mountain stand firm. He in fact was praising himself. It's very easy for us to do that. In word we may be praising the Lord but in our hearts we in fact are congratulating ourselves. And David is confessing this here and he is reflecting he is looking back on his own experience and on his own deliverance. And I think this is brought out if we look at the structure of the psalm. Verses 1 to 3. contain the story of the psalmist's deliverance. O Lord my God I called you for help and you healed me. You delivered me. It sums up the testimony of this psalm. [18 : 25] They are right in the first verse. And then verses 4 and 5. The psalmist invites the people of God to join him in his service of remembrance and of thanksgiving.

And David is obviously here thinking of giving the Lord thanks in the temple in the community of the faithful. And it's important for us to remember that our spiritual lives are lived not simply as individuals but our spiritual life is a communal life in which we worship with the people of God and we give thanks to God with his people.

And the communal aspect of our worship is a very very important one as it was for David. And then in verses 6 to 12 as we said the psalmist gives us a flashback if you like in which he explains why he found himself in the crisis that he had outlined in verses 1 to 3.

And it may be that these verses are the speech that he made to the congregation that joined him in the service of thanksgiving when he testifies to the congregation of the way in which he was misled by his own complacency and his own arrogance and how the Lord taught him this lesson and brought him back to himself.

And he tells us how he did this in verse 8 to you O Lord I called to the Lord I cried for mercy what gain is there in my destruction my going down to the pit will the dust praise you will it proclaim your faithfulness hear O Lord and be merciful to me O Lord be my help.

[20 : 07] This was his prayer. But he tells us that the Lord heard his prayer and the Lord did deliver him the Lord brought him out of that crisis just as a bucket was drawn out of a deep well he was lifted back into the light again and so he tells in verse 11 you turn my willing into dancing you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy that my heart may sing to you and not be silent O Lord my God I will give you thanks forever.

And so today as we give thanks to God let us also search our hearts. Let us do what David did just take a moment to reflect.

We live such busy lives lives that are packed with so many things to do and so many things that are undone that sometimes we find it difficult to make the space to reflect.

And that's why in one reason God has given us the Sabbath and given us the Lord's day to create the space just to help us to worship him and to reflect to look to him above all else but also to look into ourselves and to reflect as David here reflected in order that we might by his grace correct those areas in which we have strayed those areas in which we've gone wrong those areas in which we've gone beyond or against his will.

And this is true not only of us personally it also ought to be true of us nationally. We might need to ask ourselves as a nation why do we find ourselves caught up in a war a so called war of terror.

[21 : 53] There was a cartoon in the Scotsman yesterday of someone giving thanks for the freedom that previous deliverance enjoyed.

In the background you've got all these security measures at an airport. Reminder that we may have freedom but we don't have security.

Why? What is God saying to us through this? Is God speaking to us as a nation? Is this a judgment upon us? We need to ask ourselves that question and humbly search our hearts as individuals and search our conscience as a nation before God and ask him to deal with us and enable us to repent of our failures and of our transgressions.

us. Then finally Issam has another message for us and now the journey takes us back to Aberdeen. We've been to Flanders, we've been to the Jewish celebration of the defeat of the Antiochus Epiphanes, we've been to David's palace in Jerusalem, now we've come back here, come back we must.

[23 : 18] The question is what we, what are you, what am I going to do with this psalm? This psalm is given to us not as a piece of decoration, it's been given to us as a tool, it's been given to us as something to use, something as an aid to our devotion and as an aid to our living day by day.

What are we going to do with it? Well I think the psalmist helps us here, gives us a clue as to what we might do with it. The psalmist looks back upon the crisis in his life and he almost died whether it was a physical illness or whether it was a military crisis is not clear but he almost died and on the point on the edge of death he cries out what gain is there in my destruction am I going down to the pit?

Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness? Will the dust he said proclaim your faithfulness? Why didn't David want to die?

Well most people don't want to die but it's very interesting that in the Old Testament when people many people when they attained the three score years and ten were it seemed to be content to die. that if they felt they found themselves in danger while still much younger than that they didn't want to die because the covenant as they understood it the covenant promised life rather than death and they didn't want to die before the fulfillment of years.

[25 : 04] David didn't want to die. Why did they want to die? Not that he was afraid of death necessarily because belief in life after death is implicit in the Old Testament.

It is not nearly so explicit as it is in the New Testament but it's there. He didn't want to die because he wanted to continue to tell forth the faithfulness of the Lord.

He said can the dust tell your faithfulness? He wanted to tell others of the faithfulness of the Lord. He wanted to praise the Lord so that he might be able to tell others and to share with others the goodness and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so he saw praise as proclaiming the faithfulness of the Lord. He had a deep desire to tell others of his faithfulness. The question is whether we have such a desire as David.

Do we have this desire to share our faith with others? Now David saw, he wrote this song and saw this song as an opportunity to share his faith with others.

[26 : 15] And David has given us this song in order that he might share his faith with us. He's given it to us. And that's one of the reasons why it is good for us when we witness to give the people we witness to a portion of scripture scripture.

And to give them not only our testimony but the testimony of others. The testimony which is inspired by the Holy Spirit in such a way that we can say that it is the word of God.

And so that our testimony is confirming the testimony of God. Jesus tells us that in the scriptures the father witnesses to him. And as David is doing that he is witnessing looking forward to the coming of the Messiah looking forward to the greater son of David.

That all of us are called upon to be witnesses. And he's given us this as a means of challenging us to witness to others and to be his witnesses to tell of his faithfulness.

And we have an opportunity during a time of remembrance when the nation as a whole is remembering and technically giving thanks to give our testimony to God's faithfulness.

[27 : 31] And to tell them of what God has done for us. Even if our story may be like the story of David. A story which is a checkered story. And all our stories are surely checkered because of sin to some extent.

But David here is authentic. He's telling it as it was. He's not presenting a rosy picture. He's telling us of his failure and of how in his failure the Lord met him and helped him to overcome it and brought him back to himself.

And so we have a great opportunity. We have more reason in many ways than the psalmist. He thought that his death would be loss rather than gain.

But we who are Christian believers know that our death will be gain rather than loss. Remember what Paul said, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

And so today this psalm comes to us from the Lord as a challenge to witness, for us to witness to his faithfulness, to share our faith with others, and to share our faith through the scriptures.

[28 : 52] Why not go to a Christian bookshop, find some small portion of scripture and carry that with you, or perhaps carry several of them with you, and as opportunity arises to speak about your faith, give someone a gospel, or give someone a copy of a psalm.

I find my work at the present moment, my research among young adults, the psalms are the gateway into talking about spiritual things, talking about spirituality.

The psalms are a wonderful door opener to introduce a spiritual conversation, and I would commend them to you, but you may prefer to use a gospel, you may prefer to use the book of Proverbs, you may prefer to use some other part of scripture, but God has given us his word in

order that we might confirm it, in order that we might, if you like, authenticate it as best we can, in order that we might commend it to others.

That's why David wrote this psalm, in order that he might tell the faithfulness of the Lord, and he encourages us to do the same. May God grant that today we might leave this place committed in a new way to telling others of the faithfulness of God.

Let's pray.