

MOURNING INTO DANCING

Psalm 30

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Psalm 30 is a beautiful and powerful psalm. For me anyway it's been a great source of blessing. I've called it "Mourning into Dancing" or wailing into dancing to borrow a phrase out of verse 11. "A song of David for the dedication of the temple" (NIV): That superscription may seem initially to be inappropriate. We'll look as we consider this psalm tonight why that came to be used as a superscription.

"I will exalt you, O LORD, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me. O LORD my God, I called to you for help and you healed me. O LORD, you brought me up from the grave; you spared me from going down into the pit. Sing to the LORD, you saints of his; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning. When I felt secure, I said, 'I will never be shaken.' O LORD, when you favored me, you made my mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed. To you, O LORD, I called; to the Lord I cried for mercy: 'What gain is there in my destruction, in my going down into 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.' You turned my wailing 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" (Psalm 30:1-12, NIV).

As you can see just by preliminary reading of this psalm—and parenthetically we should note that an initial reading doesn't always dive us right into it. Some of these psalms you need to read several times over to begin to pick up what is the mood and the content of the psalm. But the

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particular circumstances of the psalm as we read it suggests David as an individual in very dire straits. His dire straits later come to be universalized in the experience of the whole nation of Israel when it falls into captivity. The psalm deals with personal sickness on David's part, a sickness which he accepts responsibility for as having stemmed out of sin in his life. There's a great deal of discussion today as to whether or not sickness is caused by sin. Yes, in some cases it is. David owns up to the fact that his sickness is caused by his sin and God has spared him. But at the same time this personal experience he has had in the history of Israel of a nation becomes one in which there is this great moral and spiritual sickness. This psalm came to symbolize that God had heard the prayers of His people who had been grievously punished for their sin and now were brought back and were restored. It's very likely even Jesus as a boy could have used this psalm in observance of the time of year.

The psalm itself is divided rather clearly into two parts. The first part involves David talking about why God is to be praised. What specific things God has done for him that merit praise. Then verses 6–12 sort of cover the same ground but they review why David got into the situation he got into. So it's a review of David's condition that had brought him into the need for praying. The review goes all the way from the reason why he got in trouble to the miraculous deliverance the Lord ultimately accomplished.

I. To see the elements of David's distress all we need to do is look at the specific language that is employed to see how bad things were in his life.

If things are bad for you tonight, this is a great psalm to identify with. Verse 1, "You lifted me out of the depths." When you are in the depths, water over your head, low places. The fact that it's a time of distress is followed up by the phrase of "enemies gloat." What is it like to have an active enemy? Some of you can't identify an active enemy. Some of you can.

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Verse 2, “I called to You for help and You healed me.” “Healed” indicates that he was an ill person. Then to hear how ill he was, verse 3 indicates the severity of the illness. “You brought me up from the grave.” The same word for “grave” can be used for “well.” Jeremiah was put into a cistern or a place from which he had to be brought up. He was helpless down in the muck and the mire. This is how David feels. His sickness had been bringing him down to the grave. Even the *Sheol*, the place of the dead. David did not have a clear perception of the afterlife. He saw the place of the dead far different than how Christ would show light on the subject. He only had hints of immortality. Christ turned the whole light on.

There is this additional phrase in verse 5 that tells us that not only was he ill but he was experiencing in that illness the anger of the Lord. That produced a condition of weeping.

II. By David’s own admission in verses 6 and 7 he indicates that his illness results from his own boastfulness.

“When I felt secure I said, ‘I will never be shaken.’” It was in this spirit of self-sufficiency and pride that God brings him down low and proves to him that God is perfectly capable of bringing him to a place of being shaken. David said, “I was that way and God had to bring me down.”

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament allow for the suffering both of the innocent and the guilty. That’s why when you talk about suffering it’s so difficult. Only God knows whose suffering is related to their sin and whose suffering has nothing to do with sin at all. Job eloquently points out in the Old Testament there is some suffering that is not related to sin in the slightest iota. But here in Psalm 30 you can find it. There is a sickness which results from a person’s own sin.

The danger is that someone will read Psalm 30 and think that that is all there is to say on sin and suffering. It only says that some sickness results from sin.

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The New Testament makes room for this fact. Maybe sometimes we gloss over it. But I'd like to point out three New Testament passages, which link together the possibility of physical sickness as originating from sin in our life.

A. First Corinthians 5:4–5 “When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord” (NIV).

Evidently what is involved is church discipline. When all else has failed and somebody still hasn't repented the church and the leadership met together and literally handed that person over in a prayer of dismissal saying, “This person's body is now given over to Satan that it might be worked upon by the devil.” Then hopefully that work will be sufficient to bring them to their senses that their spirit maybe saved in the day in which they stand before the Lord. It was saying you step outside the safety of God's people and God's ark then you expose yourself to the activity which can bring you into bodily illness which hopefully will bring salvation to your spirit because that chastening process will bring you to acknowledgement of the Lord's presence.

B. First Corinthians 11:29–30 takes the same tack. This time the suffering and the illness is related to improper partaking of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper in the Early Church was connected with a potluck meal. What you have is people elbowing to the table and taking all the good stuff or if they were wealthy just eating with their own clique while the poor people sat aside eating their pieces of crust and the like. Paul tells them that this is not a proper celebration of communion. He says, “For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 11:29–30, NIV). Not asleep in the church service, but asleep in the ground. His euphemism for death.

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C. Then the third New Testament text which links illness to sin is James 5:15–16. “And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (NIV). Notice the interrelationship of bodily illness to unforgiveness in this text. And the need to examine your life when you’ve prayed for illness to insure that there is not the active presence of sin in your life, that you’ve come for physical healing and anointing with oil in the body of Christ with a pure spirit. So much as lies within you, you have brought to God those things which are a barrier in your spirit. In the New Testament the Lord demonstrated this on a number of occasions. Especially when He healed the paralytic when He said, “Your sins be forgiven you” (Matthew 9:2). The Lord does not just want to put well bodies on top of sick people. It’s like putting fresh clothes on rotting garbage.

It’s kind of an admonition for us. If we find ourselves sick one of the things that we need to do is to ask ourselves, “Have I let anything in my life that’s not of God? Have I let bitterness in my life? Have I let unforgiveness in my life? Have I let resentment in my life? Have I let unresolved anger in my life?” I’m not talking about imaginary drudging up of what’s wrong. I suffer with people who have to look and look: “There must be something still wrong in me because I haven’t been healed.” It certainly is one of the things we need to look at if we are ill.

Sometimes maybe our sin is of neglect, like not exercising properly or eating properly.

If we can say with a good conscience, my sins are confessed. My conscience is clear. Psalm 30 is such a contrast with Psalm 17. Psalm 17 is likewise a prayer to the Lord for deliverance. There when David is in a real tight spot. Verse 5, “My feet have not slipped” indicates he’s been going in a direction that’s headed downward. He says, “Though you probe my heart and examine me at night, though you test me, you will find nothing; I have resolved that my mouth will not sin”

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(verse 3, NIV). There he is spotless, pure, whiter than snow. No conscience affliction, no problem.

There can be various epochs in your life. Just because one year you've had this great clean slate with the Lord. It may be that down the road something else happens and yesterday's circumstances don't apply. One of the neat things about David is he's just honest wherever he is at that moment in life. He's honest with himself and with God.

It's one thing to be out of favor with another person. That can be managed. But when the heart of a person becomes aware that God has been displeased then the trauma is deep. The words of David in Psalm 30 describe what it's like to be out of favor with God. It is a desperate thing. In David's mind it's worse than a sickness itself. To think that God turned against him. This direction in David's life is down. Down to the pit. Verse 3. Down to despair, verse 7. Down to destruction, verse 9.

David in the midst of being chastised by the Lord through his bodily illness makes no attempt to bargain with God on the basis of his past accomplishments, which by this time were rather formidable. David had done a lot of good things. He's not saying, "Remember all the good I've done." He acknowledges the fact that no matter what he had done it doesn't cut it with God if his heart isn't right. David is discounting anything he's ever done for God because at that moment his conscience is not clear. He is in danger—to use Paul's language—of being a castaway.

It's easy to see how this psalm then in the whole life experience of the nation of Israel becomes such an important psalm. There was also this kind of thing going on later within Israel after David at the time of the divided kingdom. The spirit of self-sufficiency and not depending upon God. And of course terrible chastisement was meted out as a result.

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David, however, in this psalm has experienced God's healing and God's forgiveness even though he, David, was the source of the illness. The psalm is not a psalm that's on the downside. It's saying that even when we have failed God and been at our worse and been in danger of slipping so completely away from God that we came down to the pit. Even then God's grace can find us, save us and establish us. The psalm begins "I will exalt you, O LORD, for you lifted me out of the depths" (Psalm 30:1, NIV).

The psalm begins already with God having answered prayer. The rest is just a rehearsal, a process that has been gone through. As David begins to exalt the Lord, verse 4, he asks the rest of the congregation to join in. One of the things we do when we testify. We're saying that what God does for us establishes the principle of how God acts righteously for all of His people. Therefore the testimony of one is to be enjoyed by everybody else because it tells us that God acts in a predictable kind of a way. We have reasons for exalting the Lord. "Sing to the LORD, you saints of his; praise his holy name" (verse 4, NIV).

Then of course David says, "I was under His anger but that only lasts for a moment. His favor lasts for a lifetime." Then the great phrase, "Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (verse 5, NIV). Here "morning" is meant to stand for eternity. The night was the very black personal experience we pass through. But it's not here to last.

David's personal deliverance becomes a window through which we see what God is really like. What David is saying in this psalm is the Lord is stronger than illness. He has power to raise us up even when we've gone down to the brink. The Lord is stronger than death and even the power of the grave. He's saying through his own personal healing that the Lord's favor lasts longer than His anger.

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The final two verses then bring it all together and show the effect upon our personal lives of the reality of what God has done. The last two verses require movement. “You turned my wailing 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” (verses 11–12, NIV).

You might look at this psalm and say especially if you’re in a jam right now in your life, this is a little too neat. It’s a little too clean. Everything turns out a little bit too ok. It’s too Pollyanna-ish. It’s like a thirty-minute plot or a sixty-minute detective show where by the time you get to the end everything has turned out all right. Therefore, is it really honest? Is this the way things really come about? Especially if you go through moments in your life where it just looks like there’s a lot of things that didn’t get tried, a lot of ends left jangled. If I understand our relationship with God any kind of way at all, the fact that He has a covenant relationship with us, that He’s committed to us, means that when you commit to Him, whenever it comes time to write the bottom line every one of our lives turns out just like Psalm 30. There are no loose ends at the end. There’s no downside at the end. There’s no inability to reconcile God’s ways with His dealings with us. In the bottom analysis we’ll say, “God, You really did bring it all together! You really didn’t leave me stranded out there when I thought I was stranded. You really didn’t leave me in the pit. You brought it all together.” This psalm therefore has such a universal appeal to any believer because it tells us no matter what our night, God will bring us through. In David’s case he got to see the experience of God cleaning it up all in a matter of maybe weeks or months. May all of our problems be that quickly cleaned up. But if they’re not all cleaned up within that short a period of time then the psalm is saying to us God will always do this. That’s His bottom line. He will always turn our wailing into dancing and remove our sackcloth and clothe us with joy.

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The psalms are meant to be used in our own personal prayer life. They're meant to give us stimulus. They're meant to show us how we are to pray over the wide range of emotions and needs of our life. Even if our problems aren't related to our own sinfulness this psalm still speaks to us. It tells us that we can exalt the Lord who lifts us out of the depths. He does turn our wailing into dancing.

Closing Prayer

Lord, there's got to be people among us this evening going through times when it's tough. You wouldn't have sent this psalm to us tonight if it didn't match some of the needs in our life. There are some places, Lord, in our existence that are sore points and hurtful points that maybe only You alone see. Nobody else sees that deeply and into that great a need. We want to take a moment in Your presence, Lord, to examine our own hearts. We think of the other psalm that invites You to search and to try us and to see if there be any wicked way in us. In adversity, Lord, we don't want to be unaware of the fact that You may be sending us a message. Lord, if in any dimension of our life we have transgressed in thought or word or deed we want to come now and ask for Your healing and Your cleansing. We don't want to put ourselves as a person who is in a secure place of pride and self-sufficiency when in fact all of us are humbled.