

CRY TO GOD FOR MERCY IN YOUR DEEPEST DESPERATION

Psalm 6: 1-10 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Prayer is the forerunner of mercy. That great 18th century hymn writer William Cowper, who at times, fought with desperate suicidal thoughts, wrote, “Prayer makes the darkened cloud withdraw, Prayer climbs the ladder Jacob saw, Gives exercise to faith and love, Brings every blessing from above.” How many of us here today would go so far as to say, “I am at the end of my rope.”? That’s where David appears to be in Psalm 6. No one knows for sure what occasion precipitated Psalm 6, but the picture is clear. David is encompassed by enemies. Their hatred for him has all but sapped him of life and hope. The trouble in David’s spirit appears to have produced a wasting away in his body. So David appears surrounded by hostile foes and disease. The trouble in his body seems to be the result of the trouble in his soul.

Much of the pathos in this psalm has the pathetic sound of a plaintive man’s cry that almost, seems to be the penning of this psalm with David’s own blood. Although we don’t know the occasion for the song David wrote, one particular occasion comes to my mind. Do you remember the occasion when David was running for his life from King Saul and the Israeli army? He became so desperate, he began to think the better answer to saving his life was to turn himself over to his enemies, the Philistines. We read in I Samuel 27: 1, “Then David said in his heart, “Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I would escape to the land of the Philistines.” For David, it was a foolish decision, a lapse of faith that was born out of fear, despair, and desperation.

Decisions made when we are emotionally in upheaval and despair, decisions made in desperation are exceedingly perilous decisions. We are vulnerable to bad choices, choices we would never make if our wits were collected and we could think straight. Remember beloved, when we are down, at the end of our rope, we inevitably stumble into bad judgment. Single people, both men and women have contemplated a life of perpetual loneliness and settled for a mate they haven’t loved, one that has made their life even more miserable. Many people have walked away from a good job because of a momentary frustration. In rage they have walked out of a good job, only to wind up in a job that is far less desirable. Many couples have divorced because their marriages were at a low ebb, only to live to deeply regret their decision. Many pastors have resigned a post as under-shepherd only because they have become weary and discouraged. Many church members have left their church and the Lord, because they have encountered a difficulty with another member at church. In anger, they’ve abandoned God and the church,

only later to regret it. Ignatius of Loyola, in the 16th century wrote a book called, “The Spiritual Exercises.” He wrote, “There are two conditions in the Christian life. ***One is consolation***, when the soul is aroused to a love for its Creator and Lord. This is when faith, hope, and love and interior joy inspire the soul to peace and quiet in the Lord. ***The other is desolation***, when there is darkness of soul, turmoil of mind, a strong inclination to earthly things, restlessness resulting from disturbances, and temptations leading to loss of faith. We find ourselves apathetic, tepid, sad, and separated, as it were, from our Lord. In time of desolation, one should never make a change, but stand firm and constant in the resolution and decision which guided him the day before the desolation, or to the decision which he observed in the preceding consolation. For just as the good Spirit guides and consoles us in consolation, so in desolation, the evil spirit guides and counsels. Following this evil spirit, one can never find the correct way to a right decision. Donald Grey Barnhouse wrote, “If God wants you to trust Him, He puts you in a place of difficulty. If He wants you to trust Him greatly, He puts you in a place of impossibility. For when a thing is impossible, then we who are so prone to move things by the force of our own being, can say, ‘Lord, it has to be You. I am utterly, absolutely nothing.’”

During WWII, there was an advisor to Winston Churchill, who organized a group of people to pray as the future in England seemed at desperation point. This group of people dropped what they were doing every night at a prescribed hour for one minute, to collectively pray for the safety of England, its people and for peace. Prayer had an amazing effect. The bombing of Britain stopped. There is now a group of people organizing the same kind of prayer vigil in America as we face this election year. This group of intercessors has put out a call to prayer that says, “The United States of America needs prayer more than ever! If you, as a citizen, would like to participate, each evening at 9:00 P.M. Eastern Time (8 PM Central, 7 PM Mountain, 6 PM Pacific), then stop whatever you're doing, and spend one minute praying for the safety of the United States, our troops, our citizens, for peace in the world, the upcoming November election, that the Bible will remain the basis for the laws governing our land, and that Christianity will grow in the United States.” If we all understood the full extent of the power we have available through prayer, we would be speechless. Our prayers are the most powerful asset we have.

As we look at Psalm 6, it appears to be a journal or transcript of David’s winding road of pain and suffering. This psalm has been labeled since the sixth century as the first of seven penitential psalms. Cassiodorus in his commentary on the Psalms, so named them as the seven penitential psalms or psalms of confession of sin including psalm 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143. That simply means that these

seven psalms show very expressive sorrow of the psalmist over his sin. Interestingly, though the sin of the psalmist is implied in this psalm, Psalm 6 never once mentions David's sin. There are four distinct bends in this road of psalm 6. These curves in the road cannot be described as strophes or stanzas. To call these shifts in the psalm strophes would be like building an artificial framework for this psalm that is more of a gush of emotions, a spontaneous gush of tears and desperation. I want us to examine these four curves/switchbacks in David's road of desperation. In the end, for David, the road ahead begins to become clear. Yet, to start with, as I study this psalm, it appears that the mountain stream of David's love for the Lord has been fouled up, as if a herd of cattle went and stood in the water to drink it and to foul its pure water with their waste. In this psalm, let's observe these four distinct winding paths that are interrupted by a sharp curve. What four lessons does the Lord want us to learn in David's penitential psalm of desperation?

TELL THE LORD THE DEPTHS OF YOUR DESPERATION WHEN YOU FEEL HIS REBUKE AND DISCIPLINE IS MORE THAN YOU CAN BEAR.

(I.) Look at verses 1-3. "O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath. Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled. But You, O Lord—how long?" Since David makes no mention of specific sin in this psalm, commentators believe David wrongly believed his plight of having enemies against him and having a lapse in health, was proof that his suffering was the rebuke and discipline of the Lord. I don't discount this possibility. Sometimes we do mistake all our trials as the rebuke and discipline of the Lord. We can wrongly believe that all sickness and suffering is because of sin. Yet, beloved, in the days we are living in today, we too easily abandon any connection that there might be between our sin and our subsequent suffering. When David is talking about the rebuke of the Lord and the discipline and chastening of the Lord in these first few of his cries out to the Lord, he had no doubt what was going on. It was for him as clear as could be. God was rebuking and disciplining him for his sin, and David was telling the Lord what he thought about it as that he was crying out—pleading with God not to rebuke and chasten him in his anger and hot displeasure. David believed that his physical sickness was the outcome of his sin in his spiritual walk with God.

Never minimize the sense that God's discipline, though always given to us in love may seem to us like it is too much, and that it is given in God's anger with us, in His hot displeasure. Is David saying, "God, you may discipline me in love, but not in anger?" That is possible, but again, I don't hear that plea from David. David is telling God that the pain of His discipline and rebuke is getting to be more than he can bear. In verse 2, David says he is languishing. The Hebrew word is **umlal**. It

means drooping, feeble, sick, mourning, weak to the point of death. David is telling the Lord that His discipline and rebuke is killing him, that it is about to kill him. If it is true that David's sin has brought on this discipline from the Lord, then imagine the emotional upheaval inside David's soul as he thought about the awfulness of his adultery, murder, deception, and all it was doing to him, his family, and his nation. The weight of our sins, just to feel it for a short time during our discipline, is almost unbearable. Discipline and rebuke brings to our minds clearly the awfulness and the terribleness of our sin. It is a heavy matter. Beloved, on the cross, Jesus bore not the discipline, but the punishment of the awfulness of the sins of each of us. He bore the wrath of God which fell upon Him for the sins of the world. Jesus received the punishment for all our sins at Calvary. That cup did not pass from Jesus. It was the heaviest weight that has ever been borne.

Let me remind us all that God wants us as His children to both love Him and fear Him, for in our fear and reverence for Him, rests our safety. When our children were home under our rearing, I wanted them to run to my arms of love, but also to stop when I said stop—to fear the unpleasant consequences of disobeying my voice. It is true in the home. It is true with God. If we respect our parents or God, but do not fear them or Him, we will consider commandments we receive as negotiable. David now was re-learning that God's commands are not negotiable. David was re-learning as his very bones were aching and troubled, that he needed to re-organize the way he lived. He could no longer believe that he was exempt of God's discipline, above it, because he was the king of Israel. Oh no! His words are—"Oh Lord, how long? Haven't you finished your discipline of me? Isn't this enough? As I teach loving discipline in the home, I battle the awful presence of abuse that reigns in our world. Nevertheless, I know that my own parents disciplined us, as Mom said, "Until God gives me peace." In David's cry for relief, God welcomed David telling Him exactly what was on his heart as he cried for the discipline to end. There's a second lesson.

TELL THE LORD YOUR FEAR OF DYING WHEN YOU ARE AT DEATH'S DOOR; CALL FOR HIS LOVE TO BRING DELIVERANCE.

(II.) Notice this next bend in the road as we move from fear of discipline to fear of dying. Verses 4, 5 are a new focus, "Turn, O Lord, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love. For in death there is no remembrance of you. In Sheol, or the grave, who will give you praise?" Everyone of us have called for love in the face of discipline. We've cried out, "If you love me, stop it." David's cry has gotten beyond any focus on discipline. He is certain he is going to die of his sickness. In the face of this turn of events, David is crying out for God's **hesed**, the Hebrew word often translated mercy or lovingkindness. David is crying for

deliverance. Romans 2: 4 tells us that it is God’s kindness that leads us to repentance. It is in kindness that God disciplines His own children. Nevertheless, Hebrews 12: 11 reminds us that “No discipline for the moment seems to be joyous, but grievous.” David said in verse 3, “My soul is terrified exceedingly.” As the Holy Spirit works in our hearts, He doesn’t stop until we realize just how dreadful sin is, and that it is our own sins that nailed Jesus to the cross. But now, in verses 4, 5, David is doubting that he is going to continue in the land of the living. David was originally crying—“Deliver my soul, my body and emotions from Your discipline.” Now David is pleading for his life. David is promising God open praise if he can just live through this desperate time he is in. David adds, “If I die, I cannot praise you then. I can only praise You, Lord if I am alive.” David had gone beyond weakness and terrified bones. He wasn’t fearing the dying part of death, but he feared reaching a place where he could no longer praise the Lord.

Don’t be too hard on David. Under the Old Covenant, the saints could even speak of going to God after death. David said after his baby boy died, in II Sam. 12: 23, “I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.” We as New Testament saints know that Paul tells us in II Corinthians 5: 8 that “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” Aren’t you glad we live on this side of Calvary, this side of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and that we have all the New Testament promises? David’s heart is that he still wants to live to praise the Lord, and his limited Old Testament understanding of what happens in death left him thinking all praise is over at death. Beloved, praise really begins in earnest when we are in the presence of the Lord in glory. Many true believers today don’t know what happens when we die. In the past few months, I have answered this question in the hospital for people here in our church that have feared if they die, that they will have to wait for who knows how long to ever be in heaven. Thank God, praise of Him is available down here and it will go on forever and ever. There is a third lesson:

TELL THE LORD YOU CAN’T SEEM TO SEE BEYOND THE BED FULL OF TEARS YOU ARE LYING ON. (III.) Beloved, in our grief, all of us use hyperbole—that is, we stretch the truth not to fit the facts as much as to fit our emotions. David says here in verses 6, 7, “I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows weary because of my foes.” This weeping is true repentance, beloved. This is not light or trivial repentance. It’s not saying, “Well, yes, I am sorry for what I did.” No, this is repentance that can barely speak, that makes the eyes weary from tears, dimmed by the salty residue that blurs vision in the steady flood of David’s salty tears. This dissolving or drenching of his couch with his tears is the story of nights alone—and for David, the grief here is not over

the loss of a loved one, but the grief is over the loss of integrity, the loss of morality, the loss of ethical honesty, and the loss of a right relationship with God prior to confession and repentance. When all is said and done, when all the story is told, God wants to know from us that we cannot see clearly through the dark lens of our heartache. Jeremiah Rankin knew about David's plight in Psalm 6: 6,7 when he wrote the old hymn, "Tell It To Jesus." In verse 2, he wrote, "Do the tears flow down your cheeks unbidden, Tell it to Jesus, Tell it to Jesus. Have you sins that to men's eyes are hidden? Tell it to Jesus alone. Tell it to Jesus, Tell it to Jesus, He is a friend that's well known. You've no other such a friend or brother. Tell it to Jesus alone." Beloved, when fatigue, tears, sorrow, and fears engulf us, and we feel inconsolable, the only hope is telling the Lord, and that's what David did. Lastly,

TELL THE LORD AND EVERYONE ELSE ABOUT THE ANTICIPATED VICTORY THAT IS AHEAD FOR THOSE WHO TELL IT ALL TO HIM.

(IV.) Notice verses 8-10. "Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping. The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord accepts my prayer. All my enemies shall be ashamed and greatly troubled; They shall turn back and be put to shame in a moment." David was still praying, but he was announcing to his adversaries that God was still with him, in spite of his sadness, sickness, weakness, chastisement and pain. Now as David concluded his prayer, he no longer felt abandoned by God. He now was assured that the God who loved him also heard his prayers. That was David's present trust, but he also had a future hope. David now spoke as if the answer that was on the way had already arrived. He was saying, "God, you have heard my weeping. You have granted all my requests. You have answered my prayers. These enemies of mine are ashamed. They are troubled, and cowards who are disgraced. They have turned around, turned tail and have run away from me. Lord, you have put my enemies to shame in a moment." Where does this confidence come from? It is nothing other than the reward of the breath of God He breaths on the troubled spirit of His saints. The peace and confidence of God is the reward of submissive prayer. David was now speaking like a New Testament saint, like Paul in Romans 4: 17 who by faith, like Abraham was, "seeing things that are not as though they were." I enjoy the writing of Bill Crowder. In 1980, he had been a pastor for 2 days when his godly dad had a massive heart attack and died. At the visitation, a pastor friend saw Bill standing with tears in front of the casket. He joined him there and said strange words, "One day you will be thankful for this." The look Bill gave him made this older pastor say more. He said, "I have preached many funerals, but I have never lost someone close to me. I have never been able to say to a grieving family, "I know how you feel." Already you are better equipped than I am." That pastor friend took Bill Crowder past his tears & fears to anticipated victory ahead. Tell the Lord—1-4!