

Weeping, then Rejoicing

Psalm 30

John Breon

This psalm starts with a testimony, a witness about what God has done. Think about the testimonies that came after Jesus was raised from the dead. Mary Magdalene ran to tell the other disciples about the empty tomb and later told them, "I have seen the Lord!" The beloved disciple might have said, "I started believing when I saw the empty tomb and later the risen Lord appeared to us." Thomas could have told about his doubt and demand for proof. But then he could have told how the Lord appeared and showed him his wounds. Two disciples who walked to the village of Emmaus on resurrection day met the risen Lord, but didn't recognize him until they invited him to stay with them and he blessed and broke the bread. They said, "Didn't our hearts burn within us while he talked with us and opened the Scriptures to us?" They ran back to the other disciples and told how the Lord had come to them and how they recognized him in the breaking of the bread. Simon Peter could tell about running to see the tomb and finding it empty. He could tell how the Lord appeared to them in a locked room. He could tell about returning to Galilee, going fishing again, and not catching anything until a stranger on the shore said to cast the net on the other side of the boat. There was a miraculous catch of fish, someone said, "It's the Lord!" and Peter jumped in the water to swim to shore. Jesus confronted him and restored him. Later, Peter and the others would stand in Jerusalem and proclaim Jesus with words like this: "You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this" (Acts 3:15). A good bit of Acts, and the rest of the New Testament, records the testimonies of people who knew the living Lord.

In the psalm, the songwriter says, "I will *exalt*—or *lift you up*, Lord, because *you lifted me* out of the depths. I called to you and *you healed me*. *You brought me up* from the realm of the dead." It's no wonder this psalm is also associated with Easter.

What a witness this is. I was sunk, but you lifted me out of the deep place where I was stuck. The songwriter apparently had been ill, but God

healed him. He thought he was as good as dead, but the Lord raised him up.

One pastor told about sitting at his desk studying and seeking a word from the Lord for people who felt like their faith had grown dull. As he looked out the window, he saw a brilliant rainbow that touched a cemetery. When the rainbow—God’s covenant faithfulness and love—touches the graveyard, it raises the dead and gives new life

(<http://www.brehmcenter.com/initiatives/ogilvieinstitute/resources/ogilvie-archives/>).

When have you been down and the Lord has helped you? When have you been sick and the Lord has healed you? If we’re in Christ, we’ve been raised from the death of sin to walk in newness of life. What dead places in you has the Lord touched with life-giving power?

I sometimes get a feeling of being in a spiritual fog. Things don’t seem as clear as they once did. Or I forget something of God’s purpose and goodness. I fail to do what I know. I realize there’s selfishness in me that needs to be replaced with the love of God. But then God gives grace and light. I start to get enthused about what God is doing and the possibilities not just in my life, but in the church and the community. Did you know that the word *enthusiasm* means to have God in us? We can’t play it cool when we know that the living God is in us and is working to deliver and heal and resurrect us.

I don’t want to make you too uncomfortable, but I want to try something. Would you turn to someone near you and tell them something God has done for you, that you praise God for, that you thank God for?

Next the songwriter invites others to praise and thank the Lord. “Sing the praises of the LORD, you his faithful people; give thanks to his holy name.” At the very end of the psalm, the songwriter makes a lifetime commitment to sing God’s praise and thank God. For the writers of the Psalms, to live is to praise God and to praise God is to live (J. Clinton McCann, Jr., *The Book of Psalms, The New Interpreter’s Bible* online: <http://www.ministrymatters.com/library>, accessed 4/18/17).

Here, we're praising and thanking God because his favor is greater than his anger. God is angry at sin, at our sin. That's not because God's a cosmic killjoy. It's because God knows how destructive sin is and he hates to see it hurting us and destroying God's good creation. Still, God's anger is just for a moment, but his favor, his grace is for a lifetime. We may weep through the night, but there's joy in the morning. After the night of weeping, there's rejoicing, a shout of joy.

Sorrow, pain, grief are not forever. God can turn sorrow to joy when we give it to him. Jesus said something similar to his disciples the night before his death:

Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. (John 16:20-22)

Whatever you're going through, whatever pain or sorrow you have, trust that it's not the last word. It doesn't define you. God has something more. The sorrow and weeping will end and then will come rejoicing, shouts of thanks and praise to our Healer and Deliverer.

There's an old Gospel song that sets this theme to music:

If you've knelt beside the rubble of an aching broken heart
When the things you gave your life to fell apart
You're not the first to be acquainted with sorrow, grief or pain
But the master promised sunshine after rain

To invest your seeds of trust in God in mountains you can't move
You've risked your life on things you cannot prove
But to give the things you cannot keep for what you cannot lose
Is the way to find the joy God has for you

Hold on my child, joy comes in the morning
Weeping only lasts for the night
Hold on my child, joy comes in the morning
The darkest hour means dawn is just in sight

(Bill and Gloria Gaither, on a couple of The Bill Gaither Trio albums and on Homecoming videos;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgYJnA7hrik>)

Jesus is our example for joy and the source of our joy. Joy is all over the gospel. Remember how the angel announced Jesus' birth as "good news of great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10). Later, during his ministry, there's a time when Jesus' disciples have returned from a mission. Jesus is full of joy through the Holy Spirit and praises the Father (Lk 2:21). At the Last Supper, Jesus tells about abiding in him "so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11). Last week we saw how the women left the empty tomb with fear and great joy (Matthew 28:8). After Jesus' ascension, the disciples "worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Lk 24:52).

Now the psalm moves into a time of confession. The songwriter says that when things were going well and he felt secure, he thought nothing could shake him. But then something changed and he started wondering where God was. He was dismayed and started crying out to God for mercy. Maybe this is an example of weeping for the night. The fact that rejoicing follows weeping is not triumphalism. It's not that nothing touches us or that knowing joy is always easy.

This psalm is associated with David, Israel's king. There was a time when David took a census of the nation to measure his military power. It seems he did this out of pride and not dependence on God. God was angry at that and David had to repent (1 Chronicles 21).

Pride, self-sufficiency, lack of depending on God can wreck our joy, can wreck our lives. The songwriter wondered where God was. He feared dying and being unable to praise God. At that point, Israel didn't have a resurrection faith. God hadn't revealed that yet. So in the songwriter's mind, dying would end everything, including his ability to praise God. So he cried

for mercy, for grace, for help. Notice, it's not just, "Help me, Lord!" but it's "LORD, *be my help.*" It's in relationship with God that we receive his help.

This brings us back to praise. Praise is the antidote to pride and self-sufficiency. If you're praising and thanking God, you're giving God credit instead of taking credit for yourself and your life.

At the end of the psalm, we return to joy. Lord, you've turned my mourning into dancing. You've stripped me of my funeral clothes and clothed me with joy. In Isaiah, the Servant of the LORD is anointed with God's Spirit and sent to bring freedom and healing to people. Among other things, he will give to the people "a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair" (61:1-3).

The idea of wailing turning to dancing reminds us of another experience of David's. The Ark of the Covenant was being brought into Jerusalem. David led the procession and danced like crazy before the Lord.

Michael Lindvall's book *The Good News from North Haven* is about the fictional town of North Haven, MN and David Battles, the pastor of Second Presbyterian Church there. In one story, David tells about the church leaders voting not to let the kids have a dance in the church basement. Then, at a wedding reception, David and his wife Annie see some of the same church leaders dancing a polka and having a great time—until they see their pastor come in. When they saw him, they didn't stop dancing, they just stopped having fun doing it.

The next week, David used the story from 2 Samuel about King David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant. He titled the sermon "The Lord of the Dance." In the sermon he said that "in the heart of God there is a profound, vibrant, dancing joy, and if there's a dancing joy in our God, so there should be in us."

After the sermon, he even prayed "that we, Your people, might be filled with Your joy, that our hearts might dance as David danced before the Ark, that we might dance for the goodness of life." During silent prayer, he asked God to deepen in him the joy of faith, touch him often with the joy of laughter, and fill him with the spirit of the dance.

Then he said, "Amen," and "let us now receive the offering." David sat down and four ushers soberly passed the plates. When the offering had

been collected, the organist started the Doxology, and the ushers marched down the aisle, wooden plates in their hands.

They stopped at the foot of the five carpeted steps that led up to the very elevated chancel where the communion table sat and where the offering plates were to be placed when full. He prayed from the top of the steps and then walked down to get the plates.

All went as usual until he turned, a plate in each hand, to mount the steps to the chancel and place the offering on the communion table. The hem of his robe had come loose and as he took the first step, his toe caught it. But he didn't fall. He should have backed down then and there, but years of habit kept him aimed onward and upward. With the next step, he was further inside the garment. By the time he took the third step, he realized that he was walking up the middle of the robe. He was nearly on his knees. He could have turned around and sat down on the steps, freed his feet and started over.

But he decided to stay the course. He straightened up with all his might. The robe gave way and ripped right at the bottom button. The force of this sudden freedom sent his arms jerking upward. He managed to hold on to the offering plates, but all their contents flew up and back over his head. Offering envelopes, bills, and change rained down on the heads of four stunned ushers.

He says he should have turned around to the congregation, bowed theatrically, and accepted the humorous and humbling grace of the moment. But he marched on up the steps as though nothing had happened, and laid the empty offering plates on the table. The ushers marched back down the aisle through all the offertory debris.

He turned around to return to the pulpit and dared a glance at the congregation. He saw the tops of one hundred twenty heads, bowed deeply in prayer so they wouldn't have to look at him. There wasn't a hint of hilarity, not a giggle or a titter, although he thought he saw some shaking as though they were stifling laughter. They sang the closing hymn without looking at each other. As David stood in the greeting line after the service, two elderly ladies offered to repair his robe and a guy asked, "Have a nice trip? See you next fall." That stale joke was the nearest anybody came

to laughing out loud at the accidental offertory dance before the altar of God.

In the sermon David had soberly pronounced that “in the heart of God there is a profound, vibrant, dancing joy.” He had prayed, “Lord, teach me to dance.” Perhaps that prayer was answered and he was given a first dancing lesson. To dance, you have to be willing to play the fool a bit. In some eyes, all dancing, unnecessary movement that it is, will look foolish. To dance, you must step away from that burdensome consciousness of self. Faith is a dance with divinity, a mad polka done on the grave, kicking your legs back, and shouting out polka “whoops” like the fool you are. And maybe we should even throw money in the air. We should certainly laugh at ourselves when we trip (68-72).

God clothes us with joy and teaches us to dance so we may sing God’s praises and not be silent. I read one time about a church conference. As people went into the sanctuary, they were each given a brightly colored helium balloon. They were asked, during the service, when something touched them or moved them or gave them joy, to release their balloon. All through the service, balloons floated to the ceiling. But at the end of the service, about a third of the people still held onto their balloons (Bruce Larson, *Luke, The Communicator’s Commentary*). Let’s not keep silent. Let’s not hold back. Instead, let’s be committed to praising God, dancing for joy, singing God’s praise, shouting our thanks forever.

Let’s start right now. Would you thank God for what he’s done for you, for what he’s given you, for what he promises to do and to give?