

My Comforter

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[0 : 00] Thanks very much, Jamie and band. Welcome everyone again. Thank you for coming out this evening. You'll be pleased to know we have a more upbeat psalm today, both on Sundays and Wednesdays.

Recently, we've had some psalms that talk about the problem the psalmist has had, some caused by sin, some caused by a difficulty in discerning God's presence. This evening, we're looking at someone who's come out of that situation and is able to praise God for his deliverance from it.

So let's read it together and then we'll look at what God's got to say to us through it. So Psalm 30, heading in my Bible says, A Psalm, a song for the dedication of the temple of David.

David writes, I will exalt you, Lord, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies float over me. Lord my God, I called to you for help and you healed me.

You, Lord, brought me up from the realm of the grave. You spared me from going down to the pit. Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people. Praise his holy name.

[1 : 06] For his anger lasts but only a moment, but his favour lasts a lifetime. Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

When I felt secure, I said, I will never be shaken. Lord, when you favoured me, you made my royal 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 is gained if I am silenced, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness?

Hear, Lord, and be merciful to me. Lord, be my help. You turn my wailing into dancing. You remove my sackcloth and clothe me with joy that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent.

Lord, my God, I will praise you forever. I'm sure God will bless his word as we consider it together. One of the things I think we've learned as we've looked at quite a number of psalms over recent months is that it's always worth having a look at the heading.

[2 : 22] The heading and psalms, I think, are a bit like chapter and verse divisions in our Bible. They're not a part of the inspired scripture. Their helps have been added to give us some guidance as we seek to understand what God is saying to us.

So very often, the headings for the psalms give us some kind of indication of the circumstances in which they were written, and that then can help us to relate them to our lives.

I think the heading for this psalm is quite interesting. It starts off a psalm, a song, fair enough, good repetition there, but it then says, for the dedication of the temple of David.

That creates two difficulties, I think, that we need to think about. The first thing is, if you know anything about the life of David, one thing you'll know is he didn't build the temple, and he actually wasn't there when the temple was dedicated.

The temple was built under God's instructions by David's son, Solomon. Now, David did everything but build the temple. All Solomon had to do was to call the builders in and to use the materials that David had got together in the place which David had prepared and to get the temple put up.

[3 : 29] But David didn't build the temple, and he wasn't there at its dedication. So why do we have a psalm of David that is for dedication of the temple? What number of possible explanations for that?

The word that is translated as temple actually, it literally means house in the original Hebrew. So it's possible that it was the dedication of David's house, this palace that's being talked about, though most scholars think not that it actually was the temple.

Perhaps David, knowing that the temple was going to be built and would be finished a few years after his death, he wrote a song, he wrote a psalm that would be appropriate for singing at the dedication of the temple, quite possible.

Or the other possibility is that actually the words for the dedication of the temple were added later. And the dedication of the temple being talked about is not necessarily the temple built by Solomon, it might be the restoration of the temple under Ezra, or perhaps even more likely is the rededication of the temple by the Maccabees after Antiochus Epiphanes had desecrated it and the Jews cast him out and then they rededicated the temple to God.

This is not in the Old Testament, it's in the Apocrypha, but it is Jewish history. And what will give support to that is that the word dedication here is the word Hanukkah. And Hanukkah, of course, is the festival that celebrates, the Jewish festival, celebrates the Maccabees and what they did.

[4 : 56] So a little interesting puzzle there, probably no great practical relevance to us. The second thing, though, I think is of more relevance and it's worth a bit of thought. And that is, what does this psalm have to do with the dedication of a temple?

Why would someone think that this psalm that we've read together is one that's particularly appropriate when the temple is being dedicated? Now, if we look back to when the temple actually was dedicated under Solomon, you have Solomon's great prayer.

And Solomon's great prayer has this wonderful vision of God. It's Lord, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven or on earth. You who keep your covenant of love with your servants, who continue wholehearted in your way, and so on.

Solomon's dedication of the temple had a very high vision of God and of his greatness and of his dealings with his people, Israel. But this psalm is just one man's testimony.

It's not about God's dealings with Israel and the great sweep of history. It's one person who's gone through a time of difficulty and God has brought them out and he is asking others to celebrate with him.

[6 : 11] So why is it a psalm that's of particular relevance to the dedication of the temple? Again, I think, two reasons. One is that the theme of this psalm is God's mercy.

That the psalmist had got into this situation where he was probably very ill, probably on the point of death, and God in his mercy and his grace rescues him from that. And of course, the temple is the place of God's mercy.

It's where the people were able to come to meet with God and where sacrifices were made for sins. Indeed, if we'd read on in Solomon's prayer in 2 Chronicles 6, we'd have seen that most of that prayer is about the Israelites being disobedient to God.

God then disciplines them for it, whether it's through foreign armies coming in or through famines or whatever. And Solomon's praying, when they turn back to you, God, listen to them and in your mercy show forgiveness.

So what we read about in 2 Chronicles 6, specifically in relation to the temple as it has been built, on a national level, I think we see on the individual level in Psalm 30.

[7 : 23] Here is a psalm that reminds us of the mercy of God as the temple reminds us of the mercy of God. And of course, for us as believers in the Lord Jesus, as the cross of Christ above all else, reminds us of God's mercy to us.

Second reason why I think this is a psalm that is relevant to the dedication of the temple is that it is an individual who is calling others together to rejoice with them.

And when we come together to worship and to praise God, part of what we do is that we rejoice in God's goodness to us individually. And all of us can celebrate what God is doing in other people's lives.

I think it's been really good in recent weeks and months that we've had more people at the All-Each service talking a little bit about what God is doing in their lives and what God means to them day to day. And that is a way in which all of us can begin to understand more of God's goodness and can celebrate together.

And of course, again, as we think of the temple, we maybe think largely of the Day of Atonement and the sacrifice for the sins of the people, but most of the sacrifices that were made in the temple were sacrifices by individuals.

[8 : 40] Sacrifices recognizing their sin or particularly in this context, sacrificing, recognizing God's goodness to them, thank offerings for what God had done for them.

And so this psalm calls us if we as Christians have experienced the goodness of God in our lives, to share it with others, to give thanks to God for it, and together to praise him for his goodness to us as individuals as well as to us as a church.

So this is a psalm that's relevant to the dedication of the temple and very relevant to us too as we think of our need for God's mercy and as we think too of how we together should praise God for all the things that he's doing in our lives as individuals.

Let's try and get a little bit of understanding of the structure of the psalm. The psalm begins and ends with words of praise from David.

Verse 1, I will exalt you, O Lord. And verse 12, later at the end, Lord my God, I will praise you forever. And then in verse 4, David takes his personal praise and he encourages everyone else to join in with them, sing the praises of the Lord.

[9 : 57] and these three phrases there, they are the kind of dividers of the psalm. And in between them, there are two accounts by David of what God has done for him.

So first of all, David gives what is in many ways the physical description of what's happened. He was ill, he was on the point of death and God raised him up.

That's verses 2 and 3 particularly. And then the second half of the psalm, in the longest bit of the psalm, David, if you like, gives the spiritual reason for what's happened.

And he talks about the security he felt. He talks about how he was dismayed when his world started crumbling around him and he couldn't see God's face. God had hidden this place from him.

He talks about the prayer that he prayed, that prayer for God's mercy and God's grace to him. And then at the end he talks about how God has turned his life around and has clothed him with joy.

[10 : 57] So essentially a psalm with two is not two halves because the second is a lot longer than the first but it's two different ways of looking at the same thing. One is the description of physically what God has done for the psalmist and the second then is the spiritual side of things, how he interprets what's happened and they're all encapsulated within the praise of the psalmist.

So let's begin and have a look through the psalm. I've got loads of alliteration this evening hopefully it might make it a little bit easier to remember and the first few verses we're looking at what I've called my proclamation David's proclamation under the theme of death defeated.

So here we have David doing the first pass at what God has done for him and recognizing that he's gone through a near death experience and he's come out of it through God's grace.

So verse 1 he says you lifted me out of the depths you did not let my enemies gloat over me. Very interesting to read the psalms all the psalmists seem to have lots of enemies. I assume these are enemies are people who are the other nations or those who didn't have any time for God but very often you read about the enemies who just seem to be waiting to pounce on anything bad that happens to the psalmist and to put him down even further.

So but God doesn't let the enemies gloat over him because as he was ill as he called to God for help God healed him and he says you brought me up from the realm of the dead you spared me from going down to the pit.

[12 : 30] I think the natural interpretation of this is that the psalmist had been very very ill that he had perhaps been on the point of death and God had healed him he had recovered and looking back on things he was able to praise God.

He knew that God was the one who was stronger than death who was able to rescue him and to heal him and to help him and to comfort him as the title of our series this evening says to comfort him in his time of trouble.

Now we're not going to spend any longer on this because I think the real spiritual meat is in later parts of the psalm. So let's move on to the next two verses. I've called this my principle grace guaranteed and I think that's right I think this is the kind of theological basis for what the writer says in the psalm but I looked at it and thought that looks very sterile.

The psalmist is getting really excited here and he's saying to me will rejoice with me and really think about God's goodness. He disciplines us for a short time and then he restores us.

So I thought we'd write things just a little bit and perhaps give a bit more of a flavour for what the psalmist is thinking here. You may have come across a book called Rob Lacey it is called The Word on the Street used to be called The Street Bible and it's a very loose paraphrase of important parts of the scripture.

[13 : 54] And when Rob Lacey is writing about the psalms he says these are songs they were meant to be sung let's imagine what kind of style they might be sung in if we were singing them in our society today.

And he says Psalm 30 would be a rock anthem it would be full of guitar riffs and loud noises and people dancing about and really getting excited about what's happening.

And verses 4 to 5 the verses we're looking at here he says that's the chorus that's the highlight that's when you really get on top of things. So let me read what he translated interprets it as in this book.

He says so let it rip sing it strong let its crew take the roof off with this celebration song his fury didn't last so long his favour lasts a lifetime we cry through the night but the morning sun begins its climb and it's celebration time.

That's what the psalmist is saying to those who are listening or those who are reading it's celebration time it's the time to celebrate God's goodness and God's grace to us.

[15 : 08] And as we read these verses we really should be getting quite excited about what God is doing for us. So he says sing it appraises the Lord you as faithful people praise his holy name and then this wonderful verse verse 5 his anger lasts only a moment but his favour lasts a lifetime weeping may stay for the night but rejoicing or joy the older verses say joy comes in the morning.

Why is that? It is because God's grace is guaranteed if we turn to him. Now we'll be looking in a few minutes at the psalmist's situation but it looks likely the psalmist had been guilty of some sin in his life because of his sin God had disciplined him he turned to God God restored him to health as well as spiritually and he's able to rejoice because he knows that God is a God of grace.

God doesn't want us as Christians to live lives that are miserable that we're always down and that there are all sorts of problems that keep occupying our attention.

Sometimes he will discipline us sometimes he will in the words of the psalm be angry with us if we turn away from him perhaps particularly in the ways we're going to talk about in a minute if we turn away from God if we lose our trust in him in practice if not in words then he may bring things upon us to wake us up to help us to realise that we depend on him and that we need him but he disciplines us only to bring him back to himself and he does it in a way that is short term and that allows us once we are restored to him to enjoy again the joy of our salvation grace is guaranteed if we put our trust in the Lord Jesus if we come to him and confess whatever is happening in our lives whatever we have done whatever our attitudes have been that are wrong when we come truly confessing our sin and relying on the death of the Lord

Jesus as the one who took these sins on himself then we can experience God's grace in our lives and when we're going through the night when we're weeping when things are really really hard it can be difficult to see God at work it can be difficult to understand how God is working things for our good but when we come to the morning when things get brighter when we begin to understand more of God's way for us we can look back and we can say what God allowed to happen to me was for my good for my benefit and I can rejoice in his grace to me his anger lasts only a moment but his favour his grace lasts a lifetime let's celebrate and rejoice in the grace of our God and all that he does for us despite our sin and despite our failure let's move on and look a little bit more at the situation of the psalmist as I said from verse 6 on he's broadly looking at his spiritual condition as well as a little bit of the physical but verse 6 I think may be the key to understanding what's going on in the psalm psalmist says when I felt secure

[18 : 50] I said I shall never be shaken picture put up there says I shall not be moved and the key word there I think is I the psalmist has gotten to a situation where he is self satisfied where he is proud where he doesn't realize his dependence on God oh yes if you asked him you would say God is my God I trust him I follow him I depend on him but actually in his life and in his thoughts and in his attitudes he's thinking I can take care of myself I've got into this situation of his David maybe it's the situation of being in the palace and being in a position of authority and thinking this is my thing one possibility of this psalm is that David wrote it after he tried to count all his armies and when God had told him not to and as he counted his armies God brought judgment on Israel perhaps that's the situation he's talking about that was really

David's pride in wanting to see how powerful he and his armies were maybe it was something else but it does look as the psalmist got a situation where he's saying I have done this I shall not be moved I shall never be shaken I am secure that's a dreadful place for anyone who trusts in God to get into and yet perhaps it's a place that's all too easy for us to get into as we live lives which by and large are comfortable where most of us have a reasonable amount of material things we're not thinking where's my next meal going to come from or that kind of thing most of us in that kind of situation it's very easy for us to become dependent on ourselves say I've got a good job I've worked I've saved up I've built up my life and you kind of then lose your dependence on

God and sometimes God then has to come in and to discipline us and to draw us up and to say no without me you are nothing and you mustn't depend on yourself I certainly as I read this psalm it is one thing that really strikes you as you think about it as you examine your heart to say am I self self satisfied like the psalmist I wouldn't say it but perhaps by my actions and by my attitudes I demonstrate it that my feeling is I shall never be shaken I feel secure and the psalmist says that's not how it should be so then in verse 7 he talks about what happened so he's saying I feel secure I shall never be shaken and then verse 7 he turns back to talking about God interesting the psalm he kind of alternates between giving some commentary and talking to God I think he addresses God eight times in the psalm he said when you favoured me you made my royal mountain stand firm not exactly sure what that means but I think the kind of import of it is quite obvious that it was God they had given them some security and some stability in his life and it made his life good and relatively easy but then he says when you hid your face

I was dismayed and God hid his face in this case it looks like when the psalmist fell really ill and thought he was about to die and in that situation where the psalmist was full of himself and confident in himself God comes to him and says actually you have no reason for confidence in yourself your life is here today it could be gone tomorrow you have no real long term power or authority unless it comes from God and if your security isn't in God then that security is insecure you're not standing on the solid rock you're standing on the sinking sand and you're liable to come in for a big fall and God allows the psalmist to go through that experience God the psalmist said hides his face from him so the psalmist is looking to God in his time of illness in his time of difficulty in his time of trial and he has great difficulty finding God not that

God's not there God is always there always present and yet as the psalmist until he is willing to admit his failure and to admit that he's got things wrong it is as if God is hiding his face and the psalmist begins to lose all hope perhaps at times we get into that kind of situation too when things seem to be clattering down around us and God doesn't seem to be present and there are lessons in that part and we've looked at that in some of the previous weeks of this series as well the psalmist says my security was shattered I had a big problem so what does he do he prays verses 8 to 10 he comes before God and you have this really desperate prayer to you oh Lord I call to the Lord I cried for mercy and what does he say to God he says what is gained if I'm silenced if I go down to the pit will the dust praise you will it proclaim your faithfulness hear

[24 : 26] Lord and be merciful to me Lord be my help we have to realize that the Old Testament writers didn't have the full view of scripture that we do so we would look at death hopefully in the light that Paul looked at in Philippians chapter 1 to say for me to live is Christ to die is gain so for the Christian death isn't something that is final and that stops us from praising God in some ways it's the gateway into even greater praise and adoration of God as we see the Lord Jesus face to face and as we fall down and as we truly worship him for the psalmist it was something that was to be dreaded and not to be looked forward to now again I'm slightly challenged by this because I've said as Christians this is how it should be I'm not sure always as Christians this is how it is and perhaps at times we do dread death perhaps we do everything we can to cling on to life and sometimes

God has to say to Christians no it is better for you that you come to be with me that is my plan for your life so we shouldn't dread death perhaps we do sometimes but I think what we take particularly from these verses is that when we get into this kind of situation the psalmist is in when all seems hopeless when all seems to be going against us and we're really worried about our future and what's going to happen perhaps whether we're even going to face death or something dreadful instead of that that is the time when we really get before God in prayer earnestly and sincerely now we should be praying in that way when we're feeling secure when we're in a situation the psalmist is in in verse 6 not that should he but the situation he was in when things were going well and it all seemed to be fine that is the time when we should be building our relationship with the Lord we should be investing time in reading the scripture and learning it in prayer and meditation and making sure that when the time of difficulty does come we have a relationship with God that we can come to him in prayer and with confidence in his answer sadly sometimes when things are going easily for us we're all to forget to pray as a church do we pray together and fervently and sincerely as often or as much as we should

I suspect the answer is that we don't as an individual do I pray to God in the way that I should when things are going well the answer in my life perhaps in yours too is no not always but when the time of difficulty comes when we recognise our need of God when we come to him and we plead to him for mercy God is there and God is able and willing to answer our prayers and our recourse in the time of trouble is not to look to ourself not to look to others round about us but to look to God and to look to his mercy and to seek his face and his guidance and protection in it so the psalmist dreaded his destruction his death but he did the right thing he came to God in prayer and in the last couple of verses of the psalm is a praise of the psalmist have called it rejoicing restored I guess there's five is the one that most people know from this psalm and the joy in the morning bit but also verse 11 and 12

I'm sure look familiar to us there's a picture that's not unique to this psalm in scripture it's taking someone pictorially who is dressed up to go to a funeral who is in mourning and who is really sad about things and they have a complete change of clothing and they also have a complete change of attitude the sackcloth the mourning garments come off the joyful garments the garments of salvation go on and the wailing that was there before was turned into dancing the psalmist life has been completely transformed and he goes back perhaps in one sense to where he was to begin with he's been through this time of illness and he's back again with God's favour and in a good place physically but he's actually not going back spiritually to where he was before he's recognising that was not a good place to be and having experienced

God's discipline and God's grace so he rejoices in God's goodness and I'm sure as he goes forward his trust is much more confidently in God and so he rejoices in God and he encourages others to rejoice in God as well my heart sings your praises and is not silent Lord my God I will praise you forever so someone who's been through the whole gamut of things that we read about in the Psalms he started off with God and feeling secure and feeling God's blessing in his life but perhaps not recognising how much he was dependent on God he's experienced God's discipline for his sin he's experienced illness he was perhaps on the point of his enemies gloating over him though it doesn't seem to have come to that and then he experiences God's grace and he's able really to rejoice in the Lord and that's a good place for us to be if we're going through times of difficulty to recognise that there is joy in the morning that God does have a plan for us if we've gone through that time to share with each other and to rejoice in all that God has done for us when I came to church this morning

[30 : 24] I was told pondering in my mind how I would finish this evening I always find the most difficult part of a sermon is the end relatively straightforward usually to divide up the passion to explain it there's usually something that comes at the beginning that you can get a hook into it but often to really end well is difficult and I was sitting this morning and I looked over on my right on your left there and it was the words that young people did at Easter service Paul got the young people to fill in these three words presence peace and power and I thought these are really relevant as we think about this psalm it is about the presence or absence apparent absence of God it is someone who is dependent on God and has felt God present and suddenly feels God absent and yet he recognises that actually God is there and that is the first step in our restoration if we're going through times of difficulty to recognise that

God is always present and he is always here to hear us and to answer our prayers and then there's peace John Godingay in his commentary on this chapter talks about two stages in God answering our prayers and this psalm is largely about the second phase this is the first phase of God answering our prayers is when we bring our request to him and we trust him that he is going to answer and he answers initially by giving us that peace that confidence in him knowing that we have a loving heavenly father and that he will do what's best for us so peace I any other psalms the psalmist says I will trust in God despite everything that's happening in my life and these psalmists have got to stage one of God's answer they have recognized they need

God they have committed things to him and God has given them a peace about it God has assured them of his love and that he will always work for their good but then there's the second stage and that stage is the stage that is represented by the word power over here that it wasn't just in the psalmist attitudes or his understanding of God that God worked that God actually gave him the request that he asked for he answered his prayer in a very real in a very physical way and when we pray we need to recognize the presence of God we need to leave things with God to trust him and to know that we can have peace because we committed it to him but we then need to look for the evidence of God's power and the answer that he gives to our prayers not always as we expect our heavenly father knows better than we do what it is we need but to look for the evidence of

God's power and how he has changed things in our lives and when we see that when we can look back and we can understand the goodness of our God and all that he has done for us that is the point at which we need to share it with others we need to bring our testimony before others in our fellowship or among our friends and together we can then rejoice at the goodness of God and to recognize that with God his mercy his grace his favor lasts a lifetime but there may be weeping but that weeping is only in the short term if our confidence is in God and in the morning things lighten up the darkest hour is just before the dawn and as the dawn comes and the light comes in we can see God working and we can rejoice in all that he has done for us so let's take comfort from this psalm in the knowledge of what

God does for us and let's be willing to share with one another God's goodness in our lives let's pray together father we thank you for your word to us we thank you that this psalm really is one of rejoicing one of being able to celebrate your goodness and your grace we thank you that you are a God above all of grace and of love and although our sins rightly bring your wrath because sin is hateful to you yet you are eager that your grace should overcome all our faults that where sin abounds that grace should abound even more and that we should experience your forgiveness and your joy and your work in our lives help us to have a real dependence on you help us not to rely on ourselves and on our strength help us to depend on you and in good times and in bad times to be able to come to you in earnest prayer recognizing you as our heavenly father and to bring all our requests to you in the name of the

[35 : 49] Lord Jesus so we give you our thanks for being with us for a time of worship and of meditation on your word and we commit ourselves to you for the coming days in the name of the Lord Jesus Amen chapter 2 to you