

PASTOR LLOYD'S SERMON NOTES FROM 22/05/2022

PRAISING GOD IN THE VALLEYS - PSALM 34

You know the **letter D** gets a tough life in the alphabet.

Devastation, Depression, Disillusionment, Disability, Denial, Despair, Distress, discouraged... The letter D would describe how many people feel about the last two years. We have come through a difficult time with **Covid**. And it's taken its toll on many of us. This week I met with about fifty other Baptist pastors from churches all over Auckland. In talking with other pastors, many say this is the most difficult time in all their ministries. It has brought devastation to world economies that will be felt for generations to come. It has divided families and church communities and shown the disparity between those with wealth and those without. Right across our World this pandemic has left no one untouched. Over the past two years many people have felt like they have been walking in the valleys. Today I want to speak about praising God in the valleys.

And this morning I want you to do two things. I want you to **reflect** about your life and how this has impacted you and secondly I want you think about your *faith journey* and how it has been travelling. What has changed for you? How has your life, your family, and your work been impacted? And now the hardest question of all. How has your faith or beliefs been either threatened or strengthened during this time?

Let's read from Psalm 34 1-10

But firstly, lets read from one of the Psalms. I love the Psalms because they are so real about people's struggle with life and faith. They are full of reality but also reflect people's faith under immense pressure. The background to this Psalm is when David is on the run from King Saul who has vowed to hunt him down and kill him. Much of the time when David is on the run he seems to trust God despite what happens, but he has moments when he goes to the dark side. Here is one of them where he feigns insanity before King Achish of Gath to save his own neck -after lying to his own priest Ahimelech, saying he was on a secret mission for King Saul. He did this to explain why he had no army with him, no food and no weapons. One lie covered up by many more and then finally a complete denial of who he truly was. This story portrays a very different person than the one who brought down Goliath... and we wonder how can this be? We only need look at our own lives at times to understand how this can happen.

Now I have a **problem** with the content of this Psalm because when you align it with the background – it does not make apparent sense. Here we have David writing exhorting us to trust God who will deliver us from our enemies, defeat and change the circumstances that threaten us and even remind us not to tell lies.....all of which he has just done! The Psalm does not sit well with the story.

But more about this later.

My message to you this morning is this. Yes we can all trust God on the mountain tops – but can you trust God in the valleys?

I'm reminded of the Apostle Peter and the **transfiguration** where Jesus stood on the mountain top with Moses and Elijah.... (Law and the Prophets) and the glory of God came down upon them – and Peter says. This is great, can we stay here? Let's make some huts and camp here! No – Peter, all three synoptic gospels record 'they went back down the mountain'. But down the mountain is also where the valleys are. Travelling around the south island over recent weeks has been just amazing. There were many highlights but two places in central Otago were particularly special. A place called Bannockburn which sits on the hills above Cromwell....from where you can see right up the valley with mountains each side and Lake Dunstan sitting at the base. And the other was a place called Longslip Sheep station which is just north of the Lindis Pass. We stayed there two nights....in the valley between these huge hills of this high country sheep station. And as the sun goes down a change comes over the slopes as they turn dark with shade and finally the black of night and stars comes out – in that valley I have never seen so many stars!

Into each of our lives come not just the mountain tops but also the valleys. David didn't ask to be hunted by Saul – on the run for his life...but neither did that justify his behaviour before Abimelech and King Achish. And neither does any of us ask for the challenging situations that come our way. The loss of income, and failing of a relationship, the sudden threat of an illness or confirmation of something medically sinister, the betrayal of a friend, or just the ongoing drain of a world full of Covid and the uncertainty it brings.

Sometime we live with the **misbelief** that valleys and difficult times will not come to us. That we are somehow immune from trouble. And when the valleys come, our faith in God is shaken. And what we need is to have a truly biblical understanding of life and walking through our valleys. And even more than that how we are going to conduct ourselves when they come our way. If you for one moment believe that you won't face valleys in your life.... You need to read the Bible again and not just the parts you like.

Psalm 23 – Even *when* I walk through the darkest valley! Not if, but when!!!

Psalm 121 – I **look up** to the mountains! My help comes from the Lord – he will not let your foot **stumble**! You are going to have to walk though unstable pathways from time to time.

Psalm 3 - But you O Lord are a shield about me – the glory and the lifter of my head! I cried to the Lord and he answered me from his Holy Mountain.

Read many more like **Psalm 142 and 143** for two more Psalms where David in the midst of his valleys cries out to God – save me! You are my hiding place....my enemies are too strong for me. Come quickly, I'm going under!

We can all praise God on the mountain tops, but can we give thanks in the valleys. Because the valleys are real and where we also live. The valleys are where our faith is tested.

The valleys are where our loyalties are truly shown.

The valleys are where our true allegiance is demonstrated...in whom we trust!

You cannot escape the valleys and you cannot live on the mountain tops.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 Give thanks *in all circumstances* for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

Daniel 6:10 Now when Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went into his house, where the windows of his upper room opened toward Jerusalem, and three times a day he got down on his knees, prayed, and gave *thanks to his God, just as he had done before.*

Back to our **Psalm 34** and the apparent **non alignment** with the story from King David's life on the run from Saul. **V1.** I will praise the Lord **at all times** – I will constantly speak his praises. (NLT) His praise shall continually be in my mouth (KJV) **V4** I prayed to the Lord and he *answered* me! Now I see it!!!.....David **wrote this Psalm after the event** as he reflected upon how he had lied and feigned insanity before his enemy....and he was really saying this. ***Even when I messed up and failed God still turned up to help me.***

I've learned that God asks me to praise him in the valleys as well as the mountain tops.

No matter what comes my way – I choose to praise Him.

When I am enjoying the glory of hill tops...I will praise him.

When I walk down into the shade of the valleys...I will praise him

At the lowest can be ashamed of the way I'm living....or I lose the plot for a period. There I will praise him. Because when I do that – I'm affirming that **he is God not just of the mountain tops but also of the valleys.** There is no place that is not present to my life.

There is nothing you are facing that He does not know about.

For He is the *glory and the lifter of my head*.... when I am down.

He is the *strength of my life*.... when I am threatened.

He is the *rod and staff* that bring comfort to me in the valley.

He is the *protector of my life* during the day, when the sun goes over the horizon and the valleys of life threaten and even all during the night – He watches over me.

So you think that the shadows are around you at the moment?

You think the valleys are getting darker and the pathway less clear?

Remember this....when the sun goes down over the hills and darkness surrounds you.

That is **when the stars come out** in the heavens above.

The darker it is the more heavens you get to see.

Yes, it's sometimes the only way to see even more of the glories of God!

Even in the darkest place.....David will say – I **will** praise the Lord at **all** times!