

Pastor Matthew Ude
March 1, 2020
Invocavit Sunday

Save Me Because of Your Unfailing Love

The Seven Penitential Psalms

In one of my favorite episodes of one of my favorite TV shows. Two young women walk into an old run down abandoned house.

"What are we doing here," Kathy says, "this place is old."

"I like old things" says Sally, "they make me feel sad."

"What's good about feeling sad?" Says Kathy.

"Its happy for deep people."

During the season of lent this year we are going to be studying the Seven Penitential Psalms. Penitential means penitent or repentant, so we could also call them the seven psalms of repentance.

Now when I talk about penitential psalms or lent we probably get pictures of men bent over in dust and ashes. It sounds serious and solemn and pious. But there is also a deep deep joy and gladness in both the penitential psalms and in Lent. There is strength and there is faith.

To those who know the Lord mercy repentance is like bathing in a cold river on a cold morning. It is not always pleasant but one arises refreshed and clean and vigorous for the day ahead.

Luther reminds us to "drown our old man by daily contrition and repentance and that the new man may daily arise."

The penitential psalms as well as the season of lent is suffering, and weeping, and confession, and fasting, and someone might well say, "what is good about that?"

To which we answer, "It's happiness for deep Christians."

Psalm 6:1-3a NKJ O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger, Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure. ² Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I *am* weak; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are troubled. ³ My soul also is greatly troubled;

How many of you have ever gone up to your father and said, "Please punish me?" This probably doesn't happen much.

Yet this is what our psalmist does. He accepts the chastisement of the Lord as part of his mercy.

Notice what is missing. Notice what the Psalmist did not say. He did not say, "Do not chasten me." Rather he says do not chasten me in your anger.

The psalmist is willing to accept the discipline of the Lord. He knows that is necessary. Only he asks that the discipline be a discipline of love and not of anger. He deserves God's wrath but he pleads for His mercy.

He reminds the Lord of his own sinfulness and weakness and asks that discipline be a healing discipline.

What great faith this man has, to accept the suffering and chastisement of the Lord, and further to recognize the difference between whom the Lord disciplines in love and whom the Lord disciplines in wrath

I tell you truly it is better to accept suffering from the Lord than to accept riches from anyone else.

This is something that King David knew well.

At one point in his life King David sinned against God and God sent the prophet Gad to David and Gad says in 2 Samuel 24:13

2 Samuel 24:13-14 NKJ ¹³ So Gad came to David and told him; and he said to him, "Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land? Or shall you flee three months before your enemies, while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' plague in your land? Now consider and see what answer I should take back to Him who sent me." ¹⁴ And David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Please let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercies *are* great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man."

Now David could have said to himself, I will choose a famine after all I can buy food from neighboring countries. Or he could have said I will choose to lose three months in battle after all I could fortify my cities and hunker down and survive for three months. But no what does he say, "Let us fall into the hand of the Lord."

If sorrow and suffering must come let it come at the hand of the Lord, for the Lord is merciful.

We know the love of the Lord that was shown most brilliantly in Christ and His cross. Knowing his love for us we accept what He gives us, be it discipline or blessing. We accept even the cutting off of our own arm from the Lord. But from Satan or the world we will not even let them prick our finger. For the love of the Lord we know, but there is no one else we trust.

Let us also pray for his loving correction, for whomever receives his love receives salvation, but whomever will not accept his love, a love which yes sometimes brings punishment, will receive his wrathful punishment.

Psalm 6:3b-7 NKJ But You, O LORD-- how long? ⁴ Return, O LORD, deliver me! Oh, save me for Your mercies' sake! ⁵ For in death *there is* no remembrance of You; In the grave who will give You thanks? ⁶ I am weary with my groaning; All night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears. ⁷ My eye wastes away because of grief; It grows old because of all my enemies.

The Psalmist is willing to accept the LORDs loving discipline, but he is still human. Therefore he cries out, How long until you deliver me?

How many of us can relate? In sickness, in distress in worry, we toss and turn in our bed all night, maybe even so worried that we drench it in sweat. In our sorrow and suffering we also want to know when will the end be.

The Psalmist prays for the Lord deliverance, but what reason can he give that the Lord should deliver him?

1. because of the Lord's mercy

Here we have one of the greatest of the Hebrew words. It is the word *chesed*, and it means a love which never ceases, never fails, never gives up. It is a love unlike anything we have experienced in this life. It remains true even when we do not.

Too often love in this world fails because we fail. We fail to love and therefore those whom we love fail to love us back.

But God's love is unailing. It is unailing even when we fail Him. And because it is solid and sure and firm, it is possible for the psalmist to hang all his hope on this one thing with confidence? Why do I know the Lord will save me, because his love has never failed.

How long he does not know but he knows the love of the Lord, therefore he places all his hope on His mercy.

2. because in death there is no remembering

This death here is not the death of the body but the death of the soul. Just like in verse two "healing" was not the healing of the body but the healing of the soul. The argument of the psalmist is this, if you crush me to the point where I lose my faith, where I am spiritually dead, what will that accomplish? Then how can I remember you.

Remember here also means bring to mind and then act on it. If you crush me with suffering to the point where my spirit is destroyed I will no longer be able to worship you.

Even worse than that, if you send me to sheol, that is if you send me to hell, then truly there will be no hope for me at all. No one in sheol can ever learn to praise the Lord.

Therefore this reasoning of the psalmist also relies on the chesed, the never failing love of the Lord. What the psalmist means is this. If you do not return and deliver me quickly I will be utterly destroyed. I cannot hold up any longer under this suffering. But if I am destroyed than where is your unfailing mercy? How can I praise and give thanks and rejoice in your mercy if my spirit is utterly destroyed?

Consider now where the Psalmist turns for salvation? For he turns to the Lord. Even though it was the Lord that punished him nevertheless he will wait for the Lord to deliver him.

In this the Psalmist acknowledges that it is only the Lord that can deliver him. There is no strength in himself or in any other. The psalmist cannot deliver himself from sin or the punishment of sin. It must be the Lord.

Here we turn again to our catechism for today. It is the Lord and his power that drowns our old man and causes the new man to arise daily in us. This is a power that is given to us in our baptism. For our baptism is not simply God applying his power to us once. No in our baptism God grants us the ability to access His power forever after. So that we remember our baptism, confess our sins and then arise washed and filled with the strength of the Lord. Even as we clearly see the Psalmist does in the next verses.

Psalm 6:8-10 NKJ ⁸ Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity; For the LORD has heard the voice of my weeping. ⁹ The LORD has heard my supplication; The LORD will receive my prayer. ¹⁰ Let all my enemies be ashamed and greatly troubled; Let them turn back *and* be ashamed suddenly.

See how having drown his old man in daily contrition and repentance the Psalmist arises with great confidence and strength. He does not need to wait to see if the Lord will answer his prayer. He knows already that the Lord surely will. Therefore he walks forward alone with great confidence knowing that all must flee before him, for the Lord is at his right hand. No one who opposes him can stand for the Lord has answered his prayer.

Here in my mind I see Sauron who waves his hands and all his enemies go flying and scattering before his power. Accept here it is no the power of a man but of God.

The Psalmist is certain and confident that the Lord has answered his prayer, because he has put his trust in the mercy and promises of the Lord, and the mercy of the Lord he knows cannot be weak and cannot fail. He is weak but the Lord is strong.

"Depart from me . . . " this verse is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 7:22 and refers not to those who have done great wickedness but rather to those who through unbelief lost the kingdom.

Therefore once again we see the difference between those who take hold of the Lord's promises and through faith believe what He has said, and those who reject the promises of Christ.

For the people to whom Jesus said depart from me were not hideously evil men. They were men who did good deeds and worked miracles and even preached the word of God, but they did not turn to Jesus and trust him for their salvation. Therefore Jesus says, "Depart from me evil doers"

On the other hand we see this man who claims no good deed, but admits only to his sin, Yet this man stands confident in the day of Judgment. On the other hand are those who claim all good deeds and miracles and preaching yet they are destroyed on the day of Judgment.

Thus we learn that not all the good deeds in the world will do you any good without Jesus. But with Jesus not even all the sin of the world will hinder you from entering His paradise.

Thus we learn that what matters is not what we have done, but the Chesed, the unfailing love of Christ. In this love we are washed and strengthened and stand.

AMEN