

HOW TO GO OUT SINGING

2 SAMUEL 22:1 – 23:7

Has this ever happened to you? You pull up next to someone at a red light and you immediately recognize that he or she is in another world. The person is just bopping along to some tune on the radio. He or she might be singing at the top of his or her lungs and slapping the dashboard rhythmically. Have you ever just stared at people like that until they become aware that they're being watched? More often than not they get instantly self-conscious, embarrassed and turn all red. Great fun! I read about one elderly gentleman who was just having a great time singing along to the radio in his car. The person in the car next to him was getting a real kick watching this older man do his thing. But instead of getting all embarrassed when he realized he was being observed, the elderly man just grinned, grabbed a card, held it up to the window so that he could display the call letters of a local radio station. The other guy in the other car tuned in to the same station. Before long, he was bopping, slapping the dashboard and singing along as well. When he tuned in to the other man's frequency, he was then able to hear his song.

Since after Easter Sunday, we've been working through a series of messages on David – a man after and against God's heart. Today we conclude that study by considering a song David composed late in his life. It's a psalm that's not found in the book of Psalms. Let's read what David wrote and sang (2 Samuel 22:1-23:7). Were David's final years golden ones? Not really. The Bible tells us David struggled with illness and old age ailments. His large family was still having problems. He had to put an end to a major spat involving two of his sons – Adonijah or Solomon – as to who should become the new king after he died. In some respects, David was a weary, troubled man when he died. But here's what else is true about David. He went out singing. He ended his life singing to God, about God, for God and of God.

You could say that David was tuned into a very real spiritual frequency. I'd like us to try and tune into David's spiritual frequency, so we can hear and appreciate his song. I hear many things in David's song - what we read a few minutes ago. To be more specific, I hear a song of praise, a song of gratitude, a song of fulfillment and a song of hope. When it comes time for you to pass from Earth to Heaven, how will you go out? Will you go out singing like David did? Will other people hear from you a song of praise, gratitude, fulfillment and hope?

A SONG OF PRAISE

David's song is full of praise, isn't it? David had some very high peaks in his life experience; he also had some very deep valleys. But he went out with a song of praise on his lips. How was that possible? David learned that God was firmly in charge even in all of the ups and downs of his life. God wasn't just some add on to a self-centered life. No, for David, God was the center of all that mattered. David's song is full of wonder, praise and adoration as he recognizes the

greatness and majesty of God. Early in his life, David had learned to praise God and all through his life he experienced the power in praising God.

Jacob Needleman observed the launch of Apollo 17 way back in 1975 and described its awesome effect on him, personally. It was a night launch and there were cynical reporters hanging out, drinking beer and just waiting for the 35 story rocket to blast off. The countdown came and then the launch. The first thing Jacob saw was this amazing orange light which was hard to look at because of its brightness. Everything was illuminated by this burst of light. Then came this huge thing slowing rising up in total silence because it took a few seconds for the sound to come across the space to where Jacob and the other spectators watched. Jacob heard a “WHOOOOOOSH! HHHHMMMMMM!” that entered right into him. Jaws dropped. A sense of wonder filled everyone as the rocket gained altitude. They continued to watch until the first stage ignited in a beautiful blue flame. Then there was total silence. People just got up quietly and helped each other up. They were kinder. They opened doors for one another, looked at one another and spoke quietly. This sense of wonder had momentarily changed them and made them better. When you have a sense of wonder – of praise – toward God, your life is changed for the better, too.

“David sang this song to the LORD on the day the LORD rescued him from all his enemies and from Saul. ‘The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety. He is my refuge, my savior, the one who saves me from violence. I called on the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and he saved me from my enemies.’” (2 Sam 22:1-4 NLT) Verse one implies that David composed this song late in his life as a kind of summing up of his life experience. David had no shortage of enemies or battles that he endured. Nobody here will ever have as many physical, literal enemies as David had in his life. But every child of God has enemies and battles. They’re found in the circumstances, the events, the situations and the conflicts in life that threatening us in some way. They test your faith. They hurt and inflict pain into your life. Did you notice all the different names David calls God in his song? He calls Him “my rock, my fortress, my savior, my refuge and my savior.” He’s underlining what many of us have learned and experienced about God. God is this incredible place of protection, safety, security and shelter in the midst of life’s battles or storms. God is your strength and support. God is the One on whom you build your hope. He is the still point in a changing world. One prevailing reason to sing a song of praise to God is living out this Bible truth in your everyday experience: “...the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world.” (1 John 4:4 NLT)

There’s something else to learn from David about praising God. David learned to praise God before, during and after God delivered him. If you only ever praise God after He’s delivered you from some enemy or rescued you in some battle, you will miss a lot of great opportunities to praise Him. I know it’s hard to praise God when you feel afraid, defeated, alone or lost, but David learned how to do

that. So can we. God loves to respond with deliverance to your praise and prayer as you offer it up right in the midst of whatever you're going through. Truth be told, you might be feeling emotionally exhausted today, or physically challenged or spiritually defeated. That's the very best time to offer up a song of praise from your heart. Like David, learn to call to the Lord who is worthy of praise and He will save you from your enemies! Next, let's think about ...

A SONG OF GRATITUDE

David's song is full of thankfulness. Verse 17-20 are particularly noteworthy. "He reached down from heaven and rescued me; he drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemies, from those who hated me and were too strong for me. They attacked me at a moment when I was in distress, but the LORD supported me. He led me to a place of safety; he rescued me because he delights in me." (2 Sam 22:17-20 NLT) David doesn't sing about his own skill, his own strength or his own intelligence. No, David knew, recognized and sang about what God had done for him out of a heart of gratitude. God had come through for David not because David had done something to deserve or earn it, but simply because of God's own faithful, wonderful character. Just like David, God loves you, guides you, rescues you, supports you and strengthens you not because you're so special, but because He is special. Just like David, for unknown reasons God has decided to delight in you and make you an object of His gracious love.

Another place I see gratitude expressed is in David's words about his own sin. That's found in verses 21-25. "The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD; I am not guilty of turning from my God. All his laws are before me; I have not turned away from his decrees. I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin. The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in his sight." (2 Samuel 22:21-25 NIV) At first, it sounds like David minimized or ignored his own terrible sins. I find myself saying, "David, how could you write and sing that after that train wreck you caused involving Bathsheba and Uriah?"

Two explanations might be helpful. First, the context is God's deliverance from David's enemies. Yes, David sinned, but it was never in relation to who hated him and wanted to kill him. A second explanation might be found in the last part of v. 25 (NIV) – "...according to my cleanness in his (God's) sight." In other words, David had come to recognize that when God forgives your sin, He now looks at you differently than you even look at yourself. You may still see yourself as dirty, unclean, unholy and a spiritual mess. But what matters is how God sees you. And He sees you forgiven, cleansed and restored in and through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

A sculptor once ruined a huge piece of beautiful Italian Carrara marble. It was left in the courtyard of the Cathedral in Florence for almost a hundred years. Most sculptors thought the piece of marble was beyond use or repair. But in 1501 a young sculptor by the name of Michelangelo was asked if he thought he could do anything with it. He studied and measured the block of marble and carefully noted the bungled attempts caused by the original sculptor. He carefully made a sketch of a biblical character he envisioned. For three years Michelangelo worked steadily, his chisel skillfully shaping the marble. When one of his students was allowed to see the towering statue – eighteen feet high and weighing nine tons – he said to Michelangelo, “Master, it lacks only one thing, and that is speech.” Cheryl and I got to see that amazing statue of David just last year – one of the great artistic masterpieces of all time.

If a mere man could do that with a ruined piece of marble, how much more can the God of the universe repair and restore your broken life and my busted up life. God’s ability to forgive you, restore you, renew you and view you through the lens of Jesus, His Son, is perhaps the greatest reason you and I can offer up to Him a continual song of gratitude. Next, I hear from David ...

A SONG OF FULFILLMENT

Over in the New Testament, we find this interesting observation about David, “Now when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed.” (Acts 13:36 NIV) Every child of God is born into this world with a divine design. You’re born into a particular family, into a particular culture and country, at a particular time in human history in order – just like David – to serve God’s purpose in your generation. I hear those notes of fulfillment in 2 Samuel 23:1-2 (NLT), “These are the last words of David: ‘David, the son of Jesse, speaks— David, the man who was raised up so high, David, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, David, the sweet psalmist of Israel. The Spirit of the LORD speaks through me; his words are upon my tongue.’”

David was well aware that he came from a humble home. He knew full well that it was God who had chosen and exalted him. He knew God had gifted him to write all those songs we now have in the book of Psalms. In humility, David recognized God’s sovereign control of his own life. Do you know why you’re here on planet Earth at this time and at this place? Do you know how God wants you to serve His purpose in your family, at your job, in your neighborhood, and at this church today? David saw, recognized and knew some of that for his own life. I doubt he saw it all. But a song of fulfillment means this. It means that you know God has a purpose for your life and you ask the Holy Spirit to keep on revealing that purpose to you along life’s journey. “Lord, what do you want me to do today... in this place... at this time in my life? Lord, I’m here to serve You today.”

I see David's song of fulfillment from yet another perspective. David wrote many other psalms in which he told God all about his defeats, his problems and his troubles. Scholars have even given those a name; they're called "psalms of lament." But in this song – what might well have been the final psalm he ever composed – David sings instead about the many victories God had given to him throughout his life. There's a lesson. Yes, there are times to sigh and to lament, but there are also times to rejoice and to celebrate God's triumph in your life. It's possible to get so focused on your defeats that you fail to recognize all of the Lord's victories in your life. The Bible does say, "No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us." (Rom 8:37 NLT)

Sure, tell God all your troubles. David certainly did. But he also could rejoice in everything God was doing and had done in his life, too. Are you celebrating in and rejoicing over God's many triumphs in your life? You were once a citizen of Hell, but now you're a citizen of Heaven. You were once a slave to Satan, but now you're a child of God Himself. You ought to be able to look back in your life and point to how God met you, how God delivered you, how God rescued you and how God brought good out of bad, triumph out of tragedy and joy out of sorrow. Don't wait until you're about to die to rise up and sing a song of fulfillment today in honor of the Lord Jesus and for His glory. Finally, I see here...

A SONG OF HOPE

As David approached the moment of his own death, he realized that the most important relationship of all would not end at death. God would be there. Death forces you to let go of what you often value the most, doesn't it? Many of you here today have had to say good-bye to people you didn't think you could live without. You still miss those loved ones terribly, but you've also discovered that it is only God that you cannot do without. And then, of course, there are others kinds of death or losses in life that all of us experience. Close friends move away. Precious relationships get broken for some reason. Even families can fall apart. David had made a relationship with God his lifelong search. He articulates that in another of his psalms, "O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water." (Ps 63:1 NLT) Even as David approached the moment of his death, he had hope because it brought him closer to his life's highest priority – God and God alone.

I love what David says towards the end of this song. "Is it not my family God has chosen? Yes, he has made an everlasting covenant with me. His agreement is arranged and guaranteed in every detail. He will ensure my safety and success." (2 Sam 23:5 NLT) No doubt David is referring primarily to God's promise to perpetuate his dynasty as the ruling family over Israel. But it occurs to me that God has made an everlasting covenant with each of His children – with you and with me. Hasn't God done that in and through Jesus? Furthermore, hasn't God arranged and guaranteed His promises to you – just like He did with David - in

every detail? Doesn't God Himself ensure your safety and success just like He did David's? Of course, He does! That's why we can take to heart what we read in the New Testament, "I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit." (Rom 15:13 NLT) As you live out your life in God's presence – and particularly when that moment comes for you to pass from this world into God's Heaven – you will be enabled by the Holy Spirit to sing – just like David did - a song of hope.

Ever since he was a kid, Bob Goff had a dream to sail across the Pacific Ocean to Hawaii. So Bob and four of his buddies entered the Transpac Race, a semi-annual sailboat race from Los Angeles to Hawaii. With limited sailing skills, Bob and his friends loaded their thirty-five foot sailboat with canned chili and bottled water and set sail for Hawaii. But for Bob and his friends, the most moving part of the journey was the arrival at the finishing line.

There's a tradition in the Transpac Race no matter when you finish the race, even if it's two in the morning. When you pull into the marina in Oahu, a guy announces the name of your boat and every crew member who made the trip. It's the same announcer and he's been doing this at the Transpac Race for decades. It was a few hours before dawn when Bob and his friends crossed the finish line. It had been sixteen days since they set out from Los Angeles in their little boat knowing very little about navigation. Suddenly, the silence was broken by a booming voice over a loudspeaker announcing the name of their boat. Then he started announcing the names of Bob's ragtag crew like he was introducing heads of state. One by one he announced all of their names with obvious pride in his voice. It became a really emotional moment for each of the men onboard.

When he came to Bob Goff's name, he didn't talk about how few navigation skills Bob had or the zigzag course he'd led the crew in to get there. He didn't tell everyone about all of Bob's other mess-ups. Instead, he just welcomed Bob and the others like a proud father would. When he was done, there was a pause and then in a sincere voice his last words to the entire crew were these: "Friends, it's been a long trip. Welcome home." Because of the way he said it, Bob and his friends welled up and fought back tears. Bob wiped his eyes as he reflected on all the uncertainty, all the sloppy sailing and how little he knew. But none of that mattered now because they had completed the race.

Will Heaven be like that? Perhaps. After we each cross the finish line of our lives, maybe it will be a little like floating into a Hawaiian marina while our names are announced, one by one. And at the end of our earthly lives, after our many mistakes and midcourse corrections, our loving Heavenly Father will simply say, "My child, it's been a long trip. Welcome home." I hope when my moment comes that – just like David – I'll go out singing offering up to God a song of praise, a song of gratitude, a song of fulfillment and a song of hope.