

Psalm 30 “The Majesty of Mercy”\*\*

Main Idea: At the dedication of the temple David wanted two truths about God to be celebrated, so he wrote a song for the occasion. In Psalm 30 David shares his own story to encourage God’s people to celebrate two amazing truths about God.

I. God is majestic (1-5).

A. David exalted the Lord (1-3).

1. I called for help.
2. The Lord rescued me.

B. David invited others to exalt the Lord (4-5).

1. We may experience God’s anger for a moment, but we can experience His favor throughout life and beyond.
2. We may weep for a night, but we can rejoice in the morning.

II. God is merciful (6-12).

A. David confesses a time when he needed mercy (6-7).

1. Pride produces an inflated view of self.
2. Pride produces a false sense of security.
3. Pride cuts us off from the Lord’s favor.

B. David asked for mercy (8-10).

1. He acknowledged that apart from it he would perish.
2. He acknowledged that because of it there was hope.

B. David experienced the benefits of mercy (11-12).

1. Wailing turned into dancing.
2. Sackcloth turned into joy.
3. Silence turned into singing.
4. Self-centeredness turned into God-centeredness.

One final thought: To fully appreciate Psalm 30 we must look ahead...

1. At the cross we see God’s momentary anger.
2. At the cross we see God’s eternal favor.
3. At the cross we see the majesty of God’s mercy.

We've come to the end of our journey, one which I almost wish wasn't over. And it really isn't. In the past three months we've been looking at the psalms of David that include the historical setting in their heading. One of our goals in this series has been to create a thirst in our hearts to spend more time in the Psalms, so in that sense the journey doesn't end. It just becomes a personal trek.

Our expedition ends with Psalm 30. The heading calls it both *a psalm* and *a song*, and attributes it to Israel's greatest king: *Of David*.

There is only one David in the Bible. David became king at the age of thirty and ruled as king for some forty years, the first seven and one-half in Hebron and the final thirty-three years in Jerusalem. There are 58 references to David in the New Testament. In Romans 1:3 Paul points out that God's Son "as to human nature was a descendant of David." In Revelation 22:16 we hear Jesus say, "I, Jesus...am the Root and the Offspring of David."

Yes, David was a great man of God, yet he was far from perfect. In fact, he wrote Psalm 30 after a serious blunder. That's hope-giving for the rest of us *blunderers!* The issue isn't *whether* you will fall short of God's standard, for we all do. The issue is what you do *after* you've blown it. Do you ignore your sin? Do you blame-shift and justify your sin? Do you try and run from it? Far better to do what David did in Psalm 30, face it, confess it to God and all appropriate others, and experience the majesty of God's mercy!

When you read Psalm 30 you hear David giving thanks to God for granting him recovery from a severe illness. Verse 2—"O LORD my God, I called to you for help and you healed me." And verse 3 indicates the illness was life-threatening, "O LORD, you brought me up from the grave; you spared me from going down into the pit."

The problem is, the title of this psalm suggests a different setting. *For the dedication of the temple*. Why would David sing about recovering from an illness in a song he intended to be used in the dedication of the temple? Keep in mind that David didn't build the temple. His son, Solomon, would do that.

But David did make preparations for the building of the temple (as described in 1 Chronicles 22:1-10; he provided cut stone, iron for nails, cedar logs, etc). And apparently, he also wrote this song to be sung on dedication day.

David made one further preparatory decision regarding the temple. He chose its *location*. He told Solomon to build it in Jerusalem on the threshing floor that he bought from Araunah the Jebusite (1 Chron. 21:28; 22:1). Why there? 1 Chronicles 21 tells us why, because of a sinful choice David made. Satan incited David to take a census of Israel's troops (1). He wanted to know how big his army was. He later acknowledged this to be a great sin (8), an evidence of pride apparently, perhaps of trusting in himself rather than in God.

Stop for a moment and learn a lesson from David. *Beware of being impressed by numbers*. By the size your army. By the size of your church. By the size of your bank account. By the size of your (or your child's) IQ. By the number of letters in the degree after your name. By the number of church attendance pins you have. Why should we beware of being impressed by numbers? The issue isn't the number itself and there's nothing inherently wrong with knowing the size of your army, your IQ, etc. The issue is that the number can become the object of your trust and confidence.

There are a lot of reasons we need to be careful about number-counting. One is self-aggrandizement ("Man, am I good or what?!"). Another is self-sufficiency ("I can do whatever I want because I've got the resources!"). Or self-reliance ("I don't need or trust in others, not people and not even God, because I can pull this off *by myself!*").

According to 1 Chronicles 21:14, 70,000 people died in a plague because of David's sin. God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem, and apparently, the number would have been higher except for this. In obedience to the instructions of the death angel, David built an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah (26), called on the Lord, and the Lord stopped the death angel.

That prompted David to make an executive decision. "The house of the LORD is to be here," said David (1 Chron. 22:1). And that's where Solomon later built it.

I should mention that the word translated “temple” by the NIV is the Hebrew word *bayit* which can be rendered “house” or “palace.”<sup>[1]</sup> Some feel David is referring to the dedication (or rededication) of his own house after a death-bed experience. Perhaps David himself became afflicted by the plague, although the text doesn’t indicate so. Eric Lane poses this possibility, “If David had been ill of the plague his house would have been shut up; and on his recovery he rededicated his house.”<sup>[2]</sup>

Whether it was for the dedication of the temple or his own house, this we know. David wanted God’s people to celebrate two truths about God, so he wrote this song.

## I. God is majestic (1-5).

David highlighted the majesty of God in two ways in the first movement of the psalm.

**A. David exalted the Lord (1-3).** “I will exalt you, O LORD, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me. O LORD my God, I called to you for help and you healed me. O LORD, you brought me up from the grave; you spared me from going down into the pit.”

David uses God’s covenant name, *Yahweh*, nine times in twelve verses. He says he is going to *exalt* Him, using the verb *rum* which means “to be high.” That’s a great aspiration for a great king, to lift up, to make high, to exalt the Greatest King in the universe!

And what specifically motivated David to exalt His God? He tell us. Simply put...

1. *I called for help.* And...

2. *The Lord rescued me.* David mentions five things the Lord did for him in response to his call for help: You *lifted* me; You *did not let my enemies gloat* over me; You *healed* me; You *brought* me up; You *spared* me.

The word “lifted” was used for pulling a bucket up from a deep well. I can still visualize in my mind the sight of Vasily, my dear Ukrainian brother, drawing water from a deep well in a village in the Odessa region. Just like he pulled up a bucket of fresh water from deep inside the ground, so David says the Lord reached down and pulled him up from the pit of death.

Perhaps it goes without saying—but David said it!—when God does something great for us, we ought to respond by taking tangible steps to give Him the credit, to *exalt* Him! But not just by ourselves. That’s not enough, not according to David. Because the Lord is majestic...

**B. David invited others to exalt the Lord (4-5).** “Sing to the LORD, you saints of his; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.”

You say, “What’s the right response when you’ve experienced God’s mercy and forgiveness?” David says we ought to *sing*. Singing was a big deal for David. He sang a lot, to the Lord, about the Lord, for the Lord. He called others to do the same, as in this case.

Note carefully. David’s admonition isn’t merely to sing, but sing *to the LORD*. And he offers two specific reasons why we ought to sing.

1. *We may experience God’s anger for a moment, but we can experience His favor throughout life and beyond.* Verse 5 begins, “For”—here’s the basis for the call to sing and praise the Lord in verse 4. “For His anger lasts only a moment.” That indicates that God does become angry, for He is holy and possesses an intrinsic hatred for sin.

Thankfully, His anger is not like ours. It doesn't linger or fester. It's not whimsical, but just. It operates hand in hand with His mercy. And for those who seek His mercy it's momentary. "For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime."

If you've studied world religions you've seen the following. To please the false gods of man-created religions a person must constantly do merit-gaining activities, and even then the person doesn't know for sure where he stands with his god. There are moments of hope followed by long seasons of wondering. That's because, to restate verse 5, "A false god's favor lasts only a moment, but his anger lasts a lifetime."

In contrast, here's what's true of the true and living God. Not brief favor and long anger, but brief anger and long favor! What a wonderful thing to know about God! In fact, the NIV says "lifetime" but the word actually communicates the idea of *eternal*. Not merely *long* favor but *eternal* favor! I like how Eric Lane puts it, "*His anger* is like an overnight visitor who remains for a night, whereas *his favour* is like a permanent resident."<sup>[3]</sup>

David offers a second, related reason why we ought to join him in singing praise to the Lord. The first, we may experience God's anger for a moment, but we can experience His favor throughout life and beyond. The second...

2. *We may weep for a night, but we can rejoice in the morning.* "Weeping may remain for a night [lit. 'will spend the night'], but rejoicing comes in the morning."

Please note that, contrary to the prosperity-gospel teachers, God's people may be experiencing weeping, and the weeping David is talking about is referring to remorse for their sin. God's children do sin at times, and when they do they feel remorse. They grieve. They *weep*.

But because of God's favor, rejoicing comes in the morning. We see this principle of *sorrow leading to joy* throughout the Bible. Psalm 126:6 states, "He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him." Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted (Matt. 5:4)." Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 4:17, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." In 2 Corinthians 6:10 Paul described himself as "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing."

Yes, we may weep for a night, but we can rejoice in the morning. That's ample incentive for singing to the Lord, says David.

Be careful of taking this truth out of context. Some people are eternal optimists. Is that what this is, the sort of positive thinking that says, "Hang in there. It's been a rough day but things will get better tomorrow. As the Good Book says, 'Joy comes in the morning.'"? No.

Answer this. Does rejoicing come in the morning for *all* people? Please realize that if David had not repented, there would have been no joy in the morning for him. Joy comes to those who, like David, admit their sin, repent, and accept God's provision for washing away their sin. Peter Craigie explains, "*Anger* is the divine response to human sin; *favor* is the divine response to goodness, but also to repentance and contrition."<sup>[4]</sup>

That's what the cross of Jesus is all about. God sent His own Son into the world, and on the cross Jesus Christ paid the penalty for sin, so that all who admit their sin, repent of it, and accept Him and His sacrifice for them are forgiven.

David wrote this song so that God's people would celebrate two truths about God. The first, *God is majestic*. He is worthy of being exalted. The second...

## II. God is merciful (6-12).

David highlights God's mercy in the second part of the psalm by sharing three personal thoughts.

**A. David confesses a time when he needed mercy (6-7).** "When I felt secure, I said, 'I will never be shaken.' O

LORD, when you favored me, you made my mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed.”

Notice those first four words, “When I felt secure.” Those words didn’t describe David’s early years, for then he was on the run, running from Saul, running for his life. No security then. Then he became king, and the first years of his reign were filled with battles—it took him over seven years to unite his divided country, then many more years fighting against aggressive, surrounding nations. No security then, either.

But in time, later in David’s reign, the fighting stopped. The enemies which drove him to his knees in prayer were gone. Then he could say, “*When I felt secure.*”

That’s when it happened. What hardship could not accomplish, the absence of hardship did. “When I felt secure, I said, ‘I will never be shaken.’”

Pride is a subtle thing, and it affects all of us, including a man after God’s own heart like David. We learn three things about pride from David’s confession.

1. *Pride produces an inflated view of self.* “When I felt secure, I said, ‘I will never be shaken.’ I...I...I...

Listen to Charles Spurgeon, “As in a wheel, the uppermost spokes descend to the bottom in due course, so it is with mortal conditions. There is a constant revolution; many who are in the dust today shall be highly elevated tomorrow; while those who are now aloft shall soon grind the earth. Prosperity had evidently turned the Psalmist’s head, or he would not have been so self-confident. He stood by grace, and yet forgot himself, and so met with a fall. Reader, is there not much of the same proud stuff in all our hearts? Let us beware lest the fumes of intoxicating success get into our brains and make fools of us also.”<sup>[5]</sup>

2. *Pride produces a false sense of security.* “I felt secure,” admits David. “I said, ‘I will never be shaken.’”

We can’t be sure, but it’s possible David said those words towards the end of his life after he ordered the census. His Minister of Defense, Joab, gave the report, “Your majesty, you’ve got 1,100,000 men who can handle a sword, including 470,000 in Judah (see 1 Chr. 21:5).” Perhaps that’s when it happened, when David, filled with self-confidence, said, “I will *never* be shaken.”

Peter Craigie, “The psalmist fell prey to that false sense of confidence which so easily besets those whose lives have been attended by health and prosperity. He thought he was secure, standing firmly in a changing world.”<sup>[6]</sup>

3. *Pride cuts us off from the Lord’s favor.* That’s the conclusion David drew in verse 7, “O LORD, when you favored me, you made my mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed.” Oh, beloved, we are in trouble when we forget that our strength is always *borrowed strength*! Paul poses three penetrating questions in 1 Corinthians 4:7, “For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?”

Are you feeling secure today? The job’s going well, the kids are staying out of trouble, the nest egg is growing. Be careful. Ponder Spurgeon’s warning again, “Let us beware lest the fumes of intoxicating success get into our brains and make fools of us.”

You say, “I’m guilty. I’ve been trusting in myself. What should I do?” Do what David did. First, he confessed his sin, plainly and openly. Then...

**B. David asked for mercy (8-10).** “To you, O LORD, I called; to the Lord I cried for mercy: ‘What gain is there in my destruction, in my going down into the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness? Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me; O LORD, be my help.’”

David says he called to the Lord and cried for mercy. The Hebrew verbs are in the imperfect tense, so the sense is, “I keep on calling to the Lord” and “I keep on crying for mercy.” He asked God three questions: What gain is there in my destruction? Will the dust praise you? Will the dust proclaim your faithfulness? Why those questions? David

asks those questions because he knows that God deserves praise and honor, but if David dies then there will be one less voice on earth giving God praise.

This is so important to see. David didn't make a deal with God. He didn't say, "Lord, if you give me another chance, I'll make it up to you." No. He did what every sinner must do. He *asked God for mercy*. In fact, David acknowledged two important facts concerning mercy.

1. *He acknowledged that apart from it he would perish. And...*

2. *He acknowledged that because of it there was hope.*

Do you remember what happened after David admitted his blunder? God sent the prophet Gad to David with three options, and said take your choice: a) three years of famine b) three months of being defeated by enemy armies, or c) three days experiencing a plague from the LORD's death angel. Which do you want? You decide.

Which did David choose? The plague, but why? 1 Chronicles 21:13 tells us, "David said to Gad, 'I am in deep distress. Let me fall into the hands of the LORD, *for his mercy is very great*; but do not let me fall into the hands of men.'" David believed in and put his entire hope in *the mercy of God*.

I remember a conversation I had years ago with our daughters. They were little at the time and had been disobedient, and were sitting on the couch awaiting their discipline. "You know what you've done isn't pleasing to God," I began. "And there are consequences when we disobey," I continued. "What do you deserve for what you've done?" I asked. And both replied, with fear-filled eyes, "A spanking." "Yes, that's what you deserve," I said, then paused momentarily and said, "But instead of giving you what you deserve, I'm going to show you *mercy*."

How do you think the girls responded after experiencing mercy? They shouted with glee, "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" That's the very response that David gave as he finished his song. Yes, after confessing his need for mercy, and asking for mercy, thirdly...

**B. David experienced the benefits of mercy (11-12).** "You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever."

David mentions four benefits that mercy brought into his life that day...

1. *Wailing turned into dancing.* "You did it, Lord! You took away the wailing and set my feet to dancing!"

2. *Sackcloth turned into joy.* "You did that, too, Lord! You took off my mourning clothes and put a garment of joy over my shoulders!"

3. *Silence turned into singing.* "No more sitting in silence. After what You've done for me, I'm singing from my heart to You!"

4. *Self-centeredness turned into God-centeredness.* "No more census taking and self-trusting. From now on and forever, O Yahweh my God, I will give you thanks." Or to use the words of two little girls, "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!"

If indeed Psalm 30 was written for the dedication of Israel's temple, it's worth noting what Israel celebrated that day. On the day Solomon's temple opened for service, on the day sacrifices began to be offered on the altar, Israel sang a song about a sinner who nearly died because of his sin but was forgiven and restored. The message couldn't be clearer. If Israel's greatest king was a great sinner who needed God's great mercy, so do we! And if that great sinner received God's mercy, so can we!

In 1837 Robert M. McCheyne wrote a poem entitled, "I Am Debtor," that eventually became a hymn. That's what we are, brothers and sisters, *debtors, debtors to God's mercy*. Ponder these lyrics with me:

*When this passing world is done,  
When has sunk yon glaring sun,  
When we stand with Christ in glory,  
Looking o'er life's finished story,  
Then, Lord, shall I fully know—  
Not till then—how much I owe.*

*When I hear the wicked call,  
On the rocks and hills to fall,  
When I see them start and shrink  
On the fiery deluge brink,  
Then, Lord, shall I fully know—  
Not till then—how much I owe.*

*When I stand before the throne,  
Dressed in beauty not my own,  
When I see Thee as Thou art,  
Love Thee with unsinning heart,  
Then Lord, shall I fully know—  
Not till then—how much I owe.*

*When the praise of Heav'n I hear,  
Loud as thunders to the ear,  
Loud as many waters' noise,  
Sweet as harp's melodious voice,  
Then, Lord, shall I fully know—  
Not till then—how much I owe.*

*Chosen not for good in me,  
Wakened up from wrath to flee,  
Hidden in the Savior's side,  
By the Spirit sanctified,  
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show,  
By my love, how much I owe. [\[7\]](#)*

Celebrate the news today! God is majestic! God is merciful!

One final thought: To fully appreciate Psalm 30 we must look ahead...

David said, "His anger lasts only a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime." To fully appreciate those words we

must look beyond David one thousand years to a cross on a hillside outside of Jerusalem . Who's on that cross? It is the Son of David, Messiah Jesus. What's happening at the scene of the cross? We see three things...

1. *At the cross we see God's momentary anger.* During the six hours that Christ hung on the cross as a sin-bearer, Christ experienced the just anger of a holy God. The anger was not due to His own sins for He had none, but due to our sins.

2. *At the cross we see God's eternal favor.* Christ took the brunt of God's momentary anger so that we might enjoy the fullness of God's forever favor. That's what happened at the cross, dear friend.

3. *At the cross we see the majesty of God's mercy.* Do you long to have the weight of your sins removed? Then look to the cross for...

*Mercy there was great and grace was free,*

*Pardon there was multiplied to me,*

*There my burdened soul found liberty,*

*At Calvary .[\[8\]](#)*

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**\*\*Note:** This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[\[1\]](#) The Hebrew could be read in a couple of ways; one, “for the dedication of the *bayit* of David” or “for the dedication of the *bayit*, of David” (since there are no commas in the Hebrew text).

[\[2\]](#) Eric Lane , p. 145.

[\[3\]](#) Eric Lane , p. 146.

[\[4\]](#) Peter Craigie, p. 254.

[\[5\]](#) Charles Spurgeon, p. 45.

[\[6\]](#) Peter Craigie, p. 255. Craigie adds, “But sickness shattered the illusion and brought him to the edge of his mortality.”

[\[7\]](#) The Cyber Hymnal

[\[8\]](#) William Newell, *At Calvary*