

HOLD TO GOD'S UNCHANGING HAND – Part I

Malachi 3: 6, James 1: 17, Numbers 23: 19, Isaiah 40: 8 and Psalm 33: 10-12

This is the backdrop for this message from Psalm 34: 1-22

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Dearly Beloved, as you are gathered-together alone or with your family, please know that our church is busy during this short suspension of regular services. We are working as Pastors and leaders, to meet your special needs while so many of us are holed up in our homes praying for the pandemic coronavirus, Covid-19 storm to pass by. Both Pastor Larry and I have preached a message for you to listen to as individuals and families. Pastor Larry's awesome message is from III John. Listen to it. You can find us at Sermon Audio, under our name, the top message. Next Friday night, Pastor Will and I will again post another two Sunday messages. Get your family together and listen in your own home. We are scattered for a couple weeks, but we are gathered-together studying the same texts in the Word of God.

The background to our message this morning is **resting** in the sovereignty of Almighty God, resting in His providence, and in His amazing grace. Listen to these five passage God has laid heavily on my heart. (1) First, turn in your Bibles to Malachi 3: 6 – God is speaking. “For I the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.” Hold to God's unchanging hand! (2) Turn to James 1: 17. James declares about the Lord, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” Hold to God's unchanging hand.” (3) Turn to Numbers 23: 19 and hear what a covetous, and sinful prophet said, when he accurately spoke of God's character. Balaam accurately spoke, “God is not man, that He should lie, or a son of man, that He should change His mind. Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not fulfill it?” Hold to God's unchanging hand. (4) Isaiah 40: 8 has this Gospel in the Old Testament prophet declaring to us, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever.” Hold to God's unchanging hand. (5) The unnamed psalmist in Psalm 33: 10-12 declares so beautifully, “The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom He has chosen as His heritage.” Hold to God's unchanging hand.

Beloved, these words about God's immutable, unchangeable character, and steadfast character and the character of God's Word means we are standing on the Rock of God's Word, on the Rock Christ Jesus. As the earthquakes of this past week have reached as far as 30 miles east of Rock Springs from Salt Lake City, please know we stand on the unshakable Rock of Ages. Therefore, as the writer of Hebrews 12: 28-29 tells us, let us rest in this pandemic on this truth. “Therefore, let

us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.” I now want us to turn to the message God has laid on my heart, a psalm of David in the spiritual pandemic he faced when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and David escaped. Turn to Psalm 34: 1-22. The occasion for this psalm in the heading, doesn't paint a pretty picture of David. The occasion is I Samuel 21: 10-15, which tells of David despairing of escaping Saul's search for him, so he foolishly turned himself over to the king of the Philistines, Achish, as his place to hide from Saul. We read,

“And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath. And the servants of Achish said to him, “Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, ‘Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten-thousands?’” And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. So, he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard. Then Achish said to his servants, “Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me? Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?” David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him.”

Now if the heading of Psalm 34 is correct, as I believe it is, then there is a mystery about this psalm which mentions nothing about David's madness or feigning madness. It only gives us one of the most amazing psalms of crying out to God and worshipping Him in praise. The psalm heading tells us that David feigned mad behavior in front of the king of the Philistines and calls him Abimelech, though I Samuel calls him Achish. There is no contradiction. In I Samuel 21, Achish is the king's personal name. In Psalm 34, Abimelech is his title of royalty, just like the Pharaoh of Egypt. Pharaoh was the title of the ruler of Egypt, but not his personal name. The President of the United States is the title of his office, but not the president's name. So, the answer is that the Philistines called their kings “Abimelech,” and this Pharaoh or President or Abimelech's name was Achish. David had defeated Goliath, the Philistine, and Saul, the King of Israel out of jealousy now wanted David's head. Did David sing this psalm while acting like a madman, marking the walls in Philistia, or did he sing this psalm after escaping from the Philistines and king Achish? Only God knows!

Since the first day this song was sung, by David, millions have sung this psalm now for over three thousand years. I love to sing verses 1-4, and the Jews For Jesus sing a beautiful song by Stuart Dauermann, “Let Us Exalt His Name Together.” The song goes, “At all times I will bless Him, His praise will be in my mouth, My

soul makes its boast in the Lord, The humble man will hear Him The afflicted will be glad And join with me to magnify the Lord, Let us exalt His Name, together, forever, I sought the Lord, He heard me, And delivered me from my fears; Let us exalt His Name, together, forever, O sing His praises, magnify the Lord.” The Israelites used this psalm to sing in every impossible situation they faced, every storm, trial, epidemic, pandemic, and this little psalm of 22 verses gives us ten brief descriptions of our great and mighty God. Never doubt for a moment that whatever our fix, our problem, our dilemma, our pandemic, or whatever our nervous breakdown or our national collapse is, God never forgets His own. He is ever there to deliver us— in ten divine ways through the strength of His unchanging character: What does God do for us in our panic and despair?

THE LORD ANSWERS WHEN WE SEEK HIM AND DELIVERS US FROM OUR FEARS. (I.) Notice verses 1-4. “I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together! I sought the LORD, and He answered me and delivered me from all my fears.” Beloved, there is no time in all our lives when God’s praises should not be on our lips. In our weakness, we find God’s strength. When we are brought low in our own esteem by life’s adversities, we find that our only expectations and hopes are in Him, in God and in God alone. We boast in the Lord, no matter what is coming down in our lives, even facing this coronavirus. Making our boast in the Lord of hosts, we seek His face. When we magnify the Lord, He hears us and delivers us from all our fears. In the panic of our fear, pandemonium and March madness, we have deliverance from our fears when we bless the Lord at all times, when His praise is continually in our mouth. Secondly,

THE LORD MAKES OUR FACES RADIANT—BEAMING WHEN WE CRY TO HIM FOR DELIVERANCE AND SALVATION. (II.) Verse 5 is glorious! “Those who look to Him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.” Rather than having our faces red with shame, in our struggles, or angry with blame, or flushed with fear of our own death from this coronavirus, we can, and we must cry to the Lord. When we do, our faces beam radiantly. They shine as Moses’ face shone when he had been with the Lord. Every one of us now to one extent or the other understand, within ourselves, what a dark place we are in, where we cannot see any immediate hope or light. Cry to Jesus and this old world will brighten up. It will show on our faces. The hymn writer, Edna R. Worrell, wrote, “It’s just like Jesus to roll the clouds away. It’s just like Jesus to keep me day by day. It’s just like Jesus all along the way. It’s just like His great love.” Beloved, when we look to God, we are radiant, no matter what we face. Thirdly,

THE LORD HAS HIS ANGEL ENCOMPASSING AROUND US AS WE FEAR HIM TO DELIVER US. (III.) Notice verses 6, 7. “This poor man cried,

and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.” A celebrated Philadelphia neurologist, Dr. S. W. Mitchell, went to bed after an exceptionally tiring day back in 1975. Suddenly someone knocking on his door awakened him. Opening it he found a little girl poorly dressed and deeply upset. She told him her mother was very sick and asked him if he would please come with her. It was a bitterly cold, snowy night, but though he was bone tired, the doctor dressed and followed the girl. The doctor found the mother desperately ill with pneumonia. After arranging for medical care, he complimented the sick woman on the intelligence and persistence of her little daughter. The woman looked at him strangely and then tearfully replied, "My daughter died a month ago." She added, "Her shoes and coat are in the clothes closet there." Amazed and perplexed, the doctor went to the closet and opened the door. There hung the very coat worn by the little girl who had brought him to tend to her mother. It was warm and dry and could not possibly have been out in the wintry night. Who called this doctor out of his bed to this woman's side? I know! As Billy Graham tells this story in his book, "Angels, Angels, Angels," it is true, that the angel of Lord encamps around those who fear Him. God's secret agents, His angels are with you today on duty. 4thly,

THE LORD IS GOOD AND HE SATISFIES THE HUNGRY WHO SEEK

HIM. (IV.) Notice verses 8-10. "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing." You and I are going to have enough food, enough Clorox, enough toilet paper, and enough soup beans. The Hebrew word for taste is taam and it means to try the flavor of something. I love going to Costco once in a while and just making a meal of shopping there while tasting all the samples. I enjoy trying three or four flavors of ice cream before I land on the choice I usually buy. Guess what I buy and laugh with me—it's my favorite--vanilla. With the Lord, David says that those who take refuge in the Lord taste the Lord in a way we never lack or look again for He is all we ever desire or need. Oh, the young lions may hunger in drought times, but we who know the Lord and seek Him—we never go searching 33 other flavors for something better. Fifthly,

THE LORD HAS LESSONS TO TEACH THOSE WHO WILL LISTEN TO HIM AS CHILDREN.

(V.) Notice verses 11-14. "Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it." David turns for a moment from poet to teacher and preacher, his major point being that he is calling for us to live in the fear of the Lord, not in the pandemonium of this pandemic of fear. If we desire life, good things, if we desire to live many days, the answer is "fear the Lord"—"keeping our tongues from evil and our lips from

speaking deceit, turning away from evil and doing good, seeking peace and pursuing it.” Zach Williams sings a song I love, “Fear, he is a liar.” The chorus goes, “Fear, he is a liar He will take your breath Stop you in your steps Fear he is a liar He will rob your rest Steal your happiness Cast your fear in the fire Cause fear, he is a liar. Do you want to see many more days alive? Fear the Lord! Sixthly,

THE LORD SEES AND HEARS THE CRIES OF THE RIGHTEOUS. (VI.)

Notice verses 15, 17, and 19. “The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry... When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles... Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all...” God is especially mindful of us when we cry to Him. He sees our tears, and He hears our cries. Beloved, one of the greatest gifts we can give each other is the gift of tears. When we are like Jesus, we don’t forbid or discourage tears, but rather we see, and we hear, and our hearts go out to each other. Never, never, never think that God is put off by our tears. Never! Amy Lambert wrote a song in 1997 that the Gaithers sang around the world. She wrote, “Often you wonder why tears come into your eyes And burdens seem to be much more than you can bear But God is standing near, He sees your falling tears And tears are a language God understands.” At the burning bush, God told Moses, in Exodus 3: 7, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters.” Beloved, don’t be brave in this pandemic and hold back tears. Cry out to the Lord today! Let your tears fall. Pray with tears for your family, our church family, and every person combating the coronavirus, and everyone yet to get it. God will hear and answer. Seventhly,

THE LORD TURNS HIS FACE AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL AND HE SLAYS THEM AND CUTS OFF THEIR MEMORY. (VII.)

Notice verses 16 and 21. “The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth... Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.” Our desire is to blame others, and to pin this virus Covid-19 on somebody. Stop it! God knows what’s going on. The Lord looks with pity on us His children. But He is turned against those who do evil. If God turns His face against someone, it’s curtains for them and He will cut off their memory. He can end a legacy. He can expose evil plots or conspiracies. Live for Jesus, so that God will never turn His face against you. Eighthly,

THE LORD IS NEAR TO THE BROKEN-HEARTED AND HE SAVES THOSE WHO ARE CRUSHED IN SPIRIT. (VIII.)

Notice verse 18. “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.” The Hebrew word for near is **qarob**. It means right beside us, nearby to hear and to help. There is nothing distant about our God today. The word for broken-hearted is **shabar**. It means to burst open, to break in pieces and to crush. It speaks of pottery that is shattered, or of a broken bow, a broken door, a broken sword, broken bones,

broken bonds, or broken yokes. If we will listen for God's voice in our spirit today, we will hear His heart cry as He sees and hears us weeping. He is calling out to each one of us today. God loves us all more than any of us could ever dream. What does it mean, "and saves the crushed"? The Hebrew word is **yasha**. It means to open wide His arms, to make free, to make safe, to save, to preserve, to rescue, to defend, to bring victory to, and to help. The word **yasha** is the root word for Savior, the very word that describes why Jesus died on the cross for us. Who are those Jesus saves? Who are the born again whom Jesus delivers? David says they are the crushed. The Hebrew word is **dakka**. It means the contrite, those ground to powder, broken to pieces, who become humble, not bitter and repent. The Lord Jesus only saves those who humbly turn to Him in their brokenness. Today, that is my message to us all. Turn with your crushed, broken spirits to Jesus now. Ninthly,

THE LORD KEEPS THE BONES OF HIS ANOINTED SO NONE OF THEM IS BROKEN. (IX.)

What a protector God is. Look at verse 20. "He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken." This verse definitely has a Messianic focus, as John tells us about Jesus in John 19:36, that the Roman soldiers broke the legs of the two thieves on the cross so that they died, but they did not break Jesus' bones so that the Scripture might be fulfilled in Psalm 34: 20, "Not one of His bones shall be broken." Many of us know what it is to have broken bones, and some of you are in therapy for broken bones. Sometimes, this Messianic word has been extended to us. Coming home from Leon, Mexico to Dallas, after 2 hours going through customs, we were heading toward the Skylink. Pastor Saul started to run, but the door began to close. I saw him start to run, and I started to run but my legs got tangled in my attaché case. I went down as hard as I have ever fallen, face down on the marble floor. I hit the right side of my jaw and my chin and the world started spinning. Amazingly, I retained consciousness—and all I can say for sure is, "Thank you Jesus, "You kept my bones. Not one of them was broken." Tenthly,

THE LORD REDEEMS THE LIFE OF HIS SERVANTS WHO TAKE REFUGE IN HIM. (X.)

Sometimes our bones are broken. Sometimes we catch a virus, as I caught an A-strain virus in 1974 that put me down for 7 weeks, out of church, too sick to stand up, and I still carry remnants from the aftermath of that Port Chalmers flu. When we catch the flu, or our bones are broken, notice verse 22. "The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned." The righteous may have many afflictions like Marian Joy Remington in hospice. But be sure, those who trust in the Lord will ultimately be safe in the everlasting arms of Jesus. God makes a huge distinction between the righteous and the wicked. God even rescues us who know Him in death. We can sing, "I am a friend of God." We are His bride. Even in death, He takes us to His arms in Glory, absent from the body, present with the Lord." Hold to God's unchanging Hand. I love you all. Amen.