

False Confidences – Psalm 30

Pastor Tim Rech

Introduction

We all express confidence in someone or something or in what we believe.

Such confidence can be rewarding, at other times disappointing.

Sometimes this confidence is merited, other times misplaced or false with serious consequences.

Sometimes people place confidence in us, and we let them down.

This is the reality of day-to-day life in a fallen world.

With this thought, we approach Psalm 30 today. It is part of our series called, "*As for Me.*"

Some Background

The psalm was written by King David. As we know, David, "*the man after God's own heart*", lived a storied life filled with many tests and trials – many in which he did well and others not so much – just like us.

The context behind Psalm 30 does not seem to point to one biblical account of David's life. There are several we can point to that contain elements of what is described here, but no text that contains all. Perhaps the closest event is that of David foolishly and arrogantly ordering the census of Israel, as found in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21. God was not pleased with this decision and gave David three choices: three years famine, three months enemy invasion, or three days pestilence. David chose pestilence which cost the lives of 70,000 men in the land. But even this account does not encompass all David describes in this psalm.

In any event, David's whole life experience is the backdrop for this psalm; the trouble, the blessing, and the failure.

The purpose and timing of the psalm is worth noting. David wrote it for the dedication of the temple – the future temple planned for by David but left for Solomon to build.

The psalm was sung for a special event in Israel's history and one for which David longed to see, but God not allowing. Its theme was so important to David that he left it for a time beyond his lifetime. And as it did for them, this psalm warns all of God's people and gives occasion to praise and thank the Lord.

A Call to Praise (v 1-5)

We begin in verses 1-3 with praise for personal rescue:

For Personal Rescue (v 1-3)

*I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up
and have not let my foes rejoice over me.*

² *O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.*

³ *O LORD, you have brought up my soul from Sheol;
you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.*

David had been in great distress. His enemies had encircled him and threatened to destroy him. Many and ruthless were the enemies of David in his lifetime – some were foreigners like the Philistines, some were his countryman, one was his own king (Saul), and worst of all, some were from his own family. They hated him and took every opportunity to bring him down especially when he was weak and vulnerable. For example, when his son Absalom usurped the throne and led a campaign to kill him, David fled Jerusalem, pursued and harassed by his enemies. But Absalom and all the others never overtook David. God always protected him. And the same is true in the circumstances of Psalm 30. The Lord rescued him here. He refused to let David's enemies' triumph over him. So, David praises the Lord for rescuing him from his enemies.

He also praises the Lord for healing him. Evidently David was afflicted with something. What exactly was wrong with David is not given here.

But the illness was serious as recorded in verse three. David was convinced he was near death and headed to Sheol, that is, the grave. David was departing the land of the living, to join all others headed to death.

The account of God's angry response to David's ill-advised census fits here. The Scripture records that after taking the lives of 70,000 men of Israel, the angel of the Lord was sent by God to destroy Jerusalem. David witnessed the angel with drawn sword (what a sight!). Given the circumstances and his present sickness, it is no wonder David thought he was about to die! 1 Chronicles 21:16b records, "*Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces*" and David prayed for God to relent from the disaster. And the Lord relented, telling the angel in 1 Chronicles 21:15, "*It is enough; now stay your hand,*"

So, the Lord rescued him from death and restored him to the land of the living in this account and possibly at other times in his life. Understandably, David was thankful and praised the Lord for rescuing him.

David was rescued by the Lord from his enemies, sickness, and impending death which moved him to break out in praise to the Lord. But there was more to it, as the psalm reveals.

He now turns to the congregation – to God's people. We read in verses 4-5:

For God's People to Join (v 4-5)

*⁴ Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints,
and give thanks to his holy name.^[b]*

*⁵ For his anger is but for a moment,
and his favor is for a lifetime.^[c]*

*Weeping may tarry for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.*

David calls on God's people, all who would worship the Lord, to join him in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. Now we, along with those attending the dedication of the temple Solomon built 3,000 years ago, may wonder at this point, "*what is the reason David? You gave us a great testimony, but it seems a bit personal, right? We don't even know what was going on then.*"

But then David begin to shed more light on his verse 1-3 situation in verse five: *⁵ For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.*

God's anger and the weeping it causes lasts only for a moment, lasts only through the night (note the parallel structure of the verse). So now we can see that David's plight was because of God's displeasure. He was at odds with God. David was under the chastening or disciplining hand of God. And God's people know what that can look like. Enemies seem larger and can become agents of God's discipline. Good health can be taken away for a time. And it can even seem that death is just around the corner. David had been in physical, emotional, and spiritual distress because of his sin. They understood and perhaps experienced the same thing to some degree in their lives. In fact, this was the history of corporate Israel.

The path back from sin to full fellowship with the Lord is repentance. The path back to the Lord is to learn the lesson He gives and to humble ourselves before Him.

When this occurs, we see the flip side of this verse parallel. The discipline might be hard and seems to have no end, but it is short compared to the length of God's favor which is a lifetime – which in God's calendar lasts for eternity. The weeping may go on for what seems like an unending night. But the morning comes, and the suffering is replaced by joy. And with this joy, comes a new beginning - our gracious God is in the business of new beginnings.

What a beautiful verse. Maybe the Psalm 30 page in your Bible is especially dog-eared and worn from repeatedly returning to it. And although God's discipline is in view here, *it is important to note this applies also to times where God simply permits sorrow, mourning, and hardship into this life.*

The Lord is to be praised by His people. For they, of all people, know His anger is under control and lasts only for a time. His lavish grace makes us quickly forget the long night; like the mom who goes through the temporary hard labor process and forgets it all in the joy of holding her newborn son or daughter. And even more so, in Christ, He calls us godly ones from verse 4. We all have a testimony where we likely suffered in our unbelieving state before Christ. But once we receive Christ, there is a new beginning. All things begin to be made new. The ugly things tend to fade away in time with the Lord's help. But the point is gracious amnesia, right?

Now we could stop right here and praise God, but this does not fully explain Psalm 30. As wonderful as verses 4-5 are, we have not identified the problem in this psalm. The question remains, what did David do or not do that placed him into his verses 1-3 predicament?

A Testimony (v 6-10)

The Problem (v 6-7)

We see the answer in verses 6-7 where we read:

⁶ *As for me, I said in my prosperity,*

"I shall never be moved."

⁷ *By your favor, O LORD,*

you made my mountain stand strong;

you hid your face;

I was dismayed.

So here is the familiar phrase, "*As for me*" which we have been seeing throughout this series. Typically, when we see the phrase, it means the psalmist is taking the way approved by God, which is a teaching moment for the reader / listener. It is a reversal towards the good and godly way. But the opposite is true in this psalm. So far, David has praised God for rescue, and then

exhorted God's people to praise and thank the Lord as well for his steadfast love through the suffering, through the discipline. Here when David says, "*As for me*", he in essence is saying, "*don't do I what I did, don't make the same mistake I made.*"

So, what happened with David? As recorded in the Scripture, we know that his life was one of extremes. He experienced the great highs; defeated Goliath when a boy, held the hearts of Israel as he served King Saul, rose to become king, conquered Israel's enemies and expanded the nation's territory. 2 Samuel 5:9 says, "*And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him.*" The Lord prospered David throughout his life. But the great lows of David's life were recorded as well; fleeing King Saul, falling into sin with Bathsheba which brought division and civil war to his family, and the consequences of his tragic decision to count the fighting men of Israel.

The text here says David was in the middle of one of the high points; a time of great prosperity – permitted by the hand of God. It was a time of carefree ease. The kingdom was likely secure and peaceful with its enemies subdued. Every material desire had been satisfied – David had everything. The king of Israel was immensely popular. The Lord had been with him all this time through every trial and trouble. It seemed all his troubles were behind him. Prosperity had come. Praise God, right? Well, that depends on how prosperity is handled.

Looking closely at verses 6-7, we see David's attitude. God had prospered him, but David began seeing himself as pretty good too; strong, resourceful, smart, etc. An attitude of self-assurance had set in. In his mind, God had done much, but give him some credit here too. In fact, his heart said, "*give me a lot of credit.*" See the phrase in verse 6, "*I shall never be moved.*" In other words, nothing can stop me now. Through God's favor, David had been made strong and secure like a "*mountain.*"

The proper sense of self before God, that is, weakness, frailty, and the tendency toward sin, along with the accompanying humility, had been replaced by an arrogant self-sufficiency and confidence in self. The attitude can be expressed by, "*God is good, but I really play a big part here – look at me! Lord, thanks for the help, but I will take it from here.*"

David forgot how weak he really was. His confidence in God had been replaced by confidence in what God had given him; ability, peace, security, power, and that he was unstoppable. In the

process, he became like all the other kings of the world who exalted themselves over God. Remember King Nebuchadnezzar and so many others in the Bible. For example, in the account of the census, David was so proud of his military and wanted to count the number of fighting men. David focused on what he had been given and forgot the giver.

Well, the Lord did not let him forget. *Prosperity without humility cannot stand.* Verse 7 tells us God hid His face from David – no more shining face from God on David. When this happens, adversity and trouble come.

This explains verses 1-3. David was troubled and dismayed. He was terrified and in intense agony. He had sinned. Now the consequences were setting in; enemies revived, health in decline, and death in view. And worse yet, he was out of fellowship with God.

This led him to prayerfully plea in verses 8-10:

The Plea (v 8-10)

⁸ *To you, O LORD, I cry,*

and to the Lord I plead for mercy:

⁹ *“What profit is there in my death,^[d]*

if I go down to the pit?^[e]

Will the dust praise you?

Will it tell of your faithfulness?

¹⁰ *Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me!*

O LORD, be my helper!”

David is humbled by God. He now understands he offended the Lord. It was serious, for he faced death. He cries out to the Lord, begging for mercy.

He then appeals to God in an unexpected way. He tells God it will be a waste for him to die and go to the grave where he cannot praise God. If he goes to the grave, he will become lifeless dust, unable to tell the living of the Lord’s faithfulness. *“So, Lord, how will my death magnify you then?”*

At first glance, this seems arrogant of David. Does he think he is that special? Cannot God simply raise up another man in his place? These questions miss the point. A man after God’s own heart

loves his Lord and wants to glorify him in all things – even a man who misplaced his confidence in things other than God – a man who was chastened to regain his senses. To David, his Lord needed to receive every bit of glory possible – not to do so would be a wasted life.

And this glory David could give by God's rescue of Him, would be to show the depth of the Lord's mercy, grace, and lovingkindness – a testimony God's people and the world needed to hear. And this is the response God looks for in one of his people – to repent and to return to an utter and complete dependence on Him.

Verse 10 concludes his plea for mercy. Notice how he pleads for the Lord to *"be my helper."* This statement affirms renewed dependence on the Lord.

Restored to Thanksgiving (v 11-12)

And the Lord heard David and restores him in verses 11-12:

¹¹ You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;

you have loosed my sackcloth

and clothed me with gladness,

¹² that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent.

O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!

David had been forgiven and restored. The long *"night"* of weeping and suffering had ended. His sorrow had been transformed into joy.

Outwardly (v 11)

This change is first shown on the outside. God turned his tears into joyful dancing. And he also had a change of clothes. When mourning in biblical times, people wore sackcloth (and ashes). We often see in the Bible where a change in wardrobe reflects an altered life. God took away the occasion for sackcloth. David now exuded glad joy that could not be missed.

Inwardly (v 12)

And the psalm ends as it began – with praise and thanks coming from his glory, that is, *his heart and soul*. And as a result, he could never be silent. His thanks would last forever.

Now it is no wonder David called on the people of God to join him in the Lord's praise. For Israel repeatedly placed their confidence in things other than in God. When they forgot the God who richly blessed them, they:

- Would long for Egypt

- Trust their religion, culture, way of life, prosperity
- Trust the false gods of the nations around them.
- Trust in the kings of Israel who in turn placed their confidence in a multitude of horses, gold and silver, and a strong military.

For this, God often hid his face from them, and troubles began and then continued until they returned to Him.

So, Psalm 30 was perfect for the people to hear that day at the temple dedication. Undoubtedly, they would fail again and again. They would desperately need to hear about David's experience and the path back and most importantly, the Lord's loving kindness towards His people.

We must pay attention to this psalm. None of us are earthly kings, but we are just as prone to wander into false confidences.

What flawed and fleeting things are you placing your confidence in today? These counterfeits come in many different forms. For some, it is:

- Wealth and possessions; God may have you blessed you in this area, but have they replaced the Lord in your heart?
- Job and career; the very thing God gave you to support yourself becomes the center of your life. In fact, you might tell yourself, *"My job makes me safe and secure."*
- Science, technology, medicine – what if the medical system falls apart?
- The country we live in, our privileges and rights and freedoms.
- Our military and the peace and security it brings
- Our government leaders ... *"if only John Doe comes into office, everything will be made right ...then it will be far better ..."*

Or perhaps you placed your confidence in more personal things like:

- Other people – spouse, father, mother, children, boss – people will always let us down
- Your physical strength and appearance – young people, remember this will fade – believe me!
- Your good health
- Your "vast" knowledge
- Your gifts, talents, skills, and experiences – God given, but sometimes you think they begin and end with you. Or worse yet, maybe you do ministry in your own power because of your experience, rather than relying on the Word and Spirit – something to think about it.

All these things can be blessings from the Lord. But do you place your confidence in the gifts rather than the giver? Remember, all things we are given can be taken away in an instant. How then will you respond?

With the Lord's help (and He is most interested in doing so), identify any false confidences, repent, and root them out. See how weak you really are without Him.

And this is not a one-time exercise. Be ready to repeat. Times of sorrow and mourning will continue in this life as the Lord works to expose and change us. But joy in the morning will continue to come as well. You see, in the Lord, we are a people in process and a people of new beginnings. This is who the Lord is; the One who takes our practical holiness seriously, but also a God of grace, who continually grants new beginnings on the merit of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done.

See and be encouraged by the life of Christ today. He perfectly expressed confidence in God, the Father and always enjoyed sweet fellowship with Him. Still, Christ experienced on the cross made for Him, a complete turning away of the Father's face for a time. There was sorrow and mourning for Him in that moment. And unlike David's experience, He did go to the grave. Oh, not for His sin – He never sinned – but for David's and for ours.

And this was not the end of the story. God, the Father, raised the Son, Jesus Christ from the dead. The sorrow and gloom of sin and death had been overcome and life conquered forevermore. By faith in this His completed work, we will not be punished for our sin. We are people of life and can and must hold an unshakeable confidence in Him.

So, there is One who ultimately deserves and demands our every confidence, from the smallest detail to the largest issues of our being and our life. He is the Lord. When confidence in Him is held without wavering, there is protection, hope, and joy. But when it wavers or departs, the opposite is true.

Reflect and Respond

In whom and what do you regularly place your confidence?

Remember your only true strength and confidence is the Lord – all else will ultimately fail.

Are you currently being chastened by God? Could it be because your confidence in this life is not based first and fully upon the Lord? If yes, return to Him.

If you are experiencing the long night of suffering right now, look expectantly for the dawn of morning when the Lord transforms sorrow and mourning into joy. Count on this cycle continuing throughout this life, until the ultimate and lasting light of morning comes in eternity with Jesus.

Praise and thank Him today for His loving kindness and grace in Christ today and always.

Let's Pray

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.