

Toward a Trusting, Thankful Faith

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Well, it's no secret that we encounter thousands of situations as we live in this fallen world that threaten us individually and as a people. In our world, Islamic terrorists strike without warning and wreak terrible destruction and mayhem on unsuspecting people. In our nation, even as we speak in the coming months, the election cycle is going to bring a lot of uncertainty and fear into the hearts of American people, even those who are in the church. I hope to say more about that in just a moment. In the church of Jesus Christ, name recognition and church size count for more than doctrinal integrity and personal holiness and in our personal lives, setbacks and discouragements come our way with unpredictable results and the question is whether you're looking at it at a macro sense from world events or in our national lives or whether you're looking at it from a spiritual perspective of loving the church of Christ or whether it's in your own personal life and disappointments have struck you in a way that you don't know where to go from here, the question is: how do we live by faith in times like that? How is it that we manifest a living trust in God in a way that actually makes a difference? Psalm 31, which I just read earlier, is going to lead the way.

What does trust look like? Well, you know, even our Lord Jesus drew on Psalm 31 when as he drew his last breath here on earth as he hung on the cross, he quoted the words of the first half of Psalm 31:5 when he said, "Into Your hand I commit my spirit," as he was praying to his Father from the cross. So even by his own life and even in the work of atonement, the Lord Jesus Christ pointed us to Psalm 31 as something worthy of our attention; something that we should appropriate. And let me just say a word here, I'm already on a tangent and I'm only three minutes into my message. How about that? I think that the next six months or so, seven months depending, yeah, six months as the calendar is going by more quickly than I think, the next six months are going to be a significant challenge for us to live out the kind of faith that we see manifested here in Psalm 31 because even within Christian circles, there is going to be so much angst about the future of our country, so many declarations of doom if this candidate or the other candidate wins, and it's all going to be calculated to provoke in you a sense of worry, a sense of concern, a sense of absolute fear of the future of what's going to happen. Fear is one way that people motivate you in politics and unfortunately, based on a lot of sad prior experience, I'm quite confident that that's going to be dominating the discussions even among some of the best Christians that we know in the months to come. And here before we enter into that maelstrom, that hurricane of concern and that which is designed to

tempt us away from trusting Christ, I'm very glad for us as a church, I'm very glad for you because you're all, without exception, you are faithful to be here, especially on Tuesday nights. I'm very glad for us collectively and corporately that we are going to be able to go week by week through the Psalms in the coming months as we go through this time in our national lives, and it is incumbent upon you and upon me to rise above the worry that is going to manifest itself not only in our country but within the church and within those who name the name of Christ, pleading for this or that candidate not to be elected. Beloved, it's incumbent upon us to take this as our opportunity to grow spiritually and to manifest the kind of biblical faith that is laid out for us in God's word in the Psalms. There will be no excuse for anyone of us in this room to be shaken from our confidence. There will be no excuse for those who go through the Psalms together with us not to have a sense of perspective that gives them strength even in the most uncertain of times and that's the aspiration, that's the call of God's word on your life as we come to this, is that this would not simply be an abstraction to us, an intellectual pursuit that we engage in while our hearts are mired in doubt and fear and anxiety and a sense of being overwhelmed by what the future might hold. That is not worthy of our Lord Jesus Christ, is it? We should not be driven by political currents in our confidence in Christ, should we? That's just not the way that Christians should live.

Now, we saw that in our "Trusting God in Trying Times" conference from a couple of weeks ago and now we have the opportunity to dive back into this reality of biblical faith that is designed to control our mindset and to give us confidence and to give us that which transcends the world even as things seem to crumble around us. What does trust look like? Well, we want to just break this Psalm down into two basic sections here as we treat these Psalms; in a single message and you have 24, 30 some verses, obviously you're going to treat things in a somewhat hurried manner. But the idea here is this: what I want you to see as we go through these Psalms together and as we go through Psalm 31 tonight, what I want you to see is the big picture. Look for the big principles that are at stake, these things that anchor your heart and drive the way that you respond to all of life. Look for these big principles and that's what I'm going to try to focus on as we handle these Psalms together week after week and tonight we come to Psalm 31.

Here's your first principle for tonight. What does faith look like? It is, number 1: it is a trusting appeal to God in distress. A trusting appeal to God in distress and every aspect of that heading is important. As Psalm 31 opens, David is under the weight of some kind of trial. The commentators speculate but as is often the case, there's no real clear answer on it which gives it a greater sense of broad application. As Spurgeon said, I believe it was, is that if we had too many details about what David's trial was, we might be tempted to limit it to his situation and miss the circumstances, miss the principles that apply to all of us and that's certainly the case. What should you do when you are struck with a sudden emergency? A trial that you didn't see coming? When a disappointment hits you and something that you had banked your life on is suddenly gone with no possibility of redeeming it and getting it back? What do you do with that? Well, David shows us the way. He's in a trial as this opens and notice that he simply appeals to the Lord for help.

Look at verses 1 and 2 with me. Notice as you go through this, notice the intensely personal nature of his trust. This is not an abstraction to him. This is not an intellectual pursuit to him. He is banking his entire life on the truth of what we read here in Psalm 31. He says in verse 1,

1 In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge; Let me never be ashamed; In Your righteousness deliver me. 2 Incline Your ear to me, rescue me quickly; Be to me a rock of strength, A stronghold to save me.

Now, the first principle for you to take away as we consider a trusting appeal in distress, the thing that I would want to come to your mind first of all as your first response when you're responding to a life difficulty or to the political crises that will be foisted upon us is that these trials that come to us are designed, first and foremost, to promote in you a spirit of dependence upon your God. These are designed to provoke a reaction in you. God providentially brings these things to you in order that you might exercise the trust that you say that you have in him. David's trials promoted dependence upon Yahweh, Lord, O LORD, the covenant keeping, promise keeping name of God there in verse 1, and notice what he says. He says, "I have taken refuge in you," and he expresses his dependence with these urgent requests. He says, "Deliver me. Rescue me. Incline Your ear to me. Save me. You are a stronghold to save me." So there is this immediate outpouring of trust, this expression of dependence upon him, and look, he's praying this way because he urgently feels it. It's not that he's got everything under control, he feels like he is sinking under the weight of it all. So the point of trust is not that you're always on top of the world and now I'm happy all the day as one hymn writer unfortunately added a chorus to a great Isaac Watts hymn that didn't have that chorus originally. No, it's not always going to be a matter of being bubbly and happy all day. These trials weigh on us.

Now, with that said, in these first two verses, David has already, just in these first two verses, he has already lifted us beyond our normal response. What do you mean? Well, I mean this. I'm going to work on an assumption that you're a lot like I am and that's not too good for you but that's the way it goes. Common to our humanity, I guess. Common even to Christian humanity. What's your typical response over time when trials hit you? Well, you know, we tend to start talking to men, talking to friends, looking for sympathy, looking for men to give us the strength that would lift us up out of that and I don't want to discount the importance of friendships, but here's the thing, is that we get into a rut, we get into a cycle where that's all we're ever doing without ever actually appealing to our Lord in humble petition with the sense that the Lord is actually the one that can help us. I have no empirical data to base what I'm about to say on, it's just an observation of human nature that I think would prove true and probably for most of us, the truth of the matter is that in the midst of your sorrows, your difficulties, your trials, you are probably disproportionately talking to men rather than appealing to the Lord with this kind of dependent trusting appeal that David makes, exemplifies for us here in the first two verses of it. Well, take that to heart. Let that strike you. What is your trust? What is your ultimate hope? Why are we asking men for sympathy when we could be going right to the sovereign Lord of the universe, appealing to him for strength in the midst of our trial?

For him to exercise his delivering power like he did with the Israelites at the Red Sea; like he did in the book of Judges for his people and throughout the course of Old Testament history and in subsequent New Testament history as well. Do we believe in this God or not? Well, if we do, then why isn't he our first avenue of comfort? Why isn't he our first avenue of appeal? David leads us into a trusting appeal in this distress by showing us you cry out to the Lord right from the beginning.

You know, there is just so much for us to learn. You know, I fear that we're just very paltry prayers and I say that not to discourage you or to criticize you or me but just to lay it out before us and to let Scripture show us by its pure example, it's God inspired example, what prayer can be and should be. You know, we tend to, when we pray, we just ask for stuff. "God, help me with this. God, do that." You know, we could just kind of try to boss him around, I guess, to order things to our pleasure. But notice what David does as he prays. There is so much intelligent thought, there is so much spiritual effort directed into his request. Here's the thing, he says, "God, save me. Deliver me. Rescue me." And then what does he do? He lays out for God the reasons that he should so act. He lays out the grounds upon which he asks for help in his earthly distress.

Look at it there in verse 3 and notice the intimacy of this. This is the whole point is to call us into this kind of intimacy that David knew with his God. He said, "God, deliver me. Save me. Rescue me." Why? Verse 3, "For," because of the covenant relationship that I enjoy with you,

3 For You are my rock and my fortress; For Your name's sake You will lead me and guide me. 4 You will pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me, [Why?] For You are my strength. 5 Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have ransomed me, O LORD, God of truth.

What he's doing here is he's laying out the basis upon which he asks God to act. It's not simply, "God, do this." It's, "God, do this for these reasons. And God, I'm appealing to you on a personal basis. You are the one in whom I have put my trust. You are my rock. You're the fortress that I run to when I'm under attack and in this fortress of your divine protection and in your divine person, I find protection and safety and security. And because you are like that to me, Lord, I appeal to you to act and to help me, to lead me, to guide me." There is an expression of confidence in it.

Verse 4, look at verse 4 with me, "You will pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me because You are my strength. Into Your hand I commit my spirit. I lay my case, I lay my life, I give my soul over to You. Why? God, because You have ransomed me. You're the God of truth who has ransomed me and brought me to Yourself." And as I pointed out earlier in verse 5, the first half of this verse, those were the last words from Jesus on the cross. Note this, note this, beloved, notice the example that Christ gave to us of a trusting faith in God that on the cross he trusted God with his dying breath with a certain confidence that his trust was not in vain. As it were, as he handed his soul over to God, there was a confidence that God would keep that which Christ was entrusting to him.

Now, beloved, that's what you and I do in earthly circumstances. It's what we do with our dying breath as well. Many writers have noted that throughout the ages many dying saints have had these words on their lips, "Into thy hands I commit my spirit, O Lord." Those are great words to die with. But notice that it's not just for the extreme of being on your deathbed, this is the way that we live. And I guess I just can't help myself but just thinking about what lies ahead over the next six months and having lived through a few presidential cycles as a Christian, knowing what comes ahead and everything that is going to bombard us through both secular and Christian media. This kind of approach is going to be at a premium because it's going to be so unusual. And what I call you to as we are all under the authority of Scripture, is for you to set your heart in these coming months of being someone who is marked by this trusting dependence, this trusting appeal on the Lord that says, "Whatever happens with this upcoming cycle, God, my life is in your hands and I trust you for it without being so assaulted by fear over what the future holds." And why should we be that way? Why is it important for us to do this? It's because of the glory of God. It's because we understand and know that God undertakes and God defends his people.

Now, if the worst thing happens, no matter what the worst thing that could happen to us is and all of the laws go against us and they just make it much more difficult to live for Christ as a faithful Christian, well, do you know what? Nothing has changed for us when that happens, if and when that happens. Nothing has changed for us because we are still under the sovereign care of the same God who is immutably the same yesterday, today and forever. He is our strength and nothing earthly can ever alter that. Nothing earthly can ever diminish his power to protect and preserve his people. If that's true, and it is, then it's incumbent upon us to manifest a spirit of life that says, "I believe that and I rest in it." And we need to hear this not just once but time and time again.

Beloved Christian brother and sister in Christ, fellow believer, by an act of redemption, God has undertaken for us; he has undertaken to care for us; he has staked his name on his ability and the manifestation of his care for us. Look over at Psalm 23 which has certain echoes of this theme. In Psalm 31:3, David had said, "For Your name's sake You will lead me and guide me." In Psalm 23, a far more familiar passage to us, David says, "He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake." You see, as things get more and more difficult for us from an external circumstantial perspective, there should be a sense of expectation in our hearts that all this increasingly difficult degree of difficulty is doing is it is providing a greater platform for God to display his glory, his power, and his ability to lead and guide and protect his people. We have nothing to fear. In fact, not only do we not have grounds for fear, we have every basis to come before him and say, "Lord, even as this disintegrates around us, our faith is unshaken. Our hearts are set on you. God, deliver us. Save us. Rescue us because of who you are and do it for your glory." That's what trust looks like.

And along with that, something that will happen along the way, David here in verse 6 as we move into verse 6, David emphasizes and illustrates and manifests the sincerity of his faith in a slightly unusual way. You might not suspect this if you were just talking about

it abstractly and not just following through the text. In verse 6, he makes this this very strong statement. He says,

6 I hate those who regard vain idols.

Vain idols. "I hate false gods and I separate myself from those who engage in worship of false gods, those who give themselves over to false doctrine and to false gods. I separate myself from them. They are vain. They are empty. They are figments of the imagination." And what David is saying here is this, he says, "I have nothing to do with false gods." Instead, verse 6, look at the end of verse 6,

But I trust in the LORD.

What is he saying here? He's simply illustrating the singular hope that he has in his God. He is manifesting a sanctity of heart, that his heart is wholly set apart to the Lord and his trust in Yahweh is full, complete, and he has no other alternatives. He's not hedging his bets with some other hope. He says, "I have separated myself from all of that and I trust in the Lord and I trust in him alone."

Look at verse 7. As a result of that trust, he says, "I will rejoice." In verse 7, because I trust in the Lord,

7 I will rejoice and be glad in Your lovingkindness, [in your loyal love]
Because You have seen my affliction; You have known the troubles of my
soul, 8 And You have not given me over into the hand of the enemy; You
have set my feet in a large place.

David says, "Lord, I trust you and therefore I will rejoice. I will be glad and that's sufficient for me to have grounds for joy because it's enough for me that you see and that I know you know." And that's one of the things that we should be drawing upon; what you should be drawing upon in your personal distresses right now in the chronic frustrations and discouragements and irritations that you're facing in life as we look at the world around us and see what's going on and see that the things that we hold dear, hold no influence in the world in which we live.

Where do we draw strength in a time like this? I read a column today by Dennis Prager talking about the political circumstances of America and he ended on a very despairing note. I can only give you the gist of it but he said, "I'm not going to end on an end of hope because there is none but we fight on because that's the right thing to do." Well, that's not a very triumphant position, is it? That's certainly not a Christian position; he's not a man who claims to be a Christian in any sense as far as I know. But beloved, here's the thing for us: when we see that kind of despair being lived out in front of us by unbelieving people and then we pivot back to our own lives, what you need to realize is that your position never leads you to despair. You should never, ever say, "I've given up. I've lost hope in this situation." Rather, you come back to the fact that says, "I can rejoice and be glad," look at verse 7 with me, "Because You have seen my affliction; You have known

the troubles of my soul." God sees. God knows. God sees your difficulty. God sees your disappointment. God sees the condition of the world and do you know what? He's sovereign over it all and he loves us and there is no way that he's going to let us go. He's not going to hand us over and let us just be utterly destroyed and spiritually ruined by the events that are happening to us.

That's the truth of Scripture. That's the true character of God and those of us who have been ransomed by him, those of us that belong to our Lord Jesus Christ, have to come back to that and rest in it, especially when there is nothing external to stimulate that kind of faith in our hearts. To say, "Oh, I see how this works out for good." Well, do you know what? A lot of times you don't see how it's going to work out at all, do you? You've been in the middle of the same problem, these same bad relationships for years and there is just no seeming way that it's ever going to get better. Well, what do you do then? You step back and say, "Ah, but my God, my gracious God of mercy, God of grace, God of power, my God sees and he knows and I belong to him and that's enough and my soul can rest right there." That's what trust does. So that's what David illustrates for us.

Now, David, of course, was writing a thousand years before the time of Christ. Let's think for just a moment about how we can extend this even further as New Testament believers, as Christians in light of the cross. Look over at Romans 5 with me. Romans 5, a passage which has nothing directly to do with Psalm 31 but that's okay. Romans 5. I just want to give you something to think on, something to rest your hope on. You know, and sometimes the withered roots of your hope simply need the fresh water of grace to be sprinkled on them in order for them to spring to life. I have confidence in you that if you're discouraged here tonight, I have confidence that your heart will respond to the truth of Scripture and you'll walk out of here far more encouraged than perhaps you walked in because that's what God does. He waters your thirsty soul with his word and you respond to it accordingly and you bring forth a fresh hope that wasn't there before.

Romans 5:8, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Do you want to think spiritually? Do you want to know how to take Scripture truth and apply it to your soul in a way that leads you to a better place than where you perhaps came in tonight? You go back and you remember the character of God, you go back and you remember the cross of Christ and what he did in the past and then you reason forward and say, "That tells me what the future is going to be like." We know the character of God, we've talked about it earlier in this message.

Well, think about it from the perspective of Christ your Savior, Christ your Lord, Christ your Redeemer, Christ your King, and refresh your heart and remember what he did before you were even born. What did he do? He went to Calvary and he laid down his life as a ransom payment for your sin to deliver you from the bondage of sin and Satan. In love, in a selfless act of sacrifice of himself, he gave himself over in order to redeem and secure your eternal soul. Well, beloved, if he did that, if he did that greater thing when

you were an enemy of God, what do you think he's going to do now that you are a child of God through faith in Christ? Now that you are reconciled? Is he going to do less for you now as a blood bought believer than he did before when you were an enemy of God? When he didn't abandon you in your sin, would he possibly abandon you now that you belong to him and he has set his eternal love upon you? Is that even possible? That's irrational to think that way.

Well, when you can't see the outcome, when you can't calculate how you get to point B from point A where you're at, you go back to these transcendent principles and you say, "Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. I don't need to worry about this election. I don't need to worry about these relationships. I don't need to be cast down by what's going on around me because I know what Christ has done for me in the past and that gives me every indication I need about how he will deal with me in the future and how the details of that work out are secondary to the fact that I rest and I am secure in his hand." That's all your soul needs. You need nothing else in order to be confident about the future. The proven character of God in the past, the revealed character of God in Scripture, the shed blood of Christ on the cross, is an absolute guarantee. It gives you assurance that he will respond to your need in the future and, beloved, no matter what happens, no matter what happens in the future with the laws of the country going against us, no matter how much they try to redefine God's created order and seek to silence those who would seek to stand firm and be faithful to declare what Scripture teaches on all these issues, no matter what, nothing is going to happen which will change the faithful loving disposition of God toward us and his intention to protect and provide for us. Nothing is going to change that. There is no reason for us to be afraid. There is no reason for us to be unsettled. But having said all of that, mark it well, that the love of God does not mean that we'll avoid the trials. James says, doesn't he, James 1, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter manifold trials knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance." So it's not that we're going to avoid trials. It may be quite difficult in the days to come. We're not denying that but we are recognizing the difference between the circumstances and the certainty that holds our fate.

But as you go on in Psalm 31, go back there with me now, one of the interesting aspects of Psalm 31 is that there is a little bit of our roller coaster effect as you go through it. David goes from distress to the heights of trust and then he seems to fall back into despair again. Psalm 31:9, and as you read this, as you read David's statements about his distress, let me encourage you to think one way as we approach it here. Just think about it from this perspective: isn't your own spiritual life a little bit of an up and down? You're not always on the high mountain top, are you? Sometimes you get discouraged. Well, David was a man of like flesh with ours. David was a man of like nature with ours. He was up and down and we see an encouragement in Psalm 31 in terms of how to ride that roller coaster and come out in the right place at the end.

In Psalm 31:9, David is now entering back into the intensity of the trial and it gets even more intense than it was at the start. Look at verse 9 with me, he says,

9 Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; My eye is wasted away from grief, my soul and my body also. 10 For my life is spent with sorrow And my years with sighing; My strength has failed because of my iniquity, And my body has wasted away.

David in these verses feels demoralized. It's a chronic issue. His eye is wasted away. His soul, it's just like his whole being is shriveling up under the nature of the distress. And notice how he says in verse 10, "my life is spent with sorrow, my years with sighing." He feels the weight of his sin. "My strength has failed because of my iniquity." Do these words of Scripture of God's holy word come to a soul tonight feeling just like that? Just under the weight of it and you're just about to give up under the difficulty? You feel the weight of it? Well, take comfort that Scripture recognizes your condition. Scripture sees and understands that condition of the soul and it gently takes you by the hand and says, "Come here. Come forth with me," as it were, as Scripture speaks to you and says, "let me lead you gently away from that place of demoralization." And notice the simplicity of David's request there in verse 9, he says, "Be gracious to me, O LORD." It's just a simple appeal for favor. "God, show me favor because that's all I know how to ask for in the midst of this. I feel the weight of my sin. And not only that, O God, there is human opposition and abandonment all around me."

Look at verses 11 through 13. He says,

11 Because of all my adversaries, I have become a reproach, Especially to my neighbors, And an object of dread to my acquaintances; Those who see me in the street flee from me. 12 I am forgotten as a dead man, out of mind; I am like a broken vessel.

Broken piece of pottery. Useless. You just toss it aside because it can't hold anything. Verse 13, he says,

13 For I have heard the slander of many, Terror is on every side; While they took counsel together against me, They schemed to take away my life.

David is in the throes of conspiracies against his life. He has no immediate friends that will come to his aid, even his acquaintances view him as an object of dread. He is a reproach. Everybody is against him so he's buffeted by trials external to himself and he's feeling the weight of it inside. And in the midst of that, they mock him in the midst of his troubles. Have you ever been in that situation? Have you ever been in a situation where at once you maybe you had some authority or you were popular and then things changed and all of a sudden people scatter like rats when the light goes on because you're no longer in the position that you once were? I've been there. That's a pretty interesting place to be, actually. You think people that you thought were your friends suddenly don't want anything to do with you. That was a long, long time ago. It's okay now. It's nothing current or present in my life but I remember what it's like. The people that once were your friends, you thought, now they don't have the time of day for you. Wow. You know,

what do you do then? Those of you that are in that position now, what do you do? Well, we come back to where we started. God brings this into your life in order for you to exercise your trust in order to purify your devotion to him and for him to display, God is giving you a situation where he is going to providentially and powerfully display his faithfulness to you and show that your trust in him was not in vain.

For your part, beloved, don't wish away the trial. Don't say, "Oh, I'll be glad when this is over." Don't wish it away and say, "I wish this had never happened. I wish I had never been born. Why does this have to happen to me?" Don't go into that mental realm. Understand that you are in that sphere of circumstances in order to learn what it is like and how you go about depending on God in the midst of that isolation and abandonment. It is as though God has given you a spiritual exam that you are to take and respond to and pass and come out on the other side stronger and better than you were on the front end of it and part of the way that you manifest that is by a stubborn refusal to move away from what you have come to believe. Or in the language of Ephesians 6, and stating it positively, you say, "This is where I stand firm. When the light was shining on me, I affirmed the goodness and the holiness and the majesty of God and my trust in him. Now that the darkness has come, now that the clouds have hidden the sun from my view, now that the light has gone off in the room and it's dark and I can't quite see where I'm going, I'll tell you one thing that I'm not going to do," you say to yourself, "I am not going to deny in the darkness what I knew to be true in the light. My providential change in circumstances will not cause me to deny what I know to be true from Scripture and what God showed to be true in my experience in life up until this point." Men are hostile, political systems against us, do you know what? I don't care. I mean, I really don't care. It doesn't change anything for the Christian. It doesn't redefine our existence, our life or anything of the sort.

David, having declared honestly the opposition that he was facing in those three verses, 11 through 13, look at what he says in verse 14 as he rises up and manifests the kind of trust that you and I can live out also. He says in verse 14, "But as for me." Notice the contrast. He says, "They are like this, they are set against me, I'm all by myself, but do you know what?"

14 But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD, I say, "You are my God."

"What the providential burning of these circumstances has done is it has burned away every distraction and I'm left with the one thing in life that I know to be true and that I bank my entire existence upon. God, I trust in you and I don't need any external circumstances to prop that up. What you have said about yourself in your word is enough for me to rest my trust in you. You're my God. I trust you even in the midst of these circumstances that would seem to destroy me."

In verse 15, he goes further. He says,

15 My times are in Your hand; Deliver me from the hand of my enemies and from those who persecute me.

You see, beloved, faith doesn't mean that you don't have any obstacles and certainly more, faith doesn't mean that you deny or diminish them. True biblical faith can look at the obstacles and say, "I acknowledge everything that is about me. I acknowledge the opposition and the difficulties that I face but nevertheless with a full acknowledgment of that, I trust in the Lord. My times are in his hand. There is a deep abiding current of confidence that carries me forward even in the midst of these external difficulties."

I want to pause just a moment there on verse 15, David says, "My times are in Your hand." Beloved, David is saying more here than simply saying God has determined how many days I will live; God has appointed how long I will live. That's true but that's not really what David is saying here, he's saying far more than that. He's saying that, "The course of my life is under the providential direction of God in an unfailing way." That means that God, mark it well, beloved, God directs your steps in those decisive moments of life that determine the course of how your life goes. Whether a relationship works out or whether it fails, whether you get the job or whether you don't, whether the school works out or it doesn't, through all of that and those seeming human decisions that are being made, as you come to the forks in the road and God closes one door and opens another, you rest in an ultimate confidence that, "My times are in the hand of God; that as these things unfold in my life, God is directing me in the way that he would have me to go. And that's good," you say to yourself, "that's good because this is the God who ransomed to me. This is the God who loves me. This is the God of perfect wisdom who sees the end from the beginning."

Beloved, this God is with you in your success and in your failures, in your strength and in your weakness, when family loves you and when family despises you. God has those times in his hand and he is directing all of it for his purpose and for your good. Faith, biblical trust says, "I believe that and I bank my hope and my confidence in that even when I don't understand. And when men and when loved ones inflict pain on my heart, when their antagonism and their unkindness breaks my heart and causes me to weep, I look through the tears up to my sovereign God and say, 'My times are in your hands. I trust you even in this.'" You see, beloved, we belong as Christians to a sovereign God. He has undertaken for us. He leads us. Beloved, he cares for you and even through the hurricanes of life, he is watching, directing, holding, bringing you through in order to accomplish his good purpose in your life in the end. So what do you do? What does faith, what does Christian faith, Christian trust in God look like in times of uncertainty, adversity or isolation? You call those things to mind and you put the trust of your heart in him.

So knowing that to be true, David has grounds to ask for help even though the circumstances say there is no help to be had. Look at verse 16, quoting from that passage that we often use as a benediction from Numbers 6. David says,

16 Make Your face to shine upon Your servant; Save me in Your lovingkindness.

Then in verse 17 he asks God to vindicate his trust in him to silence the wicked. "God, manifest that my trust in you has not been in vain." Verse 17, he says,

17 Let me not be put to shame, O LORD, for I call upon You; Let the wicked be put to shame, let them be silent in Sheol. 18 Let the lying lips be mute, Which speak arrogantly against the righteous With pride and contempt.

Oh, if there is ever a passage that identifies what we're going through in our society here today, this is a pretty good one. "Lord, they speak arrogantly. They speak with contempt against you and against your word and against all the principles of truth. Father, here I am without much external support, without people in positions of influence standing to strengthen and support and protect me here on earth, O God, I'm not deterred. I still trust in you and, God, I appeal to you and I ask you that even in this you would manifest, you would vindicate, you would show forth, you would approve publicly the fact that our trust in you was not in vain. God, I expect you to do that." Why? Because Psalm 1:6, "the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish." "God, I just trust you to vindicate the principle that you say ultimately governs the moral universe. I'm trusting in you. Lord, you know that. That's enough for me. I just ask you to vindicate, make it known, show it forth to be true."

Well, that's what a trusting appeal in distress looks like. David, kind of having come full circle, kind of up, kind of down, trusting God, feeling the weight of circumstances in opposition, he leads us to a second aspect of true faith. What else can we say about faith? About trust? When the appeal is done, you look to the future and you come up with this second point: you have a thankful anticipation of the future. A thankful anticipation of the future and verse 19 is a verse of great expectation. David speaking this a thousand years before the time of Christ under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David in his human capacity couldn't have known the fullness of everything that he was saying here but in verse 19, he looks to the future with a sense of praise and gratitude toward God. He says in verse 19,

19 How great is Your goodness, Which You have stored up for those who fear You, Which You have wrought for those who take refuge in You, Before the sons of men! 20 You hide them in the secret place of Your presence from the conspiracies of man; You keep them secretly in a shelter from the strife of tongues.

What is David saying here? How can we appropriate this 3,000 years after it was written as New Testament believers? Oh beloved, God's faithful, loyal love means that we can look to the future with an expectation and a certain confidence that the future holds a greater display and manifestation of the goodness of God to us than anything that we've known heretofore.

It can only be that way. It could be no other way. Think about what you know to be true about God. Is it possible, we need to ask ourselves this, you need to ask yourself this: is it

possible that a God of infinite love for his people, a God of infinite power, of unfathomable depths of wisdom who holds eternity in his hands, is it at all remotely possible that here in this life in the year 2016, that we have experienced the pinnacle of his goodness to us and it just goes downhill from there? Is that even possible? That's irrational. Why would we think that way? Why would we be so overwhelmed and so consumed with our circumstances that we would think that we would never see the goodness of God displayed to us again? Oh, does the church of Jesus Christ need rebuke. It drives me crazy. No. No, we should honor God, you should honor God with thinking like this that says, "God, the depths of your goodness cannot be plumbed, they cannot be measured. They are deeper than the ocean and they are higher than the sky. That's how good you are. I know that because I can look back at Calvary and see Christ on the cross shedding that precious blood for the redemption of my soul. I rest in that and I know that there is an infinite fountain of love and goodness that you have bubbling over for your elect." You say, "Father, I've just been here on this earthly life 10, 20, 30, 50, 70 years, this can't be the end of it. God, there must be that you have much more stored up in your goodness that you have yet to unfold in our experience."

So there is this expectation, this anticipation that God has more goodness to show to us. Do you believe that? Is that your confidence about who God is and what his intentions are for you? If it's not, you say, "I don't know if I believe that or not." Well, you know, you need to repent of your unbelief. You know, let's just be candid with each other here. We need to repent of our unbelief if that's the meagerly, miserly thoughts that we have about God. He is worthy of greater thoughts than that from you, isn't he? Well, if that's true, then we should just say, "Do you know what? God has been good to me in the past and he's going to be good to me again in the future. Do you know what? Right now he's being pretty good to me too." Just this confident assurance in the goodness of God.

David says, look at verse 21 and 22, David expresses his personal experience of God's faithfulness even though he had sometimes staggered under the load. Maybe you have staggered under the load here this evening, well, let this be that which lightens the load, the declaration that David gives in verse 21, "Blessed be the LORD. Praise be to his name. I ascribe glory and majesty and honor to the name of Yahweh, the King of kings and the Lord of lords."

21 Blessed be the LORD, For He has made marvelous His lovingkindness
to me in a besieged city.

"In the midst of my sorrows and my discouragements and my trials, he manifests loyal love to me even then and particularly and especially then."

Verse 22,

22 As for me, I said in my alarm, [I said in times of weakness] "I am cut
off from before Your eyes" [I didn't honor God with the fullness of faith
that I wish I had shown in times gone by, but do you know what?];

Nevertheless God heard the voice of my supplications When I cried to Him.

"Even when I staggered under the load and my faith wasn't worthy of him, God still had this superintending faithfulness and loyal love upon me and rescued me and delivered me and restored me even when I was completely unworthy of it." If you're here tonight feeling the unworthiness of your faith, take heart right here. Even in your unworthy faith, God is still hearing your cry and responding in faithful love to you. That's worthy of your trust, worthy of your thanks.

And David having come full circle now turns to exhortation, preaches, as it were, it even to you and me 3,000 years later. He says,

23 O love the LORD, all you His godly ones!

"In light of everything that I've said in these prior 22 verses," as it were David says, "in light of all of this, in light that God is the rock and the refuge who saves and delivers his people even from the conspiracies of men, in light of this God of loyal love who holds our times in his hands," Christian,

23 O love the LORD, all you His godly ones! The LORD preserves the faithful.

David is now speaking outside of his experience and speaking to his audience, speaking to those who read the words. He's applying it to our hearts. He says, "Love the LORD." How should you respond to Psalm 31? Love the Lord. Faithfully anticipate his goodness still to be made known to you because,

The LORD preserves the faithful And fully recompenses the proud doer.
24 Be strong and let your heart take courage, All you who hope in the LORD.

Let's come right back to where we began. Is it you in the midst of personal trials and discouragement? Is it you as a godly man loving the church of Christ and yet seeing how unreliable and unfaithful the most prominent names are? Do you look at the world and say, "What is going to happen?" You come back right here and be strong and you take courage because the God of the Bible reigns and the God of the Bible has set his affection on you. That's enough for faith. Martyn Lloyd Jones said this and I close with this quotation. He said, "There must be no querying, no questioning, no uncertainty about the goodness and the holiness and the power of God. Do not complainingly ask, 'Why does God allow this or why does God do that?' Look up to God. Look at the ultimate and the absolute, then let us put our hands on our mouths which are so ready to speak foolishly. Let us realize that he is there in the temple of the universe, God over all. Let us silently humble ourselves and bow down before him and worship him. Let us magnify his grace, his power, his might, his goodness, and in quiet peace of heart and mind and soul, wait for him."

Let's bow together in prayer.

O God, we bring all of the collective distresses in this room and on the hearts of those watching over the live stream, we bring all of them together as a collective unit and trustingly appeal to you to hear and to help. Deliver us, rescue us, save us because you are our God and we trust in you. You're a God of deliverances. You're the God of angel armies, Father, and you are by our side. So we look to you with no strength of our own, with no earthly influence to name as that which would direct circumstances to our liking. No, we appeal to our God alone and that's enough for us, Father. It's enough for us to know that our times are in your hand; that you sovereignly hold and direct our lives in a way that is guaranteed to manifest your goodness to us in the end because you have stored up so much goodness for us, we haven't even begun to see the beginning of it yet. And, Father, we look forward to that eternal manifestation of your goodness when we are with you in heaven where sin is banished, where demons are cast into hell, where all those who hate you and oppose you and would never ever repent are banished away and it's just your people purified, glorified around the throne of our great Christ forever. Father, then and there we will see the fulfillment of Psalm 31 and with thankful anticipation, we look forward to that day. O God, particularly in these coming months in our country, let the people of this church be marked by a confident faith even when others stagger and fall. Even when the news cycle brings that which would prompt us to despair on a human level, Father, bear us on eagles' wings to rise above it, to be confident in faith, and to let our light shine before a dark and dying world. Strengthen us, Father, in our inner man. Renew us day by day that we might be the people that you have called us to be. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

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