

August 6, 20 , 16 When It's 9-6 In The Top Of The 9th
Psalm 5 vs. 11-12

I was not trying to be clever when I named this series. The name, "When It's 9-6 In The Top Of The 9th", refers to baseball. To me, the summer and baseball have always been connected. On my street in Port Arthur we played baseball on the street. I can't remember us (the gang of kids that played) ever breaking a window or doing damage. There were no sidewalks on our street. There were wide boulevards on both sides. Properties were fenced. We did occasionally hit one over a fence, and sometimes that suspended play for as much as three days. Baseball was our summer game. We played 3 men up. Sometimes it was two. We were flexible.

When this series began it was the "all star break" in professional baseball. Hope was alive that the Blue Jays could have a great second half of the season and make the playoffs. What a difference a couple of weeks makes. So far the second half of the season has been a disaster. Games that should have been won have been lost. The Blue Jays have been on the wrong side of lopsided scores. It is starting to look like "well, there's always next year!" again. That's what the title is about...disappointment with a touch of panic thrown in.

In Baseball 9-6 is a score that is just close enough, that if your team has 6 there is still hope of pulling it out. The top of the 9th is a reference to being away from home, on the road, one last chance to send 3 players to the batter's box. It

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also means (as the score indicates we are losing) time is running out. It's now or never....the ultimate crisis in sport.

Psalm 5 is a prayer, a morning prayer. Clearly David's kingdom is in crisis. Things cannot continue as they are. He needs to turn things around or he and his government are going to be consumed by those who have deceived him. And that is the other ingredient, the sound of the other shoe falling. The crisis is beyond David's control. He is talking to God about the crisis and his emotional state because he needs a miracle. Frankly, we have all been there, or we will be all too soon.

Michael Shaara's leading character in the novella, *For Love Of The Game*, which Kevin Costner adapted into a movie script, is named Billy Chapel. He pitches for the Detroit Tigers. He is old for professional sport. And he is a wounded warrior. The years have taken their toll. But the crisis comes in three forms. The Tigers have been sold to a consortium. The former owner treated Billy Chapel like a son. The consortium sees Billy Chapel as trade bait. They are in talks with the Giants. The woman in Billy's life has had it, playing second fiddle to a game. She has accepted a new job in London England. It's the last game of a losing season. Billy is pitching against the Yankees in Yankee Stadium. His life feels like it's in tatters. He needs a miracle. In the real world miracles are in short supply.

In verse 11 of Psalm 5 David does something Billy Chapel does when he takes to the mound in Baseball game.

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Billy says to himself... “clear the mechanism.” It is a mental discipline. He sees the batter at home plate, and Gus the catcher crouched behind. The roar of the crowd in the stadium disappears. He winds and delivers. He throws bullets. He throws strikes. He is almost 22 all over again. In verse 11, for at least a few innings of life, David gets control of the only thing he can. He puts his troubles out of mind. He prays. David concentrates not on what he can do (because he can do little to turn this crisis around...it is beyond his ability), so he concentrates on what he knows God can do.

“Let all who take refuge in you (God) be glad”. That is exactly what David wants. To be able to trade his sadness, his tired soul for one that is joyous in the reality of what God can do. David knows what God can do. He never doubted it was the strength of God’s Spirit that made it possible for him to make the kill shot that brought down Goliath. He never doubted that God who is Lord made Him King of Israel. He has never doubted that God had a reason, a purpose in mind for bringing David to prominence and power. But as the hymn says, David feels, weary and worn. He wants to be delivered out of this tiredness, this burned out feeling. He wants to sing aloud for joy, joy in God’s presence, the way he felt in the days of “the Lord is my shepherd.” David is clearing the mechanism. He is focusing his attention not on the problems of state, but on the sovereignty of the Lord his God.

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“Spread your protection over those who take refuge in YOU!” That’s what David is hungry for...living under the protection of the God Almighty. He thirsts for it. The sense of being under an umbrella of grace. The sense of being a servant of God. The sense of God is in control and all the problems are God’s problems to solve. Where all David has to do is pray and work, worship and serve God and leave the rest to heaven’s power. He is clearing the mechanism of focus on all worldly things. He is engaging the reset button on his kingship. He is turning it all over to God because it’s 9-6 for the other guys and two out in the top of the 9th. It’s almost over. It’s almost lost.

“Spread your protection over those who seek your protection, Lord, that those who love your name may rejoice in you.” He wants his soul to hum with the presence of God’s Spirit. He wants to be free of all the insoluble problems of state and international affairs, because those are linked. He wants to let go, the pressure of office and let God unfold His gracious will...whatever that may be. If he can be confident that what is happening is God’s will...the burdens will dissipate. He will be...free. Forgiven. Alive...no matter what.

“For surely O Lord you bless the righteous.” David knows a few things about God’s blessing him when he did what was right. There was that moment when Saul the King of Israel was trying to capture and kill David. As Saul slept David crept to the King’s side and planted a spear in the earth right beside the

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King...to let Saul know...David was there...he could have killed the king...he didn't...he left as quietly as he had come...did the right thing. Left Saul to God.

On the other side of the coin there was the lostness when he took Batsheba, and arranged the death of her husband so he could make it look like love and marriage when it was lust and greed. And there was that moment when David was confronted with his sin, and sought forgiveness, and found...forgiveness at the hand of the Lord. Yes God blesses those who do the right thing. God always has, Jesus always does, the Holy Spirit refreshes. Clear the mechanism. Cleanse me. Mold me. Melt me. Spirit of the living God.

“You surround the faithful (there is no other way to be righteous, it involves an act of faith that seeks, searches out, digs for, mines for the merciful pleasure of God)...you surround the faithful...as with a shield.” Protection from all the bruising harm of the world.

You need to know that Billy Chapel pitched a perfect game in Yankee Stadium that day. And he wept because what should have been the greatest moment of his career tasted like ashes in his mouth. Alone in his hotel room, he cried like a baby. Because after all these years, a world series ring, baseball,... is only a game. He didn't become a Giant. He retired. He gave his life to the woman who was going to England to a new job. Here is the secret of Psalm 5... Living

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under the shield of God's grace when surrounded by troubles....means life becomes a brand new game. Losing the old one, in God's grace can mean only one thing...you catch a glimpse of eternity. Under the shield of God you win...life. Especially when it's 9-6 in the top of the 9th!

Let us pray;

Lord sometimes we just can't see the forest for the trees. All too often our pain is but a symptom of our need to let go of what we treasure in this world, and cling to the hem of the robes of Jesus in search of cleansing, refashioning, renewing. It is hard for us to recognize we cannot what we need on our own. We have not the power. We need you to work a miracle in us and around us and for us. Remind us of our eternal purpose. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.