

July 3, 2016 “Looking Down” Psalm 46

As I emerge from the challenges created by treatment for health problems, (and I am still emerging), I am so aware that I have been blessed by the thoughtfulness, and the prayers of so many. Last Sunday we worshipped with the congregation of St. Andrew's in Brampton. We also shared as we have done for the past 5 years in their Strawberry Social and I took the opportunity as part of the entertainment of that event to thank the folks who had been remembering me in prayer, and my family during the last 13 months. I have also tried to express my gratitude to you. And most importantly, my thankfulness to the Lord who has seen us all through a challenging time.

My point is, I am not surprised that as a result of all that has happened, and the degree of recovery I have experienced, that my own consciousness of the importance of prayer has been elevated in my thinking. Over the next six weeks, I am going to share with you some teaching about prayer from the Psalms. This morning we begin with Psalm 46... “Looking Down” because if there is one thing that Psalm 46 emphasizes it is that it is important to see things not through our eyes, but from God's viewpoint.

The 46th Psalm begins with this statement. “God is our refuge and strength...an ever present help in trouble.” One of the ways that God helps us, and gives us refuge in the midst of stormy times is in the relationship which we call prayer. I would remind us that prayer is not a duty. You do not lose marks with God if you fail to pray enough. This prayer relationship is not about earning points or being religious. Prayer is not a duty, it is a privilege. One of the hard realities of life and our times is that most people...certainly the majority do not pray. And yet having said that, I recall my late father

in law's sharing this insight. He would not have called himself a religious man. But he told his grand children one day, that everyone is afraid on a battlefield. And everyone he knew prayed that they might survive the experience of war in the midst of battle.

The poignant fact of experience is only those who are aware that they have this privilege indulge in it with frequency. God wants us to share in prayer with Him. That's part of God's point of view and quite often we overlook that. We worry about our inability. Our lack of Biblical knowledge. A list of things that we regard as our shortcomings. If God is our refuge, it stands to reason HE wants us to seek refuge in Him, constantly. In the 10th verse, the Lord says to all who will hear, "Be still and know that I am God." More often than not that is our experience in a moment of prayer.

So it is that in a moment of prayerfulness, conversing with God we recognize HIS majesty. "Though the earth give way;...though the mountains fall into the sea;...though the waters foam and roar" ...shattering experiences, that bring us to our knees recognizing the simplest and most basic things of faith as disciples of Jesus, as Christians...that God is God and only HE is God. It is in this light as we look at things as God does we might recognize the first fundamental of faith is something that happens in moments when we are praying. Recognizing that God is as the Psalmist says,,the Lord Almighty, Jesus strong to save, HIS Holy Spirit present with us, touching us, keeping us safe no matter what it is that occurs.

In the Old Testament book of Job, we meet a man who suffers. The loss of his children. The loss of his fortune. And finally the loss of his health. Any one of those is recognizable as a

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catastrophe. The loss of his health causes Job to fear he is going to die, that moment comes to all of us. But Job prays in the midst of those experiences. And in chapter 38 God replies. And God does not say, “this is why I permitted all these bad things to happen to you.” What God says is, “Job, where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?...Who stretched a measuring line across it? ...On what were its footings set?...or who laid its cornerstone? And Job replies, in chapter 42:5, “My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” The reason that pair of verses is so important is the revelation that Job has recognized as he had never done before, God is the Holy Lord. Our Redeemer. Our continual companion whether we recognize Him or not. And it occurs as a result of a conversation with God...prayer.

I'm going to say something so obvious we tend to overlook it, set aside, even deny that it is relevant. We are human. So what? What does that have to do with anything. It means what Job came to see as God replied to all of his questions out of the power of the whirlwind. We are the creation of God. He alone is the Holy One. Only Jesus saves us from our sins. Only the Spirit of God provides that company in the deepest moments of trial that bare us up on eagles wings. Taking us in the midst of our suffering to a point above our suffering. Permitting us to see things from Lord's perspective.

We are human. We are not God. And what a difference it makes when we are prepared to recognize that reality and live within it. Clint Eastwood said it well in one of the Dirty Harry movies, “A man's got to know his limitations.” The truth is when we forget to do that, recognize our limitations, we forget we are human, made from

the dust of the earth, and that the Lord is God and not we ourselves.

And here is the really big thing about this relationship of prayer. If we are only human. And if God as He is described in the Bible, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, alone is God, the Creator, Jesus, the Helper, then this has to be recognized. We are not in control. I have said it many times and I am repeating myself. Control is an illusion. We have a tendency to believe that illusion as we look up and try to see God as we want Him to be and where we want Him to be. This morning we are privileged to share in the view from above, looking down, sharing the Lord's perspective. We are not in control. We are not pawns either. The point is that God is in control...even when we are in pain. As Psalm 46 says, "Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way....the Lord Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge."

Many of you will remember the Christian poem or meditation published under the title "Footsteps". The image is that of footprints in the soft sand of a beach. And the meditation, that's what I call it, ponders the question, if there are two sets of footprints in the sand, obviously those are moments when God walks with us, but what about the fact that there are moments where there is only one set of footprints? Where was God then? Were we, are we at times alone? And the response from above is "Never!" There is one set of footprints in the sand when God bore us in his arms and carried us through those very things we could not bare. We have the assurance that God is always in control. And that is why we can be saved in every hard and difficult experience. That is why even though we die in faith, believing, we shall live. We win because God is in control. Jesus saves. The Spirit of the Lord is our companion. In prayer we catch a glimpse of that truth. God cares.

Indeed, God cares. “Come and see the works of the Lord ,“says Psalm 46. Come and see the desolations HE has brought on the earth.” This is the heart of what we see as we look down, privileged for a moment to see things as God sees them. Every time we are saved in a real life circumstance from something that could harm us, God has destroyed something that Satan would have had consume us. We were driving on the 401 from Brampton to Stratford last week and this car, going faster than we were came out of nowhere and seemed to miss us by inches as it cut in front of us and continued on into another lane. I remember thinking.... “God it is dangerous down here.” And while I will praise my daughters skill as a driver, I do that looking up, the human point of view. In a moment of prayer and praise, looking down, I see that the Lord's hand undid an attempt to destroy...and as a result we were saved to continue on as if...nothing had happened. God cares. There is no such thing as a near miss. There is the grace of God. He loves us and He cares what happens to us, even when we are tempted to say, “what was that?”

And one final insight. Did you notice in Psalm 46? Did you notice? God does not just care about us. It is not that simple friends. HE cares about us. HE does. But HE also cares about our neighbours. People whose names we do not even know. And our enemies. The view looking down, includes this insight, HE is the ONE who stops wars, breaks the bows, shatters the spears, burns the shields. And the peace that results from the cessation of hostilities is not just enjoyed by us, it is also enjoyed and a blessing upon those we have called our enemies.

God says, “Be still! And know that I am God.” So often that only happens in moments of prayer and praise. But it is not just

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so that the Lord will be exalted in our eyes, and ears and minds. He says it twice in verse 17. "I will be exalted among the nations...all the others. I will be exalted in the earth." All of it and everywhere. Exercise your privilege. Pray. Taste and see...the Lord is good.

Let us pray;

Heavenly Father, it is so easy to become preoccupied with the view from down here. Trying to mold you into the shape of our very human desires. We thank YOU for the opportunity to share in your viewpoint, as we look down, as it were through your eyes in the reading and remembering of Psalm 46. We praise your name even as we exercise the privilege of talking to YOU. Amen