

It Was Before The LORD!

Psalm 30; 2 Samuel 6:16-23

I've chosen this Fall to weave some of the psalms of David into some of the incidents and general themes I've seen in David's life, because I think that David's worship and singing makes more sense if we remember the twists and turns that David lived through as he made his walk with God a thousand years before Christ. And what I'm attempting to do can be sketchy for two reasons.

First, many of David's psalms come to us without any information about when or why he wrote them. And second, while Christians have held that the words David sang are inspired and true, the Church has not held that the historical superscriptions from the Hebrew hymnal are necessarily inspired or true. What the scribes wrote in the margins above each psalm is either third hand information, or perhaps just the scribe's best guess as to when or why David wrote a psalm.

For instance, last week in Psalm 37, David sang about God's justice and about the injustices that I think David had suffered on his long, difficult path to Israel's throne. *"Don't fret yourself because of evildoers;" David sang, "don't envy those who are lawless! Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart."*

And I thought last week that these were words that David had sung to himself after he was betrayed by old King Saul, after his first marriage to his first love, Michal, had been shattered by the wickedness of the old, mad king. But in fact, Psalm 37 comes to us in the old Hebrew hymnal with no notes at all in the margin other than the fact that the psalm was written and sung by David. I applied some circumstances from David's life to David's words in Psalm 37 because I wanted you to see that what David sang about in worship was no academic exercise to him.

He went through the same sort of twists and turns and heartbreaks in life that you and I go through, even though David was a man after God's own heart. And this morning's psalm, Psalm 30, does come to us with a note in the Hebrew margin saying that this was the psalm David sang on the day the ark of the LORD first arrived in the tent sanctuary David had set up in the brand new holy city David was building. And like Psalm 37, I believe that David sang this psalm on that day to worship God for bringing him through all the heartbreak and trouble David had suffered to finally provide God's people with a permanent place to worship him. David begins singing about heartbreak.

“O LORD, you have brought up my soul from the grave, you have restored my life from among those who go down to the pit...you...have not let my foes rejoice over me.” It is noteworthy that for all the harm Saul caused David, the mad, old king does not get mentioned as David sings about heartbreak, nor as you read in 1st and 2nd Samuel is David particularly bitter against Saul himself. Rather, David sings about trouble and heartache as if all of it was part of God’s sovereign plan for his life.

He sings: *“O LORD my God, I cried to you for help and you healed me...Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment, his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may last for the night, but joy comes with the morning!”* As we saw last week in Psalm 37, David pictures our walk with God as a journey that starts in shadows with grief, but as we learn to worship God through adversity, light dawns in our hearts and we experience a sort of daybreak that will grow into full blown joy and laughter as God teaches us how real and good is heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn,” Jesus taught, *“for they shall be comforted.”* Here in Psalm 30, David sings of the roller coaster effect such lessons can cause in our hearts as we learn them: *“As for me, I said in my prosperity, ‘I shall never be moved!’”* It must have seemed that way in the years that David rose from a mere sheep hand, to a palace minstrel who first lays his eyes on Saul’s princess, then to a national hero when he slays Goliath, then to a military commander, a noble man in Saul’s court, then finally he gets to marry the bride of his dreams in a palace wedding.

And suddenly it all vanished, David sings to God: *“...you hid your face, and I was dismayed!”* His bride was gone, captured and married to some other man by the old, mad king. For years, David had seen God bless, his own star rise just as the prophet Samuel had said it would. Then came years in the wilderness, branded as a traitor, hunted by Saul’s war parties, hiding in caves and circling mountains one step ahead of capture and execution, all with no hint from God why the wheel had turned so violently and dangerously. So David bargained bitterly with God from hilltops and caves.

“What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will [a dead man] tell of your faithfulness? Hear O LORD, and be merciful to me!” David prayed. Of course, in the Holy City on the day the Ark of the LORD finally came home to the mountain where Christ would atone for all our sins a thousand years later, on that day the desperation David sings about was a thing of the past. David himself had sung and danced all day as the Ark was paraded into the city.

All Israel had sung and danced behind their new king. His long lost first love, Michal, was finally safe and home, waiting for him in his palace. So David closed his offertory that day on a note of triumph: *“You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silenced. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever!”* It was the worship that belonged to a happy ending. It was David’s *“glory”* to play the palace minstrel again as Israel’s real king, *“the LORD of hosts”* arrived on Mt. Zion.

But poor Michal, leaning out the palace window, saw an entirely different set of facts. Her heart whipsawed through two marriages, raised by one king, a brutal warlord, married to a completely different kind of king, her thoughts and affections ignored by the both of them, Michal saw her once and future husband shed his royal robes and become once again the minstrel she had loved and never quite regained. She saw David heartlessly celebrating what her father had not lived to be able to do, to the applause of the women dancing in the parade, heedless of her loneliness and grief.

When David finally got around to her, back at the palace, she snapped and David snapped back, rubbing salt into all the losses she had suffered. The text simply tells us that Michal went to her grave without children which ancient readers would have taken as God’s judgment against her for speaking to Israel’s king in that way on that day. And she was surely wrong not to have grasped what it meant to her husband to have lived to build holy city and to bring the Ark to a sanctuary there.

But theologian Peter Leithart has pointed out that Michal’s heartbroken insight that David was caught up to a point that was both heartless and dangerous in himself and his own griefs and triumphs and the attention of the women around him, that insight would prove to be prophetic as David’s life went on. The day was a personal triumph and the psalm David sang about weeping in the dark and finding joy in the daylight was both beautiful and fitting on a day that God came home to Zion.

And in the weeks to come, we will see David seek and find God’s blessing in a way that is powerful and heart warming for him and for us. But we will also see, I think, that the loss of his first love, the train wreck with Michal, bent and hardened David’s heart in ways that would find tragic expression in his walk with God and his family life and finally in his kingdom and among God’s people.

The point being that good people, real believers continue to be subject to heartrending sin. We can experience a real, heartwarming, life changing relationship with God and still think and do and say things that cause real harm and end in real sorrow. The good news being that real

sorrow in God's economy is not the same thing as absolute despair. Because the things that go wrong in our hearts and lives are no surprise to God. God knew how deep and wrong were our sins when he sent his Son to die on a cross and his Spirit to live in our hearts. He is generous enough to forgive us and wise and powerful enough to sort us out and he's promised to do both.

The question is do we believe that to the point where we are willing to learn what is right from God and face what is wrong in us over time. Moses and David and Peter and Paul weren't so much better people than us, that's not what made them meek and small and great. They sought and found a God good enough to love them, sins and all, and great enough to teach them holiness and to bear them through the hardships that come with the learning.