

Reforming the Evangelical Soul, Part 1

Selected Scriptures

Well for this afternoon's text I want to take you to Psalm 25. And I'd like to just begin by reading that text and then we'll kind of introduce it later, as we get into it, but Psalm 25, not necessarily a particularly familiar Psalm, but certainly one that helps us address the assigned topic of reforming the evangelical soul.

And so Psalm 25, a Psalm of David, beginning in verse 1. "To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust, Do not let me be ashamed; Do not let my enemies exult over me. Indeed, none of those who wait for you will be ashamed; Those who deal treacherously without cause will be ashamed. Make me know your ways, O LORD; Teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; For you I wait all the day.

"Remember, O LORD, Your compassion and your lovingkindnesses, for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; According to Your lovingkindness remember me, for your goodness' sake, O LORD. Good and upright is the LORD; Therefore He instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in justice, and he teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the LORD are lovingkindness and truth, to those who keep His covenant and his testimonies. For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my iniquity, for it is great.

"Who is the man who fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way he should choose. His soul will abide in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land. The secret of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he will make them know his covenant. My eyes are continually toward the LORD, for he will pluck my feet out of the net. Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses. Look upon my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. Look upon my enemies, for they are many, and they hate me with violent hatred. Guard my soul and deliver me. Do not let me be ashamed, for I take refuge in

you. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you. Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.”

Even for those of us that are earnest in ministry, you're earnest in your church involvement, earnest in your pursuit of Christ. You know the, the line of sanctification is not an unbroken line upward, is it? You know it's more like a, looks more like a, ah, Dow Jones chart. That's up and down, up and down a little bit.

There's, there's a trend upward but, you know, we all know what it's like to be, to be tired, to be fatigued, to be weary. We all know what it's like to be discouraged. We all know what it's like to have, say, significant family issues that come up and we wonder how it's going to turn out. And it, it weighs on us, what's going to become of this loved one that I care about that is drifting away from Christ and you cry out to God and it seems like things go from bad to worse and, you know, you're left with that sense of discouragement.

Well, what I want to bring out for you from Psalm 25 is this, is that biblical ministry, and it is the intention of God for his people that there would be certain effects of his word and of biblical ministry on our hearts and that it would produce godliness in a practical way. And it, in a godliness in a way that affects the way that we view the world. Godliness in a way that affects our capacity for perseverance through difficult times. Godliness in an effect that allows us to, to maintain hope and that confident expectation of the ultimate blessing of God even though circumstances continually roll against us.

You know you're trying to climb up the hill and you slide back down and yet you still have a positive sense and a sense of optimism about the ultimate outcome of it, well how is that that is worked out in the soul? And that's why I wanted to come to Psalm 25. Psalm 25 is a very personal Psalm by David.

He uses the first-person singular pronoun about thirty-six times in these twenty-two verses. I, me, my, you find this first-person singular perspective throughout most of the Psalm. And so David is really pouring out his own heart here. Only to

the end that does he take a broader perspective as he applies it more to the nation. In this Psalm, in, in these twenty-two verses he calls on the name of Yahweh ten times.

Yahweh being that covenant name of God that he keeps, he's a covenant keeping God, he, he keeps his promises. He is faithful in a personal way to his people. And so David in a very personal way is pouring out his personal heart to a personal God. There is this great intimacy to it that today's current evangelical trends cannot produce because that's not what they're even trying to do.

They've substituted a false earthly model for the living reality that scriptures, especially the Psalms, would call all of us to. Call us not only to, to acknowledge, but call us in to enjoy and call us in to participate in a life like this. That this is a pattern for all of us. That this is what the Spirit of God can do in all of us. As he works in our hearts and so that's what I want to focus on and I trust that in one way or another the Lord will use it to encourage you even as he's used it to encourage me.

And so we see first of all, the first aspect that we see of this prayer, is this prayer, it, it is a prayer of protection. A prayer of protection. The first verse functions like a summary theme for the rest of the Psalm. Look at it there, briefly in verse 1. Where David says, "To you O Lord I lift up my soul."

And so David feeling somewhat downcast here, lifts his soul up to the Lord. Now what does that mean? Well, one of the primary lexical sources, in my library anyway, it says that this phrase has the sense of, of fleeing to God for protection or seeking refuge in Yahweh. There's a sense that in our trouble we go to our God and we, we ask him to protect us. And that, immediately, that immediately separates this Psalm from the prevailing pride of the current evangelical movement. And the emphasis on popular personalities and all that, and, and puffing men up for the sake of their profile.

David doesn't have a puffed-up profile here, he's coming to God humbly and saying, God, I need your help. I need you, my God, I need you to assist me in this time in which I find

myself. The Christian soul, the biblical soul, is one that, that knows to go to God and to trust him in the midst of hostile people and hostile circumstances.

The Christian soul recognizes and has enough discernment about his life to say, I'm on, I'm on slippery ground here. This is difficult. The circumstances are difficult. The people are difficult. The future is unknown and uncertain and, and intimidating to me. And I feel vulnerable in the midst of that. I don't know what's going to happen. And the things that I hold dear are at stake.

Well, the idea that the Psalms repeatedly teach us is that when we find ourselves in that position, whether from medical issues or financial matters or whatever the case may be, when we find our future in jeopardy, when we find ourselves and our souls vulnerable, we go to the Lord like this and we ask him to protect us.

Now there used to be a time in my early Christian life where I felt like I wasn't supposed to pray unless I was feeling

strong. And, you know, and you go, and, you know, you've got to muster up trust and faith in order to speak properly to God. Where I don't know where exactly I got that mindset from. But nothing could be further from the truth. My friends, beloved, the Lord is using your circumstances that make you feel vulnerable like that to humble you and to draw you to grace, not to push you away from it.

Let's look back in the New Testament at the familiar passage in 2 Corinthians chapter 12. Just to remind you of this, that the apostle Paul himself cried out looking for relief and found that it was denied to him. Travis alluded to this text in his message earlier this morning. But Paul is weighed down. And in verse 7, 2 Corinthians chapter 12, I know you know the passage, he says, "Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from exalting myself."

You see, he says it there twice. He says "the Lord allowed this messenger from Satan, he sent this messenger from Satan,"

for a particular purpose, to work out a sanctifying influence in Paul's life, to guard him from pride. To keep him from being puffed-up. I wish there were a lot more messengers of Satan at work in the evangelical movement today; to be honest with you if this would be the effect of it. But that's outside of the scope of what we need to talk about today.

Verse 8, here's my point, Paul says, "concerning this, I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And he has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you for power is perfected in weakness.'" Paul goes on and says "okay if that's the case then I'll boast about my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses with insult, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake, for when I am weak then I am strong." God had a purpose for you in your weaknesses.

God has a purpose for you in those intimidating times that you go through. God has a purpose in those difficult church life situations that seem to suck the life out of the body. As, as you deal with difficult issues. God has a purpose in that he is

humbling us and teaching us to depend upon him and not on ourselves. And this comes out, this is brought out in prayer with the sense of, of, Lord to you I lift up my soul. I am unable to solve this problem by myself. I cannot handle this on my own O God, and so I come to you humbly and I ask you to protect me.

This is a whole different mindset in which to walk with God. The Christian soul understands that these times of weakness are sent so that we would learn to trust God and to depend upon him and show forth that our trust in him is not in vain. Look at verses 2 and 3 with me. He says "O my God, in you I trust. Do not let me be ashamed. Do not let my enemies exalt over me. Indeed none of those who wait for you will be ashamed. Those who deal treacherously without cause they will be ashamed."

And so, David here is saying that, and what he is modeling for is this. Instead of collapsing in fear, and collapsing in anxiety at, at the human circumstances he was facing, he comes instead vertically, humbly, privately before the Lord, and he

casts his cares on him. He casts his case upon the Lord as it were, and he says, "Lord I'm going to wait on you."

He's addressing him by the name Yahweh. He's saying, Lord I know that you're a God who keeps his promises. I know that I can trust in your loving kindness. And so in the midst of these difficult circumstances I come to you for protection and Lord I will wait on you until you deliver me. I will wait on you with a sense of confident expectation, that you will care for me in the midst of this. Stated differently, he's saying that he will accept God's providence. He will trust God's wisdom. He will yield to God's timing in the midst of this because as he comes to God he is placing himself under the protection of God and leaving his situation there, leaving his soul there, for the care of God to be exercised as God sees fit.

Now look, what we're discussing here, what we're seeing here, is a completely different mindset than one that expects immediate resolution of every problem at the first breath of prayer that we make on it. And let me just approach it this way.

Early in my Christian life I went through a very serious trial. One that tormented me for a number of years.

Seven years, really, if you counted it out, and there was a lot about my worldview that was undeveloped at that time. There was a lot that I didn't understand that prolonged that. But through that it was all very, you know, it just humbled me. Probably, certainly not enough, it didn't humble me enough, but it humbled me and made me, taught me on the other side, the importance of depending on God and waiting on him. And realizing that not every, every issue in life is going to find an immediate solution.

Not every problem in life is going to have, you know we're conditioned by thirty-minute T.V. programs that the problem comes up and it's solved at the end of thirty minutes. And when we start to think that way in the spiritual realm, and that's not, that's the wrong way to think. If there was not a struggle in the process, if there was not a time element to the process, you know where would be the depth of faith that was on the other side of it. If it was just superficially solved for us,

immediately we wouldn't know anything about the long term benefits of trusting God when there was no visible evidence in, according to human sight, to resolve it for us. Nothing to encourage it.

Rather in the darkness of those times, so to speak, rather we're taught to lean on his word and trust him for the sake of his word, and to walk by faith not by sight. And that's very challenging. Under the weight that some of you are feeling that's the last thing in some ways that you want to hear. It may not change anytime soon, but that's precisely your spirit, the point of your spiritual opportunity is to recognize this and say, Okay Lord, I want to, I want to take another perspective on this.

I'm just going to lift my soul up to you. I'm not going to ask you for any particular outcome. I'm just going to say you are my God, you are a God of faithfulness, I commit myself to you and I trust you for whatever comes out, come what may. I don't make any demands about the outcome, I don't tell you what

you ought to do, I just come and say Father thy will be done. As in Heaven, so also upon earth. As in Heaven, so also in my life.

And to learn to be content, to be there, under the hand of God regardless of what happens with the circumstances. And I want to suggest to you that that is the heartbeat of the true evangelical soul. One that knows God enough, one that trusts God enough, to go to him in times where there is no visible solution on the horizon and say, Lord I just ask you to protect me, cover me, help me. And then to get up and get on with the duties of the day.

And to live as though we actually believe the things that we say that we do. It's a prayer of protection that he opens up with. Now, secondly, here in Psalm 25, we see a prayer for guidance as well. A prayer of protection, secondly a prayer for guidance. And what David does here is having established his confidence in the Lord, "I've lifted my soul up to you." David expresses his trust next by asking God to guide him.

Look at verses 4 and 5, he says, “make me know your ways O Lord. Teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me for you are the God of my salvation. For you I wait all the day.” Again, in contrast to the boastful pride of the current evangelical complex, you find instead here with David this humble sense of asking God to teach me.

God I don't know what to do. I don't know everything. God I, I don't know which path to take. And so I'm asking you by your providence and by your work, the work of the Spirit of God in my heart, I'm asking you to help me understand, enlighten my mind, and guide my steps so that I can walk in your path. Lord I'm, I'm in a, I'm in a period of darkness here. I don't know where to go next. I don't know what to do next. I'm at my wit's end, O God. And I don't know what to do.

And so the evangelical soul, rather than wringing it's hands in anxiety, contrary to what Jesus taught us in Matthew chapter 6, what the Christian soul does, what a true believer does, is he goes to God again in humility and says, God, please guide me. Please help me. Please show me the way. And now look,

in different words, the New Testament picks up this exact Spirit in the book of James in chapter 1. You don't need to turn there, it's a familiar verse and I'll just read it for the sake of time.

But in James chapter 1 verse 5, we're instructed in the New Testament writings, it says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all generously and without reproach and it will be given to him." You don't know what to do? Go to God! Say, God, give me wisdom, guide me. Teach me. Help me here. You know, and most everybody knows I turned sixty yesterday, which is just an amazing thought, I feel like I turned forty, but the calendar's winning this argument.

There have been times in the past year or two, you know, in ministry and other things that, uh, that we go through, you know, I, I just more and more I'm praying this way, more and more, saying God I don't know what to do! Here I am I've been a pastor for however many years and I do whatever I do and God I don't have the first clue on what to do here. I just ask you to

give me wisdom. You know, 'cause I don't, I don't know what to do.

And so this, this, humbling effect before God, this humbling sense of a child coming to his Father saying, God I don't know what to do but I know you do. And I know you have the power to somehow impart that to me. And to direct the steps of my life. God I'm asking you to do what I don't understand. I don't know what to do but, but I'm asking you to guide me and to help me.

David there in Psalm 25, look at verse 4 he says, "Make me know your ways, teach me your paths." These are metaphors. That are talking about the direction and the unfolding of God's will for his life. Humbly asking God to unfold the circumstances of life in a way that would cause David to walk in the path that God had established him for.

Now, we're all here, we, we're big boys, big girls, theologically I'm assuming some things. We take seriously the sovereignty of God, the providence of God that God sovereignly

orchestrates our circumstances and he is involved in every detail. He brings the details of life to us. We believe that, we trust in that, "God works all things after the counsel of his will." Ephesians chapter 1 verse 11.

But, I think where we as Christians, as evangelicals sometimes where we fall back on is that that makes us passive and even fatalistic. Well, in the sense of whatever will be, will be. Well those doctrines do not make us spiritually passive, rather they become the grounds for us to pray. Say, God it's because I believe in your providence that I pray to you this way. It's because I believe in your sovereignty. It's because I believe in your goodness that I'm praying and asking you to work these things out in the life that you have given to me. And so God protect me, God guide me, as I look to the future I ask you to lead me. Whatever that means, however you do it, in your comprehensive sovereignty over all of my life, do a work in my heart and in my circumstances and in my relationships so that you're will is unfolded in my life.

Providence is not meant to make you passive it is meant to make you dependent and to make you consciously dependent and prayerful in a sense that it says, my prayers are meaningful because God is actually in control and therefore I will use prayer as a means of expressing my dependence upon him. Beloved this is the, this is the mark of the Christian soul. This is what, this is what Christians do.

We ask God to protect us. We ask God to guide us. This is fundamental to life. And again, you can think about it in a New Testament perspective, this is exactly how Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew chapter 6. "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come," what's next, "your will be done."

Jesus commands us to pray like this. Commands us to pray in a manner that is seeking his protection and seeking his guidance. And this is not because God's will won't happen, you know unless we do Satan's going to be in charge. That's not the idea at all. Prayer is the appointed means for us to express our dependence upon God. And we do so in the context of, of the way

that he has revealed his sovereignty and providence to be over
all that we do and all that we see and all that we say.