

“Being Honest With God”

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In the movie, *‘It’s A Wonderful Life,’* we meet George Bailey who is repeatedly about to leave Bedford Falls, but is stopped many times: by the death of his Father just before he was due to “go see the world;” the surprise marriage of his brother prevented George from going to college; the stock market crash stopped George and his new wife from going on their honeymoon. And when later Mr. Potter finds out a hefty sum of money is missing from George’s business, he calls the police and tells them to arrest George for embezzlement. Poor George concludes that night that it’s in the town’s best interest that he no longer live; including the Building & Loan where he worked, the citizens of town, his family, and even himself. It seems George Bailey was in a similar place as the author of today’s passage – Psalm 88.

LORD, you are the God who saves me; day and night I cry out to you. ² May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry. ³ I am overwhelmed with troubles and my life draws near to death. ⁴ I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am like one without strength. ⁵ I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care. ⁶ You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. ⁷ Your wrath lies heavily on me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves. ⁸ You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape; ⁹ my eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, LORD, every day; I spread out my hands to you. ¹⁰ Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do their spirits rise up and praise you? ¹¹ Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction? ¹² Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion? ¹³ But I cry to you for help, LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you. ¹⁴ Why, LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me? ¹⁵ From my youth I have suffered and been close 2 death; I have borne your terrors and am in despair. ¹⁶ Your wrath has swept over me; your terrors have destroyed me. ¹⁷ All day long they surround me like a flood; they have completely engulfed me. ¹⁸ You have taken from me friend and neigh— darkness is my closest friend.

Whoever Heman the Ezrahite was, whenever he lived, whatever his exact situation, it was already dark, painful, and bleak with no ending in sight. But had he given up? No. In fact, he did the one thing he should’ve done – he prayed; he went to Almighty God and delivered his petitions, his *accusations* and desires to God. And most importantly he was honest, *fully* honest.

From today's passage we will look mainly at these two ideas:

1. We need to know Who we're talking to in prayer; and to
2. Never stop asking God for what is going on in our hearts and minds.

Who We're Talking 2

Now, George Bailey was in his darkest moment when he prayed. He prayed in total desperation to God, for God to do something, to act on George's behalf. Likewise, the Psalmist opens this prayer in what appears to be a very confident way. In verse one he says **LORD, you are the God who saves me; day and night I cry out to you.** This is full of respect, honor, and worship just to name a few. What is clear, though, is that the Psalmist's experiences did NOT mean the character of God had changed. And since God's character had not changed the Psalmist knew that God was still able to hear and to receive this very prayer.

- What's Psalmist going thru? In verse three he says he is literally about to die. Additionally, it's as though his name had already been put on the record of the dead in verse four.
- Sadly, we see in verses 5 and following an underdeveloped and *false* view of what happens after death. The Psalmist *believes* that he has begun to enter the place God forgets those who have died.
- Who put him there? (v6) **You have put me in the depths of the pit.** God's full wrath was upon the dying Psalmist's soul; he was worn out from it because it had been so constant; he uses the word **overwhelming** in v7. Idea is that of a prize fighter receiving blow after blow from a skilled and stronger opponent.

In sim place, the Psalmist in Ps42:8 **By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.**

- Sons of Korah wrote both Psalms 42 & 88. In these Psalms we're faced with the sobering truth that life will have times and perhaps lengthy seasons of pain, sorrow, bitterness and perhaps suffering, and even then all at once!
- Only a soul who has been run through the ringer of life knows how good God is *even when* it feels like he's nowhere to be found, that he's not listening, not caring, not stopping evil, pain, or suffering.

The Psalmist is teaching us to cling to Almighty God, the object of our hope and faith. He knew who he was talking to, but so oft we don't. Let me give you an example:

- If you are an introvert you'll appreciate this experience of mine. Some years ago I met a pastor's wife for the first time. I don't remember the topic of conversation just the feelings I had during and afterwards. Whatever I was talking about she

kept saying: *yes, right, or of course* every few words I spoke. In my introverted mind I took this to mean that she was telling me to be quiet. But that's because I didn't know her well!

- It turns out she's a licensed social worker; she was tracking and making sure I knew she heard me, that she understood me, and that she cared about what I was saying. Sound familiar???
- That is what Almighty God does too! He listens – intently – to every word of your prayers whether they be filled with praise, frustration, pain, sorrow, grief, anger and anything else you may feel in the moment!
- He sent his own perfectly holy Beloved Son to the cross to die for sinful creatures like me! He understands!
- And even though he knows what's going on in your head better than you do, like the good Parent he is, he cares enough to want to hear it all from you, whatever you are dealing with.

Never stop asking

We also learn from the Psalmist –in verses 9 and 13 - to never stop bringing our pains, wants, desires, and woes to the throne of grace on which our Savior sits. (Verse 9 says) **I call 2 U, LORD, every day; I spread out my hands to you.** (Verse 13 continues) **But I cry to you for help, LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you.** Never *ever* stop asking God to intervene, never *ever* stop asking God to change circumstances; never *ever* stop asking God to stop the difficulties and evils that surround you! Your Heavenly Father wants you to be bluntly honest with him. Never stop – 4 if you are truly one of his children – *doing so is an act of faith.*

- The worst day of my life to this point was Oct 6, 2021. It was on that day that I was completely honest with God for the first time. I had Bachelor's degree in Religion, a completed Master of Divinity, had my calling to full-time ministry confirmed by Presbytery, been ordained, and pastored for over 4 years but that day was first time I was completely honest with Almighty God.
- I was overwhelmed emotionally for myself and my family due to the extremely painful years we'd spent in ministry; our faith in a good, kind, & gentle Jesus had been shaken to its very core. That day, while driving and through tears I looked to heaven and with a clenched fist yelled in anger *Where R U?!?!?!?!?*
- But if I hadn't done that I could not look back & see God calmly & gently answering: *I'll show U.*

The Psalmist believed his name already written on list of people who had died. From his youth he'd been experiencing pains of all kinds. No one liked him. False rumors were spread a/b him. As verse 18 makes clear, only darkness was his friend. But what did he say in verse 13? *I'll be back again tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that, and each day I live until you either answer with YES in this life or life to come.*

- Many days and years he'd asked God to end his suffering, only to receive an answer of NO because it all continued. But did he stop asking? No. Why? Because as he said in v1 his only *possible* source of salvation was Almighty God.

I love irony. And in verses 10-12 Psalmist asks ironic questions. He believes the answers to all the questions is NO: he asks hopelessly: **Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do their spirits rise up and praise you?** ¹¹ **Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction?** ¹² **Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?** *Ironic Psalmist's believes answers to all are clear and painful NOs, but you and I know that all answers are resoundingly and joyfully YES! But they are only YES because of the completed work of Jesus Christ your Savior, King, and Redeemer!*

- Beloved, it is ok to NOT be ok, it is ok to question God's providence, it is ok for you to be hurt by what's going on and to ask God why, it is ok to ask God both *How long* and to make whatever is ailing you to stop. Our God is strong enough, compassionate enough and loving enough to hear, receive, accept how you feel at any given mom, and *not* respond in anger or vengeance. God is God and we are not – that's great news!

After returning George to reality, Angel Second Class Clarence rightly tells George he'd been given a wonderful gift – to see what Bedford Falls would have been like if he'd never even been born. And what is George's response? Joy. In fact he runs down the main street of town yelling *Merry Xmas I'm going to jail!* Those whom George thought would be better off without him showed how much they had truly loved, cared, appreciated, and *needed* him all along. But let me be very clear: you need Jesus, I need Jesus, the world needs Jesus infinitely more than Bedford Falls needed George Bailey. We need Jesus each moment of every day, of every week, of every month, of every year of our lives.

- With all that is going right and wrong, just or unjust in your life, full or empty, will you open your heart and be honest with the Triune God today?! How about tomorrow?
- Do you trust that he is able to hear the most honest and full cries of your heart? Do you truly believe that he will make all things new? You can and should do all of these things because Jesus Christ has already assured your eternity. He won your acceptance with the Heavenly Father; he won the pardon for all your sins, and earned the guarantee of eternity in his holy, holy, holy presence without curtain or veil separating you from his glory and the fullness of his love.