

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Sexagesima Sunday, February 27, 2011

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 363, 142: 1, 513, 528:1-5, 535: 1-3.

Lessons: Psalm 3, Acts 1: 15-19, John 13: 12-30.

Sermon Text: Psalm 41.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This psalm begins and ends with praise of God, despite sufferings and betrayal by close friends. David experienced this sort of betrayal twice in his life as recorded in Scripture. In 2 Samuel chapters 15-17 we read of one situation. Ahithophel was a counselor, an advisor to King David but betrayed him and sided with Absalom when he tried to take his father's throne by force. Like Judas, Ahithophel committed suicide when the plans fell apart. Some think this may have been written when David was an old man and his close friend Joab joined in a plot to make Adonijah king instead of David's son Solomon, as recorded in First Kings chapter 1. But regardless of the circumstances under which it was written, it also plainly points to Judas, the betrayer of Jesus Christ, as we shall see in our sermon. Be assured today that

GOD BLESSES DESPITE SUFFERING AND FALSE FRIENDS

1. God cares for his people, despite the treachery of false friends and enemies.
2. Jesus identifies Judas as fulfilling this prophecy for himself

“Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the LORD delivers him in times of trouble. The LORD will protect him and preserve his life; he will bless him in the land and not surrender him to the desire of his foes. The LORD will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness. I said, ‘O LORD, have mercy on me; heal me, for I have sinned against you.’”

Is David being proud or self-righteous when he speaks of himself as one who has regard, concern and love for the weak? This verse is not as self-righteous as it may appear. It is the least that could be expected of any faithful follower of the Lord and especially a king, who is responsible for his people. He is just stating a fact, and may be comparing himself to other kings he was aware of. But those words would surely apply to Jesus our Savior. He healed the sick and helped the weak when he was on earth. And more importantly, he gave up his life for the weak – for all men, who are too weak to earn salvation.

We often need to be reminded that the Lord delivers us in time of trouble. Sometimes we think the problem is that God doesn't deliver us when we want to be delivered. But remember that God didn't send the Messiah on hundreds, perhaps thousands of times when his chosen people thought God should send him. That happened only in God's good time, as we read in Galatians 4:4-5: *“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”*

Friends may forsake the one who is suffering, but God sustains the sick and sometimes heals them fully even here on earth. There are times when you may feel that God is not providing you relief in your illnesses and pains. You may also feel that those close to you aren't paying any attention to your troubles. That may be true. But we must be reminded of God's words through David in Psalm 27:7-10: *“Hear my voice when I call, O LORD; be merciful to me and answer me. My heart says of you, “Seek his face!” Your face, LORD, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior. Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.”*

In our text today, David expresses his confidence in God: ***“The LORD will sustain him on his sickbed.”*** This suggests the changing of a man's situation from sickness to health. How often don't we look for help when we are sick in bed, or even hurting in ways that no one can physically see, and are looking for help that we expect will happen? When we are young, we automatically expect that we will get better and be healed. As we grow older we may realize that God doesn't necessarily heal all our diseases in this lifetime. We always want what David praised God for and prayed for in Psalm 103:2-5: ***“Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.”***

Believers are not free from poverty, sickness, or outward affliction, but the Lord knows what is happening in their lives, and will send help in his good time. From the Lord Jesus' example the believer learns to consider his poor and afflicted brethren. But nothing is so distressing to the contrite believer, as the sin in his own heart. Sin is the sickness of the soul. God's pardoning mercy heals all sin, and for this spiritual healing we should pray more earnestly than for bodily health.

It may be that we don't find final relief from a particular pain until we receive eternal life from God. Even St. Paul had what he called a “thorn in the flesh” that he prayed to be delivered from but it didn't happen. But you can rest assured that God WILL deliver. Did you notice how David piles up the phrases of deliverance: ***“The LORD will protect [the one who believes] and preserve his life; he will bless him in the land and not surrender him to the desire of his foes. The LORD will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness.”*** With that kind of assurance, we can surely rely on God. We need only look at the Scriptures for examples of God doing just that. One of the most significant is Job, and of course, we must look at Jesus himself as one who suffered tremendously but was finally relieved, and then in a most spectacular way, by rising from the dead!

“I said, ‘O LORD, have mercy on me; heal me, for I have sinned against you.’” Confession of sin is certainly proper for one who suffers. That is part of daily contrition and repentance. We are reminded again of words of forgiveness from the Holy Ghost through David ***“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.”*** Psalm 32:1-2. And then a few words later in that same psalm we find the words we sing and hear every Sunday: ***“I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.”*** Psalm 32:1-2

In God's loving way of sustaining us in times of trouble and providing for our needs we see the grace of God. In life's most trying times, when even our family deserts us, we can rely on God to hear our cries and help us.

David is confident of deliverance. Because he knows the Lord, he has confessed his sins and entrusted his life to the Lord. He is confident of delivery from death and from all conspirators, those who seek to take his life.

David's enemies are Godless and unprincipled men. Sometimes we encounter such enemies in our lives. But we can always turn to our God, and be reminded of the words of David in Psalm 37:1-5: ***“Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this:”***

Our text goes on: ***“My enemies say of me in malice, ‘When will he die and his name perish?’ Whenever one comes to see me, he speaks falsely, while his heart gathers slander; then he goes out and spreads it abroad. All my enemies whisper together against me; they imagine the worst for me, saying, ‘A vile disease has beset him; he will never get up from the place where he lies.’ Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me. But you, O LORD, have mercy on me; raise me up, that I may repay them. I know that you are pleased with me, for my enemy does not triumph over me. In my integrity you uphold me and set me in your presence forever.”*** Remember the two possible occasions for the writing of this psalm. Both occurred when David was older, one when his son Absalom sought to kill him and

take power in Israel, and the other when he was very old and his health was failing, and his advisor and long-time friend Joab conspired to make Adonijah king instead of David's son Solomon.

We can expect that enemies will plot against the Christian. David expected this, too. But when a ***“close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me,”*** we might be surprised. But we shouldn't be. Even in our lives, those who were close to us have turned their backs on us. Perhaps this has happened in a church controversy over upholding the truth of God's Word. But in every situation, we can be sure that the Lord will have mercy upon us. Desire to repay evil for evil is a natural feeling. Even such thoughts are sin, to say nothing of such a deed. Sickness must not cause us to lose our love and compassion for others. Our sinful flesh may lead us to seek to repay them evil for evil, but we must remember God's words in Romans 12:19 quoting Deuteronomy 32: ***“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.”*** And in all things we must take confidence that our chief enemies: the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh will not triumph over us. Jesus Christ saw to that.

That leads us to the most specifically Messianic part of this Psalm, which you heard fulfilled in our Gospel lesson about Jesus and Judas at the Last Supper: ***“Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”*** Jesus identified Judas as his betrayer in the words ***“I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the Scripture: ‘He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.’”*** John 13:18.

To lift up a heel against someone is to be violent toward one, to kick at one, to try to trample someone. The violence and treachery which lie behind the smiling face or greeting kiss of a friend are the worst kind of betrayal. This is exactly what Jesus suffered from Judas.

Jesus quoted this verse as He prophesied His own betrayal at the hands of Judas, and this may also be the passage that Peter has reference to in Acts 1:16: ***“Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus.”***

Judas, after he realized what he had done, went and committed suicide by hanging himself. It is also notable that Ahithophel eventually hanged himself, as 2 Samuel 17:23 records, thus also hinting at Judas, the betrayer of Jesus.

“But you, O LORD, have mercy on me; raise me up, that I may repay them. I know that you are pleased with me, for my enemy does not triumph over me. In my integrity you uphold me and set me in your presence forever.” David repeats his prayer and reaffirms his confidence in the Lord. This confidence extends not only to his preservation and lengthening of his life on earth, but to an eternal presence with the Lord after death. These words also may make us think that David is being proud or self-righteous. But he realizes that all his good works are done in the fear and love of God. Finally we are supported in all our troubles and difficulties by the power of God, and not by our own strength. The mercy of God brings consolation, hope, and assurance that God will raise up the believer from a sickbed and from all the ways and places in which an enemy can triumph. The presence of God that brings healing and ultimately, deliverance from this world of sin, is the basis for praise.

The psalm closes, and closes what has been called “Book 1” of the Psalms with the words ***“Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen.”*** What better way to close a psalm of prayer, of humility, and confidence in God's deliverance than with these words: ***“Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen.”*** (King James Version) Yea, yea, so shall it be! Thank you, dear and gracious Lord! Amen.