

The Anchor Holds in spite of the Storm

Psalm 42:1-6a and Hebrews 6:19-20

One of my favorite songs is “The Anchor Holds”; its lyrics are as follows: “I have journeyed through the long dark night, Out on the open sea, by faith alone, Sight unknown; and yet His eyes were watching me. The anchor holds Though the ship is battered. The anchor holds Though the sails are torn. I have fallen on my knees as I face the raging seas; The anchor holds in spite of the storm. I’ve had visions, I’ve had dreams, I’ve even held them in my hand, But I never knew they would slip right through Like they were only grains of sand. The anchor holds Though the ship is battered. The anchor holds Though the sails are torn. I have fallen on my knees as I face the raging seas; The anchor holds in spite of the storm. I have been young but I’m older now, And there has been beauty these eyes have seen, But it was in the night, through the storms of my life; Oh, that’s where God proved His love for me. The anchor holds Though the ship’s been battered. The anchor holds Though the sails are torn. I have fallen on my knees as I face the raging seas; The anchor holds in spite of the storm. I have fallen on my knees as I face the raging seas; The anchor holds in spite of the storm.” [Ray Boltz]

Last week I said that the ongoing coronavirus pandemic is a medical tsunami; as you know, a tsunami is a tidal wave brought on by a tremendous storm. Unfortunately, no one is exempt from the storms of life; in this, followers of the risen and ascended Jesus are like non-believers, the difference is that those who put their faith and hope in God have a Savior to lean upon, to guide us, and to comfort us as we go through such storms, even storms as large as a global pandemic. Hope in Christ is an anchor for our souls; it stabilizes us during difficult seasons because we know this is not how our story ends. Christian hope is rooted in our belief and trust in a personal God, His salvation, and eternity. If we believe these truths in our hearts, then they will produce a hope that does not disappoint. With all that said, listen to the Word of God recorded in **Psalm 42:1-5** and **Hebrews 6:19-20**.

As I said a moment ago, no one is exempt from the storms of life, which means that we are in good company, biblically speaking. Nearly all the biblical figures you and I know had to deal with finding hope amid life’s storms. Job was such a person as he lost everything in one day: his farm, his family, and his future, even his health came under attack from Satan. In the midst of that prolonged and vicious storm, Job came to realize that only by turning to God could he make sense of his life and the calamities that he was suffering. Some storms of life come quickly and pass rapidly without doing much harm; they are like summer thundershowers that make a lot of troubling noise, but soon pass as the sunshine returns with no lasting damage inflicted. Other life-storms, like the one Job experienced and the ongoing pandemic, come unexpectedly and leave utter devastation in its path. After much soul-searching, Job found peace with God and discovered that his hope rested in the love and restoring power of God’s grace; our hope rests in these things, as well, which is why the author of the Book of **Hebrews** wrote, “We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, . . .” [**Hebrew 6:19**,

NRSV] Never ponder the Book of **Job** without remembering that the One in whom Job placed his hope restored Job after the storm in a miraculous way.

Job was a farmer, but even kings have wrestled with despair and hopelessness. From the lowly to the mighty, this has been a timeless battle for every human being; many political, medical, and religious leaders around the world are facing this right now as they wrestle with things like when is it safe to return to work and resume our worship services. King David wrote **Psalm 42** during a contentious time in the Kingdom of Israel: Absalom, one of David's sons, had made a bid for the throne while David was still sitting on it; this open rebellion caused David to vacate the palace and Jerusalem itself in fear for his life. That meant that David also had to leave the tabernacle of God where the priests kept the Ark of the Covenant, which symbolized the presence of God. This family fight—this tsunami drove David away from the palace and away from the sanctuary of God, as a result, the King found his hope in the Lord shaken and threatened by the actions of his own son.

As I just noted, in the midst of this storm, God inspired King David to write **Psalm 42**; perhaps the tragedy of the situation was what caused the King to write this praise song with such vivid imagery. In the first verse of this psalm, David likened himself to a deer longing for water; the familiar *King James Version* uses the word “panteth” instead of “longs”. A deer only gets to panting if it has been running hard, running especially hard if it is trying to avoid a predator, such was the real circumstance for the King. David was spiritually parched, longing for the stream of living water to the extent that his soul was panting for God; can you relate to being thirsty in the midst of a storm, in the midst of the ongoing pandemic? The home of my paternal grandparents had a well that provided the most wonderful refreshing water that I have ever drunk. This well used an electric pump to bring the water from deep in the ground and into the house. This system had one major drawback and that was if a storm knocked the power off, no water flowed and if the storm lasted long enough, I would get thirsty. Perhaps the ongoing pandemic has left you thirsty: thirsty for fellowship with those you have not seen for weeks; thirsty for the economy to fully reopen; thirsty for our worship services to resume; thirsty for life to take on some form of normality. This particular storm in David's life was both long and severe, so his soul was desperate for relief from the thirst it was experiencing.

In the second verse of **Psalm 42**, King David made it clear that his thirst was not merely for a unified kingdom or even for peace between himself and his son, as important as those things were to him, but rather, his all-consuming thirst was for the living God. In spite of the storm, David believed his hope was still alive because God was alive. All too often, we focus on the tsunami, but David taught us to focus on God and not the storm that rages around us; what a valuable lesson that is. The living God was still there even though David could not be in the sanctuary of the tabernacle in Jerusalem; God was still there with him in the forest as David was on the run trying to stay alive and God is with us in the eye of the storm, as well, whether that storm be death, illness, pandemic, injury, divorce, economic upheaval, natural disaster, betrayal, prodigal children, or any other storm.

In verse three of this psalm, David let us know that his only spiritual sustenance during this storm was his constant tears as everyone around the King kept asking, “. . . ‘Where is your God?’” [Psalm 42:3, NRSV] Again, no believer is exempt from the storms of life just because he or she has put his or her faith in God, and King David was no exception and neither are we. Being a faithful follower of the risen and ascended Jesus does not mean that we will not face conflicts, hardships, battles, pandemics, and storms just like everyone else, nor does it mean that we will not become infected by the coronavirus or that our stock portfolio will not be adversely affected by uncertain economic conditions. The difference is that those who put their faith and hope in God have a Savior to lean upon, to guide them, and to comfort them as they walk through the storms; in other words: “The anchor holds Though the ship is battered. The anchor holds Though the sails are torn. I have fallen on my knees as I face the raging seas; The anchor holds in spite of the storm.” [“*The Anchor Holds*”]

King David was on the run for several months as he sought to shore up support in order to take back his kingdom. This separation from the place of worship drove David into a despair and challenged his hope in the Lord. He wrote, in verse four of this psalm, “These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, . . .” [Psalm 42:4, NRSV] John Knox, the founder of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland following the Reformation, wonderfully captured the mood of this verse as he translated the first part to read: “Memories come back to me yet, melting the heart; . . .” [*Believer’s Bible Commentary*] Do you have any heart-melting memories of worship; perhaps when you surrendered your life to Christ; received the *Sacrament of Baptism*; or rededicated your life to the work of the Lord? David painted a word picture for us in verse four that evokes all the emotion and spirit that an excited congregation will feel when it finally gathers in the sanctuary of God to celebrate the resurrection of Christ on its first Sunday back after a three-month absence. Like us not being able to worship together on *Easter Sunday*, being on the run had forced the King to miss at least one major Jewish festival, such as *Passover*, and his heart was broken because of his absence. The storms of life are always more severe when we are hindered from worshipping God with fellow believers; this is true whether our absence is pandemic-induced or due to our own neglect.

In verse five of this psalm, King David asked and answered a couple of crucial questions that we should ask ourselves in the midst of this pandemic, and indeed, in all of life’s storms, as he wrote: “Why are you downcast, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God. . . .” [Psalm 42:5-6, NRSV] Centuries later, the Apostle Paul echoed the thought of David when he wrote: “. . . If God is for us, who can be against us?” [Romans 8:31, NIV] David realized that no matter what his circumstance, he could be in God’s presence whenever he lifted praise to God and that would help him through the storms of life; my prayer is that our praise of God produces the same assurance in each of our lives as we have been forced to worship together via video.

In the midst of the storms of life, **Deuteronomy 31:6** encourages us to “Be strong and bold; [to] have no fear or dread . . . because it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail or forsake you.” [NRSV] **Joshua 1:9** echoes this assurance: “. . . Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” [NRSV] Again, referring to Jesus, the author of the Book of **Hebrews** wrote: “We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, . . .” [**Hebrew 6:19**, NRSV] All three of these verses and many others offer the same message: “The anchor holds Though the ship is battered. The anchor holds Though the sails are torn. I have fallen on my knees as I face the raging seas; The anchor holds in spite of the storm.” [*The Anchor Holds*] Let us put our hope in the Lord no matter what this pandemic brings and if we do, like both Job and King David, we will see the storm pass and the sun shine again as God goes with us through the storm.

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