**Exalting God**

**Psalm 57**

11/16/14

Thought for Meditation:

You’ll never know that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have. Wilderness survivors find refuge in God’s presence. They also discover community among God’s people. *Max Lucado, “Facing Your Giants”*

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One of the classic Presbyterian theological statements came out of the Shorter Catechism in the 17th century. “What is the chief end of man?” Or, to put it into modern terms, why do humans exist? What is our purpose in life?

Do you remember the answer? “The chief end of man, our purpose, is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” This morning I want us to think about the first part of that answer – to glorify God. What does it mean to glorify God? How is God exalted?

There was a medical missionary in a small field hospital in Africa. About every two weeks he had to take a bicycle trip, through the jungle, to the closest city where he would buy supplies. It was a long enough trip that he had to camp out, in the jungle, half way there and half way back to his village.

The doctor went home on furlough, and talked at his home church in Michigan. He told a story of how one time, as he got near to the city, he saw two men fighting. One of them was very badly injured so the doctor treated him. As he bandaged his wounds the doctor witnessed to him, telling him about Jesus. The doctor then went into the city, got all of his supplies, and then returned to his village.

The doctor then told the people about his next trip to the city, two weeks later. The doctor saw the man he had treated. The man came up to him and said, “I know you are a doctor, and that you carry both money and medicine with you. Last time you were here, after you bandaged me, my friends and I followed you into the jungle. When you set up your camp we had plans to kill you and take your drugs and your money. However, when we got to the campsite there was an armed guard, with 26 soldiers protecting you.” The doctor laughed and said, “I don’t have an armed guard. I was all by myself.” The young man insisted that he and his five friends had all counted. 26 armed guards. He said, “When we saw them we were afraid and left you alone.”

At that point, a man in this doctor’s home church stood up and interrupted him. “What is the exact date you were on that trip?” The doctor thought for a moment and told him. The man continued, “The night you were camping in the jungle it was morning here. I was headed out to go play golf. I put my clubs in the car and then I felt an urge from the Lord to pray for you. It was such a strong urge that I called a group of my friends together and we met for prayer.” Then he turned to the church and said, “Would those of you who prayed with me that day please stand up.” They counted and there were 26 men standing.

“Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth” (Psalm 57:5).

For several years work had been very stressful. As the economy had struggled so had the business. Many of his co-workers had lost their jobs, but so far Turk had been spared. He had seniority and didn’t think that his job was in any danger. Thursday afternoon everyone was called into a meeting. They were told that the business was shutting down and that tomorrow would be their last day. And so, at age 49, Turk had to figure out what was next. How would he support his family? “I cry to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me… Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth” (Psalm 57:2, 5)

Daniel lived in Babylon with the Israelite exiles. The king of Babylon was a man named Darius. He appointed 120 satraps to rule over the kingdom. Then he appointed 3 administrators who supervised the satraps. Daniel was one of those administrators. In fact, he did such a good job that Darius planned to promote him above all the satraps and above all the administrators. All the other leaders got jealous of Daniel. They decided to try to get rid of him. Unfortunately, Daniel was such an honest man that there was no way they could accuse him of doing anything wrong, unless it had to do with his religion.

Finally, they came up with an idea. They went to King Darius and said, “O great King, you are the greatest king ever. You are above all. We think that you ought to make a law, that for thirty days no one can pray to any god, except you.” Darius liked the idea – people worshipping him – so he passed the law.

Daniel learned about the law, but he continued to pray, as he always did, three times a day, to Yahweh, the God of the Israelites. The satraps told the king, and Darius knew he couldn’t go back on his law, so he threw Daniel into the lion’s den. And so Daniel prayed. “Be merciful to me, O God, for in you my soul takes refuge… I lie down among lions that greedily devour human prey; their teeth are spears and arrows, their tongues are sharp swords.” Daniel trusted God, and God delivered him. “Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth” (Psalm 57:1a, 4-5). Daniel was delivered.

Terry & Sue waited anxiously in the hospital room with Ashley, their four-year-old daughter. Dr. Greensberger walked in with a somber look on his face. He sat down, looked them in the eye and asked, “What do you know about leukemia?” He explained a little bit about it, and what the treatment plan would be for Ashley. Terry and Sue heard the words, but they didn’t really register. Their minds were spinning. Their hearts were overwhelmed. And so they prayed. “Be merciful to us, O God…. In the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, until the destroying storms pass by…. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth” (Psalm 57:1, 5).

 We could tell stories all day of people who needed God’s help, people whose lives were threatened, whose dreams were shattered, whose relationships were torn apart and destroyed. People who, in their time of need, prayed. And sometimes God saved them. Let me share with you one more story from our Old Testament lesson, Psalm 57.

 This psalm has an introduction. In my Bible it is written in italics. “To the leader.” The Psalms were used in worship so these guidelines for the worship leader. Then it says “Do Not Destroy.” No one knows for sure what that means. It may be the name of a song that these words go to, or just the theme of the psalm. “Of David when he fled from Saul, in the cave.”

David was a loyal servant of Saul. He was best friends with Saul’s son, Jonathan. He served in Saul’s army, leading troops in war against Israel’s enemies. Saul got jealous of David and tried to kill him. David had to run away to save his life. At least twice, as he was running away, David hid in a cave. One of the times he was in a cave he was with a handful of men. Saul and his army were just outside the cave. Saul came in to the cave and David’s men nudged him and said, “Now is your chance. He’s right here, kill him before he kills you.” But David would not do it. He knew that Saul was the Lord’s anointed and so, rather than taking the matter into his own hands, he trusted God to protect him. “In you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge. I cry to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me. He will send from heaven and save me, he will put to shame those who trample on me. God will send forth his steadfast love and his faithfulness” (Psalm 57:1b-3).

Psalm 57 is a prayer for God’s help. It suggests that anyone who is struggling with life, in any circumstance, is invited to pray the psalm and ask for God’s help and protection. Notice that the Psalm alternates between asking for help and praising God, between describing a struggle and celebrating God’s deliverance. “Be merciful to me, O God… He will send from heaven and save me… I lie down among lions that greedily devour human prey… Be exalted, O God, above the heavens… They dug a pit in my path, but they have fallen into it themselves… I will give thanks to you, O Lord” (Psalm 57:1a, 3a, 4a, 6b, 9a).

So how do we exalt God? How do we give God glory? What would that look like for you? My guess is that most of us think about glorifying God by doing something great for God. If you are a musician you might think about singing, or writing or playing a beautiful piece of music, something that will touch people and draw their hearts to Christ. If you are into crafts that might involve making a beautiful piece of art, a needle point or painting a picture or some sort of woodworking project. For those of you who like to serve other people, maybe down at the food pantry, glorifying God might involve helping a person that you know needs the food and appreciates your work.

I dream of preaching a sermon that will be so powerful that a renewal will break out in the church and spread out into the community. I imagine that many people here dream of turning this church around so that hundreds, maybe thousands of people are coming to the church. However, the question becomes who will be glorified – God or me? There is nothing wrong with our hopes and dreams unless there is something overtly sinful about them. They may be good, but I would suggest that doing great things for God may not be the best way to glorify God.

I wonder if maybe God is trying to teach us that it is in our weakness and in our struggles that we exalt God. We exalt God, not so much by doing great things, but by turning to a great God. We exalt God by praying and asking God for help, and by trusting that God will help us.

 Paul knew this as well as anyone. Our passage from 2nd Corinthians is one of my favorites. Paul had spiritual experiences that are beyond what I can even imagine. In the verses before the ones Sara read Paul described having visions and revelations from God. He talked about being “caught up to the third heaven.” But God also gave him a thorn in his side – no one knows what that is – but it keeps Paul from doing the ministry that he wants to do. It keeps him from being able to live the fully abundant life that he wants. So he asks God to take away the thorn so that he can do more great things for God. God’s answer is “No. My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

We glorify God by asking for God’s help and then by trusting that God will help us. Whenever we turn to Jesus for help, whenever we trust in Him, God is exalted. No matter what your situation is, whether you are physically in danger, grieving the death of a loved one, worried about your job or your kids, struggling with depression, dealing with domestic violence, going through a divorce, or any other problem, when you pray, when you ask for help, when you trust in God, you are exalting God and giving God glory.

“Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth” (Psalm 57:5). I invite you to exalt God, by singing this song. It is a statement of faith that no matter what is going on around us, we trust in God.