



Psalm 30 - Thanksgiving for Recovery from Grave Illness

A Psalm. A Song at the dedication of the temple. Of David.

Introduction

The title in the NRSVA states this psalm was written after David was recovering from a serious illness, yet it is accepted that David composed Psalm 30 for the dedication of the temple, an event that took place after David died; refer to 1 Kings 8:63. Some verses seem to indicate that David also alluded to the dedication of his newly built palace in Jerusalem.

The temple does not figure much in the psalm itself, except for the address to fellow worshippers in v.4. The theme of the whole psalm is one of personal thanksgiving for God's repeated care and deliverance over the course of a life; the title makes the concrete situation of David's experience of having survived a life-threatening situation the background, and the worshippers can liken their own experiences to his.

Psalm 30:1-3 - Reasons Why I Will Extol

The opening phrase <<*I will extol you*>> is followed by three experiences that lead the singer to extol God: deliverance from the attacks of the foes, answered prayer in desperate circumstances, and rescue from impending death. The mention of Sheol and the pit in v.3 probably indicates that the threatened death would have been death under divine judgement, as confirmed by 28:1.

- ¹ I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up,
and did not let my foes rejoice over me.

Psalm 30:1

I will extol you, O Lord. At the dedication of his own house, David did not extol himself rather, it was the Lord he gave all the glory to. What might have been understood as the achievement of a man was instead the occasion for praising God. 2 Samuel 5:11-12 and 1 Chronicles 14:1-2 describe the completion of King David's palace: *<<King Hiram of Tyre sent messengers to David, along with cedar logs, and masons and carpenters to build a house for him. David then perceived that the Lord had established him as king over Israel, and that his kingdom was highly exalted for the sake of his people Israel>>*.

It can be seen that King David knew three things that made his reign great. Every godly leader should know these three things well:

- David knew that the Lord had established him as king over Israel: David knew that God called him and established him over Israel.
- He had exalted his kingdom: David knew that the kingdom belonged to God, it was his kingdom.
- For the sake of his people Israel: David knew God wanted to use him as a channel to bless his people. It was not for David's sake that he was lifted up, but for the sake of his people Israel.

For you have drawn me up. This explains the core reason for David's praise. He knew that his security and status were the work of God. It was not as if God did it all as David sat passively; he was a man of energy and action. Nevertheless, it was God's work far more than his own.

And did not let my foes rejoice over me. For David, this was a significant part of God's victory on his behalf. He was constantly confronted by foes, and God protected him and made him the winner in regard to them.

² O Lord my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.

Psalm 30:2

I cried to you for help. No doubt there were many times when David received healing from God from both illness and injury. Yet the idea of healing is also broad enough to include the sense of God's help and rescue from any great need. Many commentators believe that David remembered when God saved his life from a life-threatening illness. It has similarities to Hezekiah's psalm of praise after his sickness (Isaiah 38:10-20).

And you have healed me. Although applied to restoring the sick, healing can also be translated as salvation. This idea is also seen when Jesus healed the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years: *<<He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith*

*has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease’>> (Mark 5:34), where the Greek *sōzō* can mean either heal or save. The woman’s faith in Jesus for physical healing at the same time became faith in him for salvation from sin. Of course, faith itself does not do the healing; God does. But the woman’s faith was the divinely appointed means for her bodily healing, as well as for her spiritual salvation.*

³ O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol,
restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.

Psalm 30:3

O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol. It cannot be fully determined if David was describing what might be termed a near-death experience or if it would be more like a narrow escape from death. Either way, in his life as a soldier and leader he had more than one time when death was near, and God rescued him from death. More importantly to David, he also knew that his eternal destiny was to be with God and not in hell.

You restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit. David was not immortal, in the sense that one day his body would die and he would pass from this life to the next, a fact confirmed by Peter on the Day of Pentecost: *<<Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day>> (Acts 2:29)*. Yet there were many occasions when God delayed his eventual death, not allowing him to go down to the Pit. The prophet describes a similar experience: *<<Surely it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but you have held back my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back>> (Isaiah 38:17)*.

Believing that David composed this psalm for the dedication of the temple, it was instructive for David to say to all, “You see the strength of my kingdom and the splendour of this temple. All seems good and secure on the day like today. Yet no one should forget that there were many times when my life was in great danger and I was close to death, and praise the God who delivered me.”

Psalm 30:4-5 - Joy Comes with the Morning

After stating his own intention to extol the Lord, the singer turns to his fellow worshippers and urges them to join him, to sing praises and give thanks. Although there is indeed weeping in the lives of the faithful, sometimes because their misdeeds have incurred God’s anger, and sometimes just because of suffering that comes from living in a fallen world, it comes to an end. Morning stands for the time when God gives relief: *<<Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days>> (Psalm 90:14)*; it might

not arrive until the last day: <<*Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd; straight to the grave they descend, and their form shall waste away; Sheol shall be their home*>> (Psalm 49:14), but it will surely come.

⁴ Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones,
and give thanks to his holy name.

Psalm 30:4

Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones is a reminder that the great works of God not only caused David to praise but also caused him to compel others to praise God. It was fitting because they also were his saints, his special people: <<*As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight*>> (Psalm 16:3).

Give thanks to his holy name. Giving thanks is another way to praise God for his goodness, and is also good manners. His holy name is the one by which God wanted his people to know him: <<*God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.' He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "I am has sent me to you."' God also said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you": This is my name for ever, and this my title for all generations*>> (Exodus 3:14-15).

⁵ For his anger is but for a moment;
his favour is for a lifetime.
Weeping may linger for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.

Psalm 30:5

For his anger is but for a moment; his favour is for a lifetime. After calling God's people to praise, King David then gave them more reasons to do so. Here he rejoiced that the anger of God may be real but momentary, while his favour, i.e. acceptance and pleasure, is lasting, even for life: <<*and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, 'For he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever towards Israel'*>> (Ezra 3:11a). This is a contrast between the momentary nature of God's anger with his people and the lasting favour he holds them in. In NT vocabulary it might be said that the correction or discipline of God is for a moment, but his grace abides forever.

Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning. Almost certainly, David said this as a testimony from his own life. There were many

tearful nights, followed by joyful mornings, perhaps with the recognition that the mercies of God to his people are new every morning: <<***The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness***>> (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Psalm 30:6-7 - You Alone Are My Security

It is easy, in times of prosperity, for God's people to trust in themselves for continued well-being; but they must always remember that it is God who makes one's mountain stand strong, a figure for unshakable security, and if he should remove his care, even the faithful are undone.

⁶ As for me, I said in my prosperity,
'I shall never be moved.'

Psalm 30:6

As for me, I said in my prosperity, 'I shall never be moved.' One may wonder if David said or sung this to an assembly at the dedication of his palace, and smiled at this line. It seems to communicate an overconfident assurance born of a season of prosperity and material success.

⁷ By your favour, O Lord,
you had established me as a strong mountain;
you hid your face;
I was dismayed.

Psalm 30:7

By your favour, O Lord, you had established me as a strong mountain. King David confessed that the strength of his life and kingdom was not due to his prosperity, but to the favour of God. The palace of King David in Jerusalem, discovered by archaeologists, is situated in the great hills of Jerusalem. King David can almost be seen making a gesture towards these mountains and telling everyone that it was God's favour that made David stand strong.

You hid your face; I was dismayed. Without the constant sustaining work of God, David was deeply troubled. This is not to imply that God played a hiding game with David, constantly hiding and then revealing himself to him, although God had said he would remove his presence from the faithless: <<***My anger will be kindled against them on that day. I will forsake them and hide my face from them; they will become easy prey, and many terrible troubles will come upon them. On that day they will say, "Have not these troubles come upon us because our God is not in our midst?"***>> (Deuteronomy 31:17). The idea is that David was

completely dependent upon the presence of God, fellowship with him, and upon his grace and favour.

Psalm 30:8-10 - My Cry to the Lord

After recording one thing he had said (v.6), David moves on to another recollection: he had been in desperate circumstances and prayed for continued life. It is clear from v.9 that the mere prolonging of earthly days is not the goal of these deliverances, precious as that is: the faithful live to praise God, to tell of his faithfulness. The Books of Samuel recount many instances of just this in the life of David; the psalm expects the worshippers to reflect on the events of their own lives, and to renew their own intention to live well.

- 8 To you, O Lord, I cried,
and to the Lord I made supplication:
- 9 'What profit is there in my death,
if I go down to the Pit?
Will the dust praise you?
Will it tell of your faithfulness?

Psalm 30:8-9

To you, O Lord, I cried. King David first said that he cried out to God in v.2. This is perhaps the content of his prayer on one of those occasions.

What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise you? This was David's prayer in a life-threatening situation. He made rational arguments to God, knowing that he would certainly praise God if he escaped death, but was uncertain if he could praise God from the pit or the dust of the grave. These words of King David frankly sound strange to the reader of the NT. It seems very different from the triumphant confidence of Paul who wrote: <<**For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain**>> (Philippians 1:21). David seemed to see no gain in death, and therefore pleaded that God would preserve his life. This is due to the admittedly shadowy understanding of the afterlife in the OT. There are certainly moments of triumphant faith, such as when Job said: <<**For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God**>> (Job 19:25-26). Yet there are also moments of uncertainty, such as here. It was not until the NT that God revealed more clearly the fate of those who trust God from this life to the next, as Paul so clearly knew: <<**but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel**>> (2 Timothy 1:10).

10 Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me!
O Lord, be my helper!’

Psalm 30:10

Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me! Even though David prayed with rational reason, in an even greater sense he simply relied on the mercy of God. It was as if he said, “Lord, here are many good reasons for you to answer my prayer. Yet beyond all these, I simply ask for your mercy, and ask you to be my helper.”

O Lord, be my helper is another compact, expressive, ever fitting prayer, similar in tone to: <<*May he send you help from the sanctuary, and give you support from Zion*>> (Psalm 20:2). Spurgeon comments: “It is suitable to hundreds of the cases of the Lord’s people; it is well becoming in the minister when he is going to preach, to the sufferer upon the bed of pain, to the toiler in the field of service, to the believer under temptation, to the man of God under adversity; when God helps, difficulties vanish.”

Psalm 30:11-12 - I Will Give Thanks Forever

The experiences in which sorrow has turned to joy lead the psalmist, and all who worship with him, to expect to sing God’s praise and give him thanks forever.

11 You have turned my mourning into dancing;
you have taken off my sackcloth
and clothed me with joy,

12 so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.
O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you for ever.

Psalm 30:11-12

You have turned my mourning into dancing. The dedication of David’s palace was a happy event. Without specifically mentioning the dedication of the house, David used it a reason to remember all the times God brought him from sadness to joy, from mourning to dancing.

You have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy. Using the Hebrew literary tool of repetition for the sake of emphasis, David repeats the idea of the transition from sadness to gladness. It was a happy day, but God had also been faithful to David in more difficult times.

Sackcloth was typically worn by someone during times of great sorrow, affliction, mourning or repentance, for example: <<*Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and*

with dust on their heads>> (Nehemiah 9:1), <<When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went through the city, wailing with a loud and bitter cry>> (Esther 4:1), and: <<Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes>> (Luke 10:13).

So that my soul may praise you and not be silent. David wants his inner being to always cry out in praise to God irrespective of the situation he may face. King David revealed the primary reason for God's transforming work in his life. It was not primarily to give him palaces; it was to so that David could praise the Lord and not be silent. God worked in David's life so that he would bring himself glory and appropriate praise. Although it clearly benefitted David, it was primarily for God's own glory that he did this. This principle means that God has a special reason to bring his transforming work to lives that will give him praise.

So that my soul may praise you indicates that King David sang those praises with passion and exuberance, welling forth from whatever glory was associated with him as a man, a soldier, and a king. Singing praises to his Lord indicates that David knew that in some special way, God regards and receives praise that is presented to him in song. David gives the sense that it would be a sin to be silent.

O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you for ever. King David closed this song for the dedication of his house with a determination to thank God forever. Palaces seem to be permanent things, but they eventually crumble. Yet God will rightly be thanked and praised forever.