

Declaration

“Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God? You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples.” (Psalm 77:13-14)

On its own, this sounds like a joyful declaration of confidence and hope, but the Psalmist, far from feeling joyful, confident or hopeful, is greatly troubled and distressed, maybe depressed. Nevertheless in the midst of his anguish he calls out to the living God – who else can he call out to?

Hymn: by Samuel Davies

1. Great God of wonders! all thy ways display the attributes divine;
But countless acts of pardoning grace beyond thine other wonders shine:
*Who is a pardoning God like thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?*
2. In wonder lost, with trembling joy we take the pardon of our God;
Pardon for crimes of deepest dye, a pardon bought with Jesus's blood: ...
3. Pardon – from an offended God! Pardon – from sin of deepest dye!
Pardon – bestowed through Jesus's blood! Pardon – that brings the rebel nigh! ...
4. O may this strange, this matchless grace, this God-like miracle of love,
Fill the wide earth with grateful praise, as now it fills the choirs above ...

Prayer

Gracious Father,

I trust in you. You sought me and found me, revealed your truth to me and helped me to accept it. You are my God and Saviour, a God of wonders, my security and my hope. You have pardoned me and helped me. Even though I have doubted and failed, you have walked with me and guided me, and you continue to do so.

Thank you for your forgiveness, forbearance, patience and love, and as you have been to me, so may I be to others.

In Jesus' name,

Amen

Scripture Readings

- Jonah 1:1-12
- John 6:60-69

Song “My Lighthouse” by Chris Llewellyn, Gareth Gilkeson.

1. In my wrestling and in my doubts in my failures, You won't walk out
Your great love will lead me through, You are the peace in my troubled sea,
You are the peace in my troubled sea.
2. In the silence, You won't let go. In my questions, Your truth will hold.
Your great love will lead me through, You are the peace in my troubled sea,
You are the peace in my troubled sea.

*My Lighthouse, my Lighthouse, shining in the darkness, I will follow You
My Lighthouse, my Lighthouse, I will trust the promise, You will carry me
Safe to shore, Safe to shore, Safe to shore, Safe to shore*

3. I won't fear what tomorrow brings. With each morning, I'll rise and sing
My God's love will lead me through, You are the peace in my troubled sea
You are the peace in my troubled sea.

When you're feeling lost, stuck out at sea, the waves grow high, the winds blow strong
In your heart, believe there's a light that's shining, It's never going out
Doubt give up, no, don't lose hope, the future's looking bright
Fire before us, You're the brightest, You will lead us through the storm

Refrain

© 2013 Thankyou Music. Used by permission CCLI 509237

Message: Storms of life – from God?

“The devil’s really been having a go at me this week!” You’ve probably heard that said, maybe said it yourself. Troubled sleep, recollections of past events, sense of worthlessness, depression, more or less. Maybe other issues: unexpected financial challenges, blowup with neighbours, friends or family.

We live in a fallen world where sin and its consequences are everywhere to be seen. And it affects everything and everyone, Christians included. Yeah, we get that! But this is different. The present circumstances, or the circumstances ‘back then’ are, or were, extreme and really stressful and debilitating. And because we interpret God’s character through the bias of our own preferences, we conclude too quickly that our discomfort must necessarily come from anything but God. God wouldn’t do that, we say.

Jonah heard God speak. What a privilege to hear God speak. I dare say you have heard that Voice. It’s quiet and authoritative, but not irresistible. Resist it often enough and you will no longer hear it. Jonah heard it: “Go to Nineveh ... and preach”.

He refused.

But he didn’t just refuse. He went to some trouble to do the exact opposite, getting on board a ship, heading in the opposite direction to “run away from the Lord” – expensive and risky, an option based on a false premise which made fleeing preferable to obeying the Voice. What false premise? The premise that a person can run away

The Lord Hurlled A Great Wind

from the Lord. Maybe the God of Israel only lived in Israel. If only I can get away from Israel I won't hear that Voice anymore. Maybe if I leave the church I'll feel better. Maybe if I move to Sydney I can start again. Maybe a divorce will improve my life.

So Jonah left for Tarshish in Spain. He soon discovered that his premise was false. God was in the Mediterranean as well! And God did something that our bias will often not allow. He sent a storm. Or as some translators prefer, He hurled a storm, just like Saul hurled a spear at David. And it was a storm potentially fatal to both ship and sailors. Jonah eventually conceded: "It's my fault". God may have sent the storm, but it was Jonah's fault.

It's worth noting in passing that the sailors and the ship owner suffered as a result of Jonah's disobedience. We should think about that next time we ignore God speaking to us.

Jesus also caused a storm. It wasn't like the one Jonah experienced, but his words definitely disrupted the discipline and structure of the Establishment and was a serious threat to the status quo, both intellectually and socially. "We can't accept this teaching" they said. So they "turned back and no longer followed him". Would the disciples also leave? "To whom shall we go?" they said. "You have the words of eternal life". The disciples most likely were also troubled by what they heard – who wouldn't be? But they had what many since have had – a trust in Jesus Christ, a confidence that his words are true, "a hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."¹ With this, despite the pain of the present (or past) experience and despite their own hesitation and reservations, they persevered with Jesus. They really had little option. Like us sometimes.

So instead of blaming her, or him, or the institution, or the devil, consider the real and initially unpalatable thought that maybe, just maybe, the storm was sent by God. Ah, but what about Job? Read it carefully and you see that God was in control. "Have you considered Job?" he said to Satan. It was God who introduced Job to Satan. What was Job's response? "Though [the Almighty] slay me, yet I will hope in him."² Perhaps Job also thought he had little option. This is a gracious God at work.

The testimonies are numerous. "I thank God for that time of difficulty" is heard from time to time. Sure, not usually thankful at the time, often perplexed, but nevertheless holding onto the Word that has been spoken and trusting, despite the circumstances, that somehow the Living God is controlling it all for the purposes of his perfect and good will.

God sending (hurling?) a storm at us does not contradict his character, even though it may conflict with our preferred understanding of him. His attitude of love and his desire for holy living (IE sanctification) in all of us is constant. His eternal purpose remains the same. His inherent righteousness and goodness is not impacted. His kingdom is coming. He is Lord of all. May he help us to understand these things in the good times and bad.

Finally, in the words of Scripture: "Continue in the fear of the Lord all the day. Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off."³

¹ Hebrews 6:19

² Job 13:15

³ Proverbs 23:17-18

The Lord Hurlled A Great Wind

Hymn: *by Joseph M Scriven*

1. What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!
2. Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer!
3. Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge: take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield you; you will find a solace there.

© public domain

Benediction

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your heart and establish you in every good work and word.

Amen

This service was prepared by Warren Mack for HopeNet SA