

## **2 Samuel 22:1-7: David's Song of Thanksgiving**

David spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said:

The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer,  
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,  
my shield and the horn of my salvation,  
my stronghold and my refuge,  
my savior; you save me from violence.  
I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised,  
and I am saved from my enemies.

For the waves of death encompassed me,  
the torrents of perdition assailed me;  
the cords of Sheol entangled me,  
the snares of death confronted me.

In my distress I called upon the Lord;  
to my God I called.  
From his temple he heard my voice,  
and my cry came to his ears.

## **John 12:44-50: Summary of Jesus' Teaching**

Then Jesus cried aloud: 'Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge, for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me.'

## **"Saved from What?"**

Has anyone ever asked you if you are saved? I think the first time that question was ever posed to me was on a college campus by a young, well-meaning evangelist. I think my response was, "Saved from what?" You see, I was under no threat of being killed by anyone, like David in our Hebrew lesson. No army was coming after me to end my life; I think I was a bit of a jerk in college, but not *that* much of a jerk. The student went on to explain about Jesus' sacrificial death to save all humanity from sin and death, and of course that the consequence for not believing in Jesus was damnation, which meant either death or hell, neither of which

were very appealing to me. Well, I had grown up in the church, and everything this evangelist said made some sense to me, and my fears got the better of me over the next few months and I joined a campus Christian group sometime during my first year of college.

But I soon began to have questions. First, if Jesus saved us from sin, why is it that I still sin? Did I really have faith if I was finding it so easy to disobey God's commandments? I was of course assured that if I prayed for forgiveness, I would indeed be forgiven for my sins, and that God *would* save me from hell and death when Judgment Day came. That was very reassuring, but it raised another important question: If we still sin and are yet forgiven through Jesus Christ, does salvation really have anything to do with this life? In other words, if I can go through this life, pursuing all the pleasures, pursuing luxury and status and wealth, and know that in the end I'm forgiven for my sins through Jesus Christ, isn't that enough?

It seems like a pretty nice arrangement when you think about it. Do what you want to do, say you're sorry, and go to heaven. I can be a complete hedonist, subject to my lusts and desires, be forgiven, and live forever in paradise. Sounds great, doesn't it? Where do I sign up? I remember hearing one Christian say, "Christians are no different from anyone else; we're just forgiven." Because we confess Jesus to be our Savior, we are indeed saved, from death, from damnation. We should be the happiest of all people on earth, knowing that whatever wicked things we do won't matter in the long run, because we still end up getting the prize in the end. And Jesus did all this for us! Alleluia!

The problem of course is that we are NOT happy with this arrangement. Yes, many people think that their lusts and passions will lead them to contentment, to joy and happiness. Marketers and advertisers prey on this belief, presenting their product as the answer to their dreams. But we all come to same conclusion that the author of Ecclesiastes came to over 2000 years ago: all is vanity. Wealth does not satisfy. And mere creature comfort does not satisfy. Why doesn't it? Because, thank God, we were created in God's image, to love and to be loved, which means placing the needs of others before our own needs; that's what love is. Jesus says, "Greater love has no one than this; to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13).

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus is speaking to us about being saved from vanity, from emptiness or pointlessness in this life. He's talking about being saved from *spiritual* death, which is far worse than physical death; and the way we are saved from spiritual death: hear Jesus words and keep them, because the point of obeying is not to save yourself from death in the *afterlife*; it's to save yourself from death in this life!

To use Jesus' own metaphor I would ask: "Are you walking in the light or are you walking in darkness?" To answer that question, you should look at the quality of your life not in the way your financial advisor might define quality (i.e. the type of neighborhood you live in, the type of car you drive, where you spend your vacations) but the way God defines quality: In what ways are you improving other people's lives? How are you alleviating the suffering of so many

of his children? Are you bringing good news to the poor? Are you bringing hope to those who live in despair? Are you letting them know, through your words and your deeds, that God is real, that he loves them, and that he wants them to live an abundant life?

If you are indeed walking in the light, you are living an abundant life, because if you're in the light you can see everything around you clearly. Most importantly you can see the road ahead of you, and you know where to walk. If you are living in darkness, you can't see the road God wants you to walk down, and you can't see the dangers that come jumping out at you. One of the benefits of walking in the light is that you can see the dangers that can jump out at you, so you are better able to deal with them. People who walk in the darkness have a hard time dealing with troubles because they are ill prepared to deal with troubles. Troubles arise whether you're Christian or not, but walking in the light you have clearer vision of just what those troubles are, where they came from, and how to move past them. And walking in the light also means that you are walking *with* Jesus, and so you never have to face those troubles alone.

Are you confident about the way you're walking? Do you feel that your path is illuminated, so you can see exactly where you're planting your feet and the road ahead of you, or are you groping around in the dark, not sure about where your next step will take you much less where your path is leading you? Do you have the peace and comfort of knowing that Jesus is walking with you on that path, and that the path you're walking is the path of eternal life, or do you question whether God is even with you? Is your life marked by peace or anxiety? Assurance or fear?

God cares about you *presently*; he cares about the path that you are on now, not just about your eventual destination. One of the tragic miscalculations that Christians make is in thinking that God is passively watching you and grading you to determine whether you go up or down when you're bodily functions cease. So some people smugly convince themselves that they have the right theology, that as long as they believe in God's grace they will gain entrance into heaven, and sit down to a nice meal. That's thinking of God in a very small, narrow way, and eventually these people come to realize that God is lot more involved in their lives than they gave him credit for. God cares about where you are now, and the life you are living now, because he cares about where you're going now. Because if your GPS is taking you to Newark Airport, you're NOT going to catch a flight out of JFK.

That's not to say that God, in his infinite love and grace will not divert your flight and bring you back to his Kingdom when your time on earth is complete, but he doesn't want you going blindly in the wrong direction, living in darkness and fear, while you're here. He cares about you now. Salvation is a present phenomenon, not just a thing of the future. Walk in the light. Be saved in the present, and you can be sure that you're saved in the future as well.