

Continual Proclamation

Lesson for July 14, 2024

Unit II: Expressing Hope

Adult Topic: God is Faithful

Scriptural Background: Psalm 71:12-21

Printed Text: Psalm 71:12-21

Key verse: *“But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more.”*
Psalm 71:14, KJV)

Two men go out hunting and they end up getting lost. One hunter says to the other, “I heard that if you fire three shots in the air someone will find you.” To which the other replied, “Let’s do it!” So they fired three shots in the air and after an hour had past they decided to fire three more shots in the air....two hours past and one of the hunters said, “Lets try it once more.” The other hunter replied, “Ok, but I sure hope it works this time...I only have three arrows left!”

Unknown

These two men placed their hope on the wrong things. People place their hope in many different things, sometimes it is the wrong things. Where do we place our hope? We often face our life’s greatest struggles in what is supposed to be one’s “golden” years. In this week’s lesson, the psalmist continues to trust a faithful God as he ages and faces challenges.

Unifying Principle

Our interpretation of past events profoundly influences our experience of the present. What helps us interpret past and present situations in ways that are beneficial to us and others? In Psalm 71, the poet’s hope is maintained by expressing continual praise for God’s past acts of faithfulness and love. (*Sunday School Commentary, 2023-2024*, Townsend Press, p. 400)

Key Terms

- 1. God** (verse 12) – The Supreme Being; Jehovah; the eternal and infinite spirit, the creator, and the sovereign of the universe.
- 2. Help** (verse 12) – To aid; to assist; to lend strength or means towards effecting a purpose. To remedy; to change for the better.
- 3. Mouth** (verse 15) – Accord; boast; jaws; speech; sound.
- 4. Praise** (verse 14) – The expression of gratitude; a glorifying or extolling. Commendation bestowed on a person for his personal virtues or worthy actions, on meritorious actions themselves, or on anything valuable; approbation expressed in words or song.

5. **Reproach** (verse 13) – Censure mingled with contempt or derision; critical or humiliating language towards any person; abusive reflections.
6. **Righteousness** (verse 16) – Purity of heart and rectitude of life; conformity of heart and life to the divine law. Righteousness, as used in Scripture and theology, in which it is chiefly used, is nearly equivalent to holiness, comprehending holy principles and affections of heart, and conformity of life to the divine law. It includes all we call justice, honesty and virtue.

Lesson Background

One of the features of the psalms is that they meet the circumstances of life. This psalm to God expresses the concerns of old age. The identity of the author of Psalm 71 is debated, with some suggesting it was written by David in his old age. Others suggest it is David along with other psalmists.

The opening of this psalm is much like that of Psalm 31. Specific phrases from Psalms 22, 35, and 40 are also seen here. The psalmist speaks about a lifetime worshipping God, growing older, and his current challenge from murderous conspirators. For all these reasons, it seems likely that David wrote this in response to the rebellion of his son, Absalom (2 Samuel 15–16). However, the song is technically anonymous and doesn't mention any specific event.

The theme shows that at a time in his life when he thinks he should be exempt from certain kinds of troubles, he once again is personally attacked. Though his enemies conclude that God has abandoned him, the psalmist is confident that God will remain faithful.

The opening lines of Psalm 71 are comparable to those of Psalm 35. The psalmist expresses confidence that the Lord will deliver him from his current danger. What begins as a request quickly becomes a declaration that God has already decreed that the psalmist will be rescued. A key theme is that reliance on the Lord leads to safety and security (Psalm 71:1–4)

Trust in God has been a part of this psalmist's lifelong experience. The providence of God in every moment is emphasized when the psalmist says he relied on God even before he was born. This is symbolic in the sense that the psalmist would not have been literally aware of such things in the womb. But it's literal in that everything which happens, including to the writer of these words, is dependent on the will of God. This writer's intense faith has made him a spectacle to others, but he has maintained his faith (Psalm 71:5–8).

Apparently, this life of faith has not been brief. The psalmist again asks for the Lord's protection with a reference to aging. Perhaps enemies look at the writer's decline and think this is time to strike. That may be because of his age, or some perception that God is no longer on his side. Those who want to kill the psalmist conspire. References to aging, plotting, and pursuit are among the reasons some interpreters believe David wrote this in connection to the rebellion of his son, Absalom (2 Samuel 15–16). Instead, the psalmist prays that the Lord will turn those plans around, bringing shame and

embarrassment to the plotters (Psalm 71:9–13). It is in the middle of this thought and expression that our lesson begins.

Lesson in Depth

I. A Resolve to Praise (Psalm 71:12-17)

O God, do not be far from me:

God is everywhere, at hand and afar off, with regard to his being, power, and providence. His glorious presence is in heaven; his gracious presence is with his people. But, when he hides his face, he seems to be at a distance. And this the psalmist cannot bear.

O my God, make haste to help me: With determined enemies as described in the previous lines, the psalmist needed God's help *soon*. He felt as if delayed help was no help at all.

The psalmist had to deal with the fact that as his years advanced, his troubles did not go away. The problems remained. This is a significant test for some believers, but the psalmist understood it as compelling his constant and more personal trust in God.

He knew that his help was in God, and that there was none for him elsewhere. And that he could help him when none else could, and was a present help in time of trouble. And it being such a time with him, and his case desperate, he desires the LORD that he would make haste.

He addresses him as his own God, the consideration of which encouraged his faith and hope in him, and carried in it an argument to help him (see Psalm 119:94). Sometimes we need the comfort of feeling the Father's hand. He is saying here, let me know that you are here to help me.

Let them be confounded and consumed...Let them be covered with reproach and dishonor: This was the help the psalmist asked for. He wanted God to strike his adversaries with confusion and consumption, with disapproval and dishonor. He not only wanted them defeated, but also discredited.

I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more: The psalmist was in a serious crisis and depended upon God for help. Yet in this psalm he does not slip into despair or seem to lose the sense of God's favor. Psalm 71 is a wonderful combination of both problems and praise.

I will hope continually: "I shall expect deliverance after deliverance, and blessing after blessing; and, in consequence, I will praise thee more and more. As thy blessings abound, so shall my praises." (Clarke)

“When I cannot rejoice in what I have, I will look forward to what shall be mine, and will still rejoice.” (Spurgeon)

Praise You yet more and more: “A dying hope would bring forth declining songs; as the expectations grew more dim, so would the music become more faint; but a hope immortal and eternal, flaming forth each day with intense brightness, brings forth a song of praise which, as it shall always continue to arise, so shall it always gather new force.” (Spurgeon)

My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness and Your salvation all the day: He was happy to testify of both God’s **righteousness** and His **salvation**, and to do so all day long. He felt the entire day was needed because he did **not know** the **limits** of God’s **righteousness** and **salvation**. They are limitless.

I do not know their limits: “Lord, where I cannot count I will believe, and when a truth surpasses numeration I will take to admiration.” (Spurgeon)

I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD: Looking forward, the psalmist was confident in God’s **strength**, despite his sense of diminished personal strength with advancing years (Psalm 71:9).

“He who goeth to the battle against his spiritual enemies should go, confiding not in his own ‘strength,’ but in that of the Lord God; not in his own ‘righteousness,’ but in that of his Redeemer. Such a one engageth with omnipotence on his side, and cannot but be victorious.” (Horne)

I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only: The psalmist was only interested in telling of *God’s* **righteousness**, not of his own or the supposed righteousness of pagan gods.

Of Yours only: “Man’s righteousness is not fit to be mentioned – filthy rags are best hidden; neither is there any righteousness under heaven, or in heaven, comparable to the divine.” (Spurgeon)

You have taught me from my youth: The psalmist had the blessed fortune to have followed God and learned of Him from his young years. It was something that benefited him to his older years, still declaring God’s **wonderful works**.

To be **taught** from one’s **youth** displays stability and consistency. There is no fluttering about from one fad to another, from one controversy to another.

“He says, ‘O God, thou hast taught me from my youth,’ which implies that God had continued to teach him: and so indeed he had. The learner had not sought another school, nor had the Master turned off his pupil.” (Spurgeon)

II. A Resolve to Leave a Legacy

When I am old and grey-headed, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation: He prayed for the continued presence of God so that he could **declare God's** strength to a new **generation**.

“There is nothing more calculated to keep the heart of age young, than to stand by the young, sympathizing with their ambitions, heartening their endeavors, and stiffening their courage, by recounting the stories of the strength of God, the experiences of His might.” (Morgan)

“There is nothing more pitiful, or else more beautiful than old age. It is pitiful when its pessimism cools the ardors of youth. It is beautiful when its witness stimulates the visions and inspires the heroism of the young.” (Morgan)

To everyone who is to come: “To all succeeding generations, to whom I will leave a lasting monument of this glorious example of all-sufficiency, such as this Psalm is.” (Poole)

Your righteousness, O God, is very high: The psalmist considered the greatness of God, first in that His **righteousness** was of a different order than that of men, **very high** above that of men; and then, that God is the one who has **done great things**, beyond what men can do. The surpassing **righteousness** and power of God made him ask, **O God, who is like You?**

Who is like You: “God is alone, – who can resemble him? He is eternal. He can have none *before*, and there can be none *after*; for in the infinite *unity* of his *trinity* he is that eternal, unlimited, impartible, incomprehensible, and uncompounded ineffable Being, whose *essence* is hidden from all created intelligences, and whose *counsels* cannot be fathomed by any creature that even his own hand can form. WHO IS LIKE UNTO THEE! God will excite the wonder, amazement, praise, and adoration of angels and men to all eternity.” (Clarke)

You who have shown me great and severe troubles, shall revive me again: He understood that all things were in God's hands and that if he had experienced **great and severe troubles**, that too was **shown** to him by God. That same God could also **revive** him, bringing him **up again from the depths of the earth**.

“Never doubt God. Never say that He has forsaken or forgotten. Never think that He is unsympathetic. He will quicken again.” (Meyer)

You shall increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side: More than a prayer, this was a confident proclamation. Though he was older in years, he still expected that God would **increase** his **greatness** and continue his **comfort**.

You shall increase my greatness: The idea is that as the years continued, the psalmist would see more and more of the **great things** (Psalm 71:19) God does. “The word ‘greatness’ alludes to ‘great things’ (71:19), i.e., Yahweh’s saving acts.” (VanGemeren)

Lesson Summary

Psalm 71:12-21 contains several themes and lessons that can be drawn for spiritual growth and encouragement:

1. **Dependence on God:** The psalmist repeatedly calls upon God for help and deliverance, indicating a deep reliance on God in times of trouble (v. 12). This teaches the importance of recognizing our need for divine assistance and continually seeking God's presence in our lives.
2. **Trust in God's Faithfulness:** The psalmist reflects on God's past faithfulness and expresses confidence that God will continue to provide support and deliverance (v. 14). This serves as a reminder to trust in God's ongoing faithfulness, even when facing difficulties.
3. **Praise and Worship:** Throughout the passage, the psalmist commits to praising God and declaring His righteousness and salvation (vv. 14-16). This highlights the importance of maintaining a heart of worship and gratitude, regardless of circumstances.
4. **Testimony and Witness:** The psalmist vows to proclaim God's mighty acts and His righteousness to the next generation (v. 18). This encourages believers to share their experiences of God's goodness and faithfulness with others, serving as a witness to God's power and love.
5. **Hope and Renewal:** The psalmist speaks of God's ability to revive and restore, even from the depths of despair (vv. 20-21). This offers a message of hope, reminding believers that God can bring renewal and uplift them, no matter how challenging their situation might be.

These lessons emphasize the importance of trust, praise, testimony, and hope in the life of a believer, encouraging a deeper relationship with God and a commitment to sharing His goodness with others.

The top three issues about which respondents said they were very concerned for older adults in their communities included the cost of medical care (56%), cost of home care, assisted living, or nursing home care (56%), and cost of prescription medications (54%). Next were financial scams and fraud (53%), cost of health insurance/Medicare (52%), and cost of dental care (45%), followed by access to quality home care, assisted living, or nursing home care (38%), health care quality (35%), inaccurate or misleading health information (34%), and access to affordable healthy foods (33%). The following issues fell just outside the top 10 based on the percentage reporting being very concerned for older adults in their community: poverty (32%), access to quality mental health care (30%), social isolation and loneliness (28%), being able to age in place (28%), unequal access to health care (28%), neighborhood safety (25%), obesity (24%), ageism or age discrimination (23%), stress and anxiety (23%), and opioid or fentanyl use (22%).

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Notes collected and developed by Ethel Williams