

October 23, 2016
Sunday Morning Service
31st Anniversary
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Psalm 31:1-3

1. What truths about God are conveyed by the name Yahweh?
2. If we prayed like David that God would never let us be put to shame, does that mean life will be very pleasant for us?
3. Why should we expect God to incline His ear to us when we ask?
4. Name some resources or ways in which God leads His people.
5. What could be the result of God leading you for His name's sake?
6. Think of an example of how God has led you as you sought for fellowship or even safety in Him.

GOD LEADS FOR HIS GLORY

Psalm 31:1-3

A few days ago I was talking to a fellow pastor from a church not far from here. I mentioned that we were getting ready to celebrate our 31st anniversary. I have to admit that even when I say that, I think that thirty-one years is an impressive span of ministry. Many of you think that thirty-one years is longer than you have been alive. Maybe I was feeling a bit smug when I spoke to my fellow pastor. That feeling of satisfaction didn't last long. The man responded, "Oh, we

are preparing to celebrate our anniversary also." I asked, "Which one?" He said, "It's our 150th anniversary." Oh!

Knowing how much water has gone under the bridge here at Community in thirty-one years, I can't even imagine what it must be like to celebrate 150 years of ministry. Do relatives of charter members still attend that church? Do they have records of people who were members in the past? Are any of them famous? Did Robert E. Lee attend a service there? Okay it's not quite that old—but close.

Occasionally, about this time of the year, I will get out the old pictures, or the old church directories, or old bulletins of special services that show our history. I think, "If people are water, a lot of water has gone under the bridge." The more pleasant thoughts are about all of the people who are here who have been here for a long time. God has certainly taught us much about Himself and about ourselves along the way. We should be able to see the times when God has taught us important truths. We should be able to observe the results of each of us growing into the headship of Jesus Christ and becoming more like Him. I know that when I compare the spiritual growth that has taken place in some of our folks, it is very encouraging. I hope that you who have been here for the long haul can also see spiritual growth in me.

Because Community Baptist Church is a gathering of people who are born again, we are always becoming more like our Master Jesus Christ. Sometimes that growth comes at times of difficulty when we just don't know what to do or where to turn. Sometimes, the growth comes in times of spiritual revival. Always, the spiritual growth we evidence is the result of God leading us along the way for His own glory. The more we follow in the path where He guides, the more we take on His characteristics. His path is a good path. His path leads to Himself where we find refuge and security.

We cannot imagine what the next few decades hold for this assembly. I cannot imagine what Community Baptist will be like at your 150th anniversary. But, we all should desire that as God gives additional years of ministry here, those years will be characterized by the people crying out to God for refuge with the expectation that He will hear our prayers and draw us to Himself. David learned that lesson and told us about it in this Psalm that just happens to be number 31 like the year of our anniversary.

Request.

Like David, we should long to take refuge in the LORD. Do we say with him, *In you, O LORD, do I take refuge (v.1a)*. Okay, yes, kind of, or maybe. If we stop to consider who the LORD is according to the meaning of this specific name, we will be much more convinced to seek refuge in Him. We are familiar with the special name for God “Yahweh” that David used in this statement. Jehovah (or Yahweh) is the name that God used when He commissioned Moses to deliver His people from bondage in Egypt. It is also the name that God used repeatedly throughout the creation story. In fact God used the title 141 times in the book of Genesis.

But in His conversation with Moses, God explained what the name means. *Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:13-14)*. This means that the LORD is eternally self-existing. No one or nothing created Him. He depends on no one or nothing for existence. He possesses all power being able to do whatever He chooses. He is, therefore, the source of life for all else and everyone else. While He depends on no one, everyone and everything depends on Him for existence. Do you suppose it would be wise to resort to Him when you are seeking refuge? Of course.

Why do we desire to seek refuge? The problem David was facing and the problem that drives us to seek refuge is sin and its ramifications. Sin offends God. The original sin that Satan committed was to refuse to depend on God. He determined that he would make himself like God or even rise above God. He failed. The original sin of the first humans was refusal to depend on God. Adam and Eve bought Satan’s lie that they could be just like God. If we are like God, we don’t have to depend on Him.

It was not God’s plan for His creatures to be equal with Him. God created Satan to be the chief of His angelic servants. Satan chose to go out on his own which greatly offends the Creator. God created Adam and Eve to reflect His glory and enjoy fellowship with Him forever. They also chose to go out on their own which offends God

greatly. Therefore, because of Satan’s sin and our first parents’ sin, we are born with a nature of rebellion against God. We do what we want to do instead of enjoying God and reflecting His glory. God is offended. There are other results of our sin that cause us to want to get away from it.

Sin is a taskmaster that enslaves us. As in the beginning, Satan promises freedom from God through sinning and doing our own desires. That is definitely not true. The truth is that doing what we want to do is habit-forming, and worse, it enslaves us to passions that cannot be satisfied. Solomon understood from experience and expressed the problem well when he said, *All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing (Ecclesiastes 1:8)*. Jesus went even further to explain “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin” (John 8:34).

And worse than enslaving us, sin destroys both temporally and eternally. The consequences in life cause pain in so many areas. We deal with painful consequences in our health, finances, family, emotions, psyche, and relationships. That is because God promised that the soul that sins will die (Ezekiel 3:18). God promised that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). It is a slow death from the cradle to the grave that ultimately leads to eternal death. Eternal separation from God is the ultimate death.

Along the way, sin drives its pawns to make life miserable for those who are trying to escape it. Sinful people can make life very difficult. The further a culture moves away from God, the more obvious and prevalent will be their sins. Often innocent people are the victims of that sin. There is no doubt that the American culture is reeling from the effects of unchecked sin. As a society, we have rejected God and His truth. We have mocked the Bible and virtually made God’s Word and God Himself illegal in the public forum. Now we are feeling the consequences. Righteous people know what is happening. Many people are confused and wondering what has happened and why things are so chaotic. The sinners, the pawns of Satan who have moved us away from God, are quite sure things have never been better in America. Or so they say.

The person who becomes aware of the effects of personal sin, as well as the consequences of the sins of others against us, will seek

for a place of refuge. The solution is to find safety through faith. In this first verse, some English translations read, “*In the Lord do I put my trust*” (v.1a). The Hebrew word (*khaw-saw*) which is translated as “trust” or “refuge” is found 36 times in the Old Testament and always speaks of a refuge that is the object of faith. When we are pressed down by sin and sinful actions toward us, we flee to that which we trust.

This past spring I noticed that some companies in the mid-west were advertising the sale of their ready-built tornado shelters. All you need to do is dig a hole in the ground, place their shelter in the hole, cover it with dirt, and you are safe from the ravages of the tornado. People who have lived through such horrible storms really appreciate a refuge like that. I also read last week that some publications in Russia are telling people to expect imminent nuclear war and, therefore, to be aware of the nearest bomb shelter. Where will you run for safety if the Emergency Broadcast System announces that nuclear missiles are on their way here from Russia, or China, or North Korea, or Iran? In what would you put your trust in such circumstances?

We should feel safest by putting our trust in the eternally existing Heavenly Father. The LORD (*Yahweh*—eternally self-existent) is the object of our faith. Rejoice that you can run to Him and trust Him. Do you trust Him enough to resort to Him? He alone gives safety and life. Recently I have been reading some sermons that Martyn Lloyd Jones preached in the middle 1940's. He was decrying the trend in his day for church leaders to try to bolster attendance in churches by appealing to the people's physical or emotional needs, by bringing in scholars to appeal to their intellect through apologetics, and by providing entertainment for the younger people. Jones concluded that the church doesn't need larger attendance. The great need for the church in England in his day was for real spiritual life. Where there is life, the attendance will be exactly what God chooses for it to be because only God can give spiritual life. Today, a half-century later, in England we can see the sad results of trying to provide for a “refuge” an object of faith other than God Himself.

David showed us how we take refuge with expectations. We expect that we will *never be put to shame* (v.1b). David's concern about shame was not primarily a concern about shame thrust upon us by a sinful world. That kind of shame is bound to happen. We who

follow Jesus will experience that. Jesus was the object of scorn and shame thrown at Him by sinners. Before He ever came to earth, Isaiah promised that God the Son would be shamed. *He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not* (Isaiah 53:3). Nothing was more humiliating and shameful than crucifixion.

And Jesus promised that people who trust in Him, who seek to be like Him, who wish to be led by Him will be treated by sinners the way sinners treated Him. He told His followers, “*It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household*” (Matthew 10:25). Jesus also warned, “*If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you*” (John 15:18).

That being true, we are going to be shamed by a sinful world. As many of you have learned from personal experience or have observed in the lives of other Christians, we who take refuge in God will be ignored, mocked, threatened, outlawed, fined, persecuted, imprisoned, and killed. People in those kinds of conditions need a refuge. In what do we trust? Not what, but Who—God.

People who put their trust in God might face shame from sinners, but we will never be ashamed before Him. We will stand before Him and hear Him say, “Well done good and faithful servant.” The most painful, embarrassing shame, not just in life or in the world but in eternity, is to hear Jesus the Savior say, “*I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness*” (Matthew 7:23). In contrast our “Refuge” reminds us: “*I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33).

We desire deliverance in the LORD's righteousness. David prayed to the LORD, *in your righteousness deliver me* (v.1c)! Remember that the root issue is that we need deliverance from sin and all its ramifications. How can that happen when the human heart is deceived by sin. Often human plans for delivering ourselves do not depend on God at all. That is the essence of unrighteousness. Therefore, it only stands to reason that the Lord must deliver us in or by or through His righteousness. Indeed, that is why His

righteousness is put on our account. This is why when we experience the miracle of regeneration, ultimate deliverance, God clothes us in His own righteousness. This is also why living securely within the fortress of God Himself makes us look like His righteousness.

As we pray to God our refuge, we desire for God to hear us. David requested, *Incline your ear to me (v.2a)*. Faith that runs to God for refuge grasps the value of God's invitation for us to pray to Him. We rejoice in His invitation to come boldly to His throne where we find grace and help. We are satisfied to know that He wants us to cast all our cares on Him because He cares for us. When God bends His divine ear down to hear us, He is so like a loving father who desires to give good gifts to his children. Jesus taught, *"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:9-13)*.

While we try to decide about deliverance from the effects of sin, there is a danger for us in not being able to discern what is a good gift. Human nature concludes that good gifts are wealth, ease, popularity, and a general good time in life. If we just had more money, we could buy our way out of difficulty, right? God the loving heavenly Father did not give gifts like that to His Beloved Son, or to Paul, or Peter, or James, or John, or many other of His saints.

Rather, God gives us the best when we pray to Him. When we cry out to God for deliverance, He draws us into His presence which is our refuge. Sometimes in drawing us to Himself, He removes us from the enemy. Sometimes in doing that He removes the enemy from us. Sometimes the battle still rages, the enemy still attacks, but in the midst of it, we have a peace that human wisdom cannot explain. Paul called it *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7)*.

Calling out to God to secure us within Himself, the mighty and safe fortress, sounds so encouraging. It is. But one issue we have to deal with in the process is that we humans tend to desire quick rescue. Even David prayed, *"Rescue me speedily" (v.2b)*! Of course! But the deliverance doesn't always happen right away. If a thousand years with the Lord is as a day (2 Peter 3:8) what does "speedy" mean? An important principle to learn while God rescues us is that His timing

is always right and best. We are learning very important lessons about God and about us through a sometimes lengthy process of delivery.

Finally, as we cry out to God, we reveal that we desire a refuge where we will be safe. *Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me (v.2c)*! This is the ultimate promise. Heaven, the presence of God, is more secure a refuge than human experience can imagine.

When I was a kid, I played a board game called *Aggravation*. Our kids played it when they were growing up and now our grand kids play it. The game was accurately named. There are four players who each have five marbles. The object is to get your marbles from the starting point to safety at home. Once you have a marble in "home" the opponent can't hurt you. However, and this is the aggravating part, along the way to home, if an opponent lands on the spot your marble is occupying, he sends you back to start. Like real life, it is aggravating; and like real life, sometimes you are worried you will lose your marbles. But in real life, we can be assured that we are going to arrive home safe and sound because we have a refuge in the LORD.

Assurance.

God is our fortress. We can say with assurance to the LORD, *For you are my rock and my fortress (v.3a)*. God is a rock and fortress. David understood the safety of rocks from his experience in Engedi. He understood how secure the fortress in Jerusalem was. But, the most secure fortress or bomb shelter we can imagine is only a weak picture of the security God offers.

In God we find true and lasting safety. Yes, but what does that mean to me living in real life? I often see signs in front of church buildings with the promise that the preacher in that building makes the Bible relevant to life. I'm not always sure what that means. Sometimes I fear it means, "Here we pretend the Bible says what we want it to say." How does God the fortress offer safety to us who are in need?

Maybe the most important principle underlying this whole matter is the principle of eternity. We do deal with sin and its effects in this life. But this life is not all there is. This life is temporary. All these things will pass away. Everything we try to depend on will pass

away. To make something relevant to that which is passing away doesn't seem to be wise. Making the passing life relevant to eternity is the better thing.

This is our work and message as a church. For 31 years we have been trying to teach ourselves to live life in light of eternity. For 31 years we have been challenged to take the message that life is passing away to people who need to confess their sins and trust the work of Jesus Christ to prepare them for eternity. God is the only eternal fortress, the only source of security for eternity. We are so convinced that the theme of all our work is built on this truth: *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:31-32).* We believe and teach that *all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory (2 Corinthians 1:20).*

We take God at His word. We believe that our place of safety is the fortress of fellowship with God, His presence found in the Bible, and prayer. Our responsibility is to stay in the fortress. Human nature is to find safety and then keep running back out from fellowship with God where we will be buffeted by the enemy again. Staying put in fellowship with God is how we can express so confidently from experience: "God is my rock and fortress." Faith tried and rewarded becomes strong faith.

As we stay in fellowship with God, He leads us for His glory. David's prayer to the LORD was, *for your name's sake you lead me and guide me (v.3b).* God does lead and guide us. We have learned that the Bible is full of instruction that leads and guides. We know from experience that prayer truly does help us discern God's directing. We have watched as God arranges circumstances to help guide us. This is true of us individually and of us as a church.

But while we consider how God has led us as an assembly, do we ever wonder, "Why is this assembly located where we are?" Does it even matter to us? What if we can no longer meet in a building? What if we find ourselves in circumstances like those experienced by our brothers and sisters a generation ago in Ukraine? Does God still lead us in difficult circumstances?

God leads and guides us for His own glory. His leading is really not all about making us feel good about ourselves, though we like that. His guiding us is not about our comfort and security, though we enjoy it. God leads us where and how He leads us to help make us like Himself.

You can find a large number of pictures or stories on the internet about various kinds of visions or apparitions of God or Jesus or Mary. The other day I saw a picture of a weird cloud that someone claimed to be the fist of God protruding from the sky. Jesus' face has showed up on pieces of toast. Mary shows up all over the place. I saw a statue of Jesus hanging on a wall in a church in Manila that miraculously wept. Of course a little close observation revealed that there was a leak in the roof and the water ran down the wall and over the statue of Jesus—which explains why Jesus wept most when it rained.

We forget that the image of God is supposed to be seen in us. God created humans in His image to bring glory to Himself. That image has been horribly disfigured by sin. Sin robs God of His rightful glory as our Creator. We cry out to God because of sin. God draws us into the security of His presence and promises. We, being with God, begin to take on His image again. Others see God in us and He is glorified.

That is where we as Community Baptist Church desire for God to lead us. Our desire needs to be for each of us to become more like Christ. Our desire needs to be for opportunities to help others become more like Christ. Our desire as a Church in the coming years needs to be to run from sin into God the fortress so that we can become more like Him for His glory.