

Faith in the Midst of the Fray

Psalm 31:1-24

Halifax: 21 May 2023

Introduction:

Right now, we are at a transition point in our sermon series from Hebrews.

- We have been looking at the object of our faith—
 - Jesus Christ, the great Apostle and High Priest of our faith.
 - He is the priest after the order of Melchizedek who reigns at God's right hand forever, who ever lives to make intercession for us, who has the only sacrifice that can atone for our sin, who is able to save us to the uttermost.
 - Those who trust in Him are given a new heart that is devoted to God and His ways and have complete forgiveness of sin based on God's promise that is confirmed by His oath.
- Hebrews has been focused on the glory of Christ as our faithful Saviour for the first ten and a half chapters.
 - But now at 10:19, it focuses on how we ought to trust in such a great Saviour.
 - We have seen along the way that this is not so easy to do.
 - The Holy Spirit gave these Hebrew people this letter because some of them were struggling with going back to Judaism—the pressures were immense.
 - The goal was to show them how much better Christ is to us now that He has been manifested, and how much better it is to worship Him now than before He came when there were only shadows of Him and His work.
- We learn from this, however, what has been true in the whole church until this day:
 - That trusting in Him is not easy.
 - We live in a world that hates Him and opposes Him, and we ourselves have our flesh that continues to war against our spirit.
 - Satan walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.
 - We are in a battle that has real casualties. In our own number, we have had those who once professed Him but found the battle was too great and departed from Him.
 - It is a real battle with eternal consequences.
 - Those who are truly saved will never lose their salvation. The ones who do depart to not return are the ones who never genuinely trusted Him.
 - Their rejection of Him in the heat of the battle exposes their former hypocrisy.
 - But those who truly believe are by no means exempted from the fray.
 - We need constant encouragement to keep on going—the truth is, we could not and would not keep going without it.
 - God provides such encouragement for those who are His—that, you see, is the *way* He keeps us.
 - It is not by taking us out of the fray, but by strengthening our faith in the middle of it.

The part of Hebrews that we have come to—Hebrews 10:19 to 12:29—is an encouragement to continue trusting the Lord in the midst of the battle.

- We will be looking at this in the coming weeks, but today, we are going to take up a song for us to sing as we go through this part of Hebrews.
 - It is a song about trusting God in the midst of the fray.
 - It will be our Song of Focus for this part of Hebrews.
 - The song is Psalm 31.
- Psalm 31 is found in the collection of the 150 songs that our Lord gave His people to sing—the songs that are found in our Bibles that are given by inspiration of His Holy Spirit.
 - That means that they are songs without error of any kind, not in their emphasis, their focus, their sentiments, their contents.
 - They are songs that give us words for the holy desires and yearnings and longings, for the expressions of love and trust and frustration, that we ought to bring before our God... expressions and sentiments that belong to Christ who is our Head... expressions and sentiments that we are to embrace as our own.
 - Yes, Ps 31 expresses the faith that our Lord has and the faith that we all have as His people growing up in us to perfection—this faith—a living, active, busy, growing faith as we go on in the fray, the battle of this world.
 - You might say that we want to grow up into these words that they might be a true expression of our hearts.
- This song is about His faith and our faith when it is hard to believe.
 - Like our Lord Jesus, there are times when it seems that our labour for God has been in vain.
 - Like Jesus, there are times when we are weary and exhausted and we feel like we cannot go on.
 - Like Jesus, there are times when the world crushes us and oppresses us and we are bowed down under the pressure.
 - Like Jesus, there are times when we are ridiculed and slandered and yet when we must go on in our faith.
 - Like Him, there are times when all our friends forsake us and no one stands with us, and times when we are filled with discouragement because of those who once served with us who have turned away.
 - Like Jesus, there are times when our iniquities lie heavy upon us as if they would sink us to hell forever—did Jesus not bear all our iniquities?
 - Like Him, there are times when we cry out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me,” because we cannot find Him in the heat of the battle.
 - Like Him, there are times of agonising prayer when we plead that if it is possible the cup He has called us drink might be taken away and we confess that we are overwhelmed, but our faith must go on.
 - He meant it when He said that we would be tested and that we must go through much tribulation to enter His kingdom... but called us to follow Him.

I will now read this entire Psalm to you.

- Then I will break it down in an effort to give you a better sense of it. And with God's help, you *will* gain a better sense of it—to the enrichment of your faith and trust in our gracious God.
 - Remember that God has commanded that ministers expound the word to the congregation, and in His providence, He has appointed that you are to hear this sermon today. I encourage you to always pray accordingly for God to bless you as we do this. We do this because He has commanded it.
 - He gets glory by using weak vessels of clay to bring His word to His people.
 - Our eyes are on Him.

Here is Psalm 31. This is God's holy and infallible word to us.

- It is His word about the trust that our Lord Jesus has to His heavenly Father in the midst of the fray—He still has it and He will have it until His church is gathered to glory.
- He showed that He had this faith when He was here, and He leads us in this faith now as long as we are in this fallen world. Psalm 31:

Psalm 31:1-24: «To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.» In You, O LORD, I put my trust; let me never be ashamed; deliver me in Your righteousness. ² Bow down Your ear to me, deliver me speedily; be my rock of refuge, a fortress of defense to save me. ³ For You *are* my rock and my fortress; therefore, for Your name's sake, lead me and guide me. ⁴ Pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me, for You *are* my strength. ⁵ Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth. ⁶ I have hated those who regard useless idols; but I trust in the LORD. ⁷ I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy, for You have considered my trouble; You have known my soul in adversities, ⁸ and have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy; You have set my feet in a wide place.

⁹ Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am in trouble; my eye wastes away with grief, yes, my soul and my body! ¹⁰ For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away. ¹¹ I am a reproach among all my enemies, but especially among my neighbors, and *am* repulsive to my acquaintances; those who see me outside flee from me. ¹² I am forgotten like a dead man, out of mind; I am like a broken vessel. ¹³ For I hear the slander of many; fear *is* on every side; while

they take counsel together against me, they scheme to take away my life. ¹⁴ But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD; I say, “You *are* my God.” ¹⁵ My times *are* in Your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me. ¹⁶ Make Your face shine upon Your servant; save me for Your mercies' sake. ¹⁷ Do not let me be ashamed, O LORD, for I have called upon You; let the wicked be ashamed; let them be silent in the grave. ¹⁸ Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak insolent things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous.

¹⁹ Oh, how great *is* Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, *which* You have prepared for those who trust in You in the presence of the sons of men! ²⁰ You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence from the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues. ²¹ Blessed *be* the LORD, for He has shown me His marvelous kindness in a strong city! ²² For I said in my haste, “I am cut off from before Your eyes”; nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried out to You. ²³ Oh, love the LORD, all you His saints! *For* the LORD preserves the faithful, and fully repays the proud person. ²⁴ Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the LORD.

Thanks be to God for His holy Word.

- Thanks be to God for this song of faith.
- May He strengthen our faith as the sense of it is proclaimed and as we sing it in the weeks to come—if He is so pleased.

I. In verses 1-8, we see what we might call *initial faith*.

A. Here we sing with our Lord Jesus of how we have put our trust in God alone.

1. We have, as it were, put all our eggs in one basket.
 - Do you know that expression?
 - It could be used to describe someone who is making an investment, and who decides to invest everything he has into one company.
 - Instead of putting some of his wealth in one place and some in another, he puts it all in one place—all his eggs in one basket.
2. That is what we do when we come to the Lord for salvation.
 - We don't have any back-up plan—we don't hang on to some other options.
 - We put everything on the plan that God has revealed of saving us by Jesus Christ, our gracious redeemer—true faith causes us to do that.
 - As our Mediator, Jesus also put all His trust in this plan—going all the way to the cross because He believed that by this means the Father would save us.
 - He put all His eggs in this one basket, and those who have true faith do the same—we trust in Him alone for salvation as He is revealed in the gospel.
3. Make sure you are clear about what the battle is about.
 - It is the battle for your soul.
 - We have come to God by Christ to be saved and to be His forever, and we are trusting Him to keep us. Satan, the world, and our flesh, are at work to take back our soul.
 - They do not want us to belong to God.
 - The battle you face every day is a battle for your soul—efforts are expended to turn you away from God, to turn you against Him, to distract you from Him—whatever might work!

B. Let's walk through the verses in this section.

1. In 31:1-2: we express the foundation of our faith in the LORD.
 - **1 In You, O LORD, I put my trust;**
 - This may be translated, “In you, O LORD, I *have* put my trust.” or, “In you I have taken refuge.”
 - The sense is, “Lord, I am relying on you to deliver me. I have put my trust in you to save me.”
 - “Do not fail me.”
 - That's what it means when it says, **Let me never be ashamed;**

- “Don’t let me be disappointed that I put all my eggs in this basket. Don’t ever let it be that I should regret that I have done so. Come through for me.”
 - Notice the very strong cry for deliverance—a sense of desperation:
 - **Deliver me in Your righteousness. ² Bow down Your ear to me, deliver me speedily; be my rock of refuge, a fortress of defense to save me.**
 - “Lord, I am in need of deliverance.
 - “Every day, the battle rages.
 - “I am ruined, and I cannot deliver myself. I am looking to you, first to deliver me, and then to keep me.”
 - We are sinners and we must be delivered from our own way, from our sin and our guilt, and then we must be preserved in God’s way.
 - This is the essence of our faith in God.
 - He has revealed His way in Christ, and we trust Him to save us in that way. Christ, as our Mediator, has a dual role. He is both a fellow believer as well as the object of our faith.
 - He trusted the Father to deliver Him when He came to bear our sins, and the Father did—He raised Him from the dead and established Him to rule at His right hand until He has gathered all His people in and brought them to glory and destroyed all His enemies.
2. In 31:3-5, the plea for God to keep us appeals to His reputation.
- **For You *are* my rock and my fortress; therefore, for Your name’s sake, lead me and guide me. ⁴ Pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me,**
 - Note those words, “for Your name’s sake.”
 - The idea here is that God’s reputation is on the line.
 - We have come to Him as our rock and fortress—so what kind of rock and fortress will He be?
 - We have come to Him for deliverance—how well will He lead us and guide us? Will He be able to keep us on track amidst all our enemies who try to turn us away from God? All the vain philosophies, objections, arguments, accusations, threats, and ploys?
 - How well will He be able to pull us out the net in which we have been caught? When we have been deceived by our lusts or the world?
 - You see that there is strong confidence expressed.
 - **For You *are* my strength. ⁵ Into Your hand I commit my spirit.**
 - We recognise the words of verse 5 as our Saviour’s words when He gave up His Spirit (His life) on the cross...
 - “Into your hand I commit my spirit.” Many others have spoken these words at their death as His disciples.
 - It is the ultimate expression of trust. “I am committing my spirit, my soul that will continue forever to you. I am completely in your hands to do as you will.”

- This is the very thing we are called to do: to take our very lives, our eternal spirits, and put them in God’s hands—all that we are, all that we have.
 - The hands that made the world and the hands that preserve the world are the same hands that redeem us.
 - Our confidence is that He who has redeemed us will keep us:
 - **You have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth.**
 - Redemption has a two-fold aspect in Scripture—to give a ransom and to deliver us from slavery...
 - And of course in this case, it is a ransom to justice by the blood of Christ to atone for our sin, and deliverance from bondage to Satan, sin, and death.
 - Our confidence is that since God has redeemed us, we are forgiven and sin shall not have dominion over us. Satan’s power is broken.
3. In 31:6-8, we confess that God has indeed set us free.
- He has turned us against the idols and their votaries.
 - The words are: **I have hated those who regard useless idols; but I trust in the LORD.**
 - What a marvellous deliverance God has given us. We used to trust in worthless things (that is what the word *idols* means—worthless things).
 - We trusted in them along with our comrades in the world,
 - but now everything has changed because we trust the LORD.
 - He has redeemed us and broken the alliance we had with idols and those who serve them.
 - This gives us a sure future. It gives us confidence. It gives us a sure hope:
 - **7 I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy, for You have considered my trouble; You have known my soul in adversities, 8 and have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy; You have set my feet in a wide place.**
 - “My enemies employ every means to turn me away from you—to question your goodness and your wisdom and your power—to cause me to rebel against you—to turn away from you to something else...
 - “But [wonderful words!] **You have known my soul in adversities, 8 and have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy;**
 - “You have known me when my heart is wavering and drawn away from you—you have understood my temptations and my pressures and have drawn near to me in the midst of the fray.
 - “And the enemy has not prevailed. You have not shut me up into my enemies hands, but daily you have rescued me.”
 - The outcome is that we are in a wide place in beautiful liberty. We are free to serve our God. We are no longer in slavery to sin and Satan and death.

II. In verses 10-18, we have *faith in the fray* described (or expressed).

A. God’s redemption of which we have just testified sets us free.

1. We are now on God’s side.

- We are His forever, and He is ours.
 - He is faithful and He will keep us.
2. But that does not mean that we are free from hard times.
 - The battle continues to rage on for as long as we are in this fallen world.
 - The battle can be very intense, and the pressure can be very great.
 3. It is in these times that our faith must be strong.
 - It is in these times that our faith is most tested.
 - It is in these times that our faith grows the most.
 4. God uses the battle, not to destroy our faith, but to strengthen it.
 - What we have here in verses 10-18 is the cry of faith in the heat of the battle.
- B. Let's walk through the verses in this section.
1. 31:9-13: Here we confess that following the LORD brings many hardships.
 - a. We have heavy sorrows in both body and soul.
 - We present these to our God who is our keeper!
 - **31:9-10: Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am in trouble; my eye wastes away with grief, yes, my soul and my body! ¹⁰ For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing; My strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away.**
 - This is a godly complaining—we do not want to fall away! Lead us not into temptation!
 - This is so much the way of our Saviour when He bore our sins.
 - He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
 - How great was His agony on our account, and still today as He sees us under affliction in this world.
 - We are emboldened to cry out to God with Jesus who intercedes for us.
 - The struggle is relentless, and it wears us down—and so we protest to our gracious LORD. The cry goes up, “How long, O Lord?”
 - b. We are rejected and regarded as a failure by our enemies.
 - **31:11-12: I am a reproach among all my enemies, but especially among my neighbors,**
 - They see our sorry condition under the afflictions and temptations of this world, and they say, “Where is your God? I thought you trusted in Him. Why doesn't He deliver you? Is He not able to help you? Is He unwilling to help you?”
 - We know how Jesus bore this kind of reproach, and so do we when we follow Him.
 - They look to find fault with us, even when we are being faithful, that they might discourage us in serving God.
 - Chrysostom described this quite well when he said:
 - “If anyone strives after patience and humility, he is a hypocrite.
 - “If he allows himself in the pleasures of this world, he is a glutton.
 - “If he seeks justice, he is impatient; if he seeks it not, he is a fool.

- “If he would be prudent, he is stingy;
 - “If he would make others happy, he is dissolute.
 - “If he gives himself up to prayer, he is vainglorious.”
 - When virtues are looked at as vices, it puts pressure on us to become weaker in these virtues because they are daily looked upon as vices.
 - We wrongly give up what is right to falsely maintain our reputation.
- c. We are even rejected by our friends when the battle rages. Nobody cares. Nobody stands with us. Nobody is ready to help us.
- Verse 11 says: **And [I am] repulsive to my acquaintances; those who see me outside flee from me. ¹² I am forgotten like a dead man, out of mind; I am like a broken vessel. ¹³ For I hear the slander of many.**
 - They think I have done wrong.
 - “Why are you in such a condition, under such affliction if you please the Lord? How is it that you could be so sick for so long? How is it that you could be destitute, impoverished, [whatever it might be] if the Lord delights in you?”
 - We may think of Job’s friends—and even more of Christ’s friends.
 - It is very difficult to suffer alone in the world with no companion in this world to understand.
 - Even Job’s wife told him to curse God and die.
- d. In verse 13, we testify of how this affects us and of how they threaten us.
- Verse 13: **Fear *is* on every side; while they take counsel together against me, they scheme to take away my life.**
 - They are coming against us like buzzards and vultures upon a fallen beast.
 - They make plans to destroy us. They want to kill us.
- God has not promised us an easy life. He has told us to expect affliction if we are His in this world.
2. Nevertheless, our faith remains in our God. God is our go-to in such times of testing. This is marvellous.
- Look at verses 14-18: **But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD; I say, “You *are* my God.” ¹⁵ My times *are* in Your hand.**
 - We recognise that our entire life has been planned by Him.
 - That is what it means when it says, “My times are in your hands.”
 - The times of sickness that won’t go away, the times of slanders and misunderstandings, the times of poverty, the times of struggle and temptation... they are all from Him.
 - Some might think it would make it worse to know that God sent it.
 - But those who trust God know that it is just the opposite.
 - We know that He is wise and good and powerful and has our best interests in mind.
 - None of this is random. It is all planned by Him for His wise and gracious purposes.

- “But as for me, I trust in you!”
- And so in these times of hardship, we cry out to Him for deliverance.
 - **V. 15. Deliver me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me.**
 - We know where our deliverance will come from, and we know that it will come.
 - Keep in mind that the very thing our enemies want to destroy is our faith—our walk with God. They want to draw us back in to the world’s rebellion from which we have been rescued in Christ. They want us to turn against God and embrace the rhetoric of distrust of Him.
 - But faith overcomes...we are drawn in closer to God by the battle.
 - We learn to trust Him more than we ever did before!
 - Instead of pushing Him away, we yearn for more communion with Him.
 - **V. 16: Make Your face shine upon Your servant; save me for Your mercies’ sake.**
 - This is a prayer for God to restore His visible favour to us—to manifest His favour to us for all to see, to vindicate us and to show that He is pleased with us after all.
 - Think of Jesus resurrected and think of Job vindicated before his friends.
 - Again, we ask God to make us glad that we have relied on Him and to make those who say we shouldn’t be the ones who are ashamed.
 - V 17-18: **Do not let me be ashamed, O LORD, for I have called upon You; let the wicked be ashamed; let them be silent in the grave. ¹⁸ Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak insolent things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous.**

III. In the third section, verse 19 to the end of the Psalm, we speak confidently of God’s goodness and grace!

- A. This confidence is especially strong in those who have gone through so much suffering.
 1. For them to come out of that suffering trusting God even more than they did before shows that they are kept by the power of God.
 - It shows that God has preserved them in a way that is much more powerful than if He had simply stopped the trouble.
 - Instead of stopping it, He let the enemies come against us with full force and full rage, and through it all, strengthened our weak faith.
 2. This is what we will see in Hebrews as we look at the faith that we are called to have in our Lord.
 - We will see how men like Abraham and Moses were made men of much stronger faith *because* they were tested and afflicted.
 - If everything had gone smoothly for them, they would never have learned to trust in God.

- Think, for example, of Moses, who never even got to go into the promised land at all in this life and was okay with that—not because he was indifferent and didn't care, but because he knew that God's greatest reward was yet to come!

B. Let's go again to the text.

1. 31:19-20 beautifully expresses this future aspect of our blessing—it expresses the fact that our greatest reward is yet to come.

- **19 Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You in the presence of the sons of men!**

- "Great goodness laid up and prepared!"

- What a happy thought that is!

- There is a great blessing that God has prepared for us that is best described as the great goodness of God—the excellence of Him—the delightfulness and glory of Him that will draw out our admiration and praise in ways that we cannot even imagine!

- Anyone who comes to God looking for immediate blessing in this world will not stick long with the true God.

- There are some pretty excellent immediate blessings—hope, a measure of communion with God, enlightenment, growth in love and grace, a new appreciation for all the things we used to take for granted...

- But these immediate blessing are flat and unimpressive if they are not rooted in the assurance that the reward is yet future...

- Like Paul, the men who have true faith, and especially those who attain the greatest heights in their faith, recognise that, if it is only in this life we have hope, we are greatly to be pitied!

- But we do have an important expectation for this life.

- Not that we will face no battles, but that the Lord will keep us in His way.

- That we who have come to Him are kept by His power through faith.

- This keeping that He does is beautifully explained in verse 20:

- **20 You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence from the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.**

- It is a keeping that is best known to the one being kept!

- It is in the secret place of God's presence—the communion that we have with God through Jesus Christ that we have seen described in Hebrews—

- That our Lord Jesus has opened the way to God, that He has gone ahead of us as our forerunner, and that He has established the true tabernacle, not made of stones, but of the people He came to redeem! We and Him are the sanctuary of God.

- The Spirit of God dwells in us, and He strengthens us and upholds us when the battle heats up. We have personal communion in His grace.

- The world does not understand why we go on trusting God when we don't seem to get anything tangible out of it in the world.

- It is this communion with our God in faith—He kisses us with the kisses of His lips and assures us of His love and promise.
 - He works in us, He causes our love and trust to grow up to greater and greater maturity.
 - The world does not appreciate this transformation, but it gives us great joy and confidence of what a grand thing it will be when God’s great goodness is ours at the last day!
2. v. 21-22: **Blessed be the LORD, for He has shown me His marvelous kindness in a strong city!**
- We bless Him for keeping us in the secret place—in Himself as our mighty fortress, or strong city as it says here. He is that strong city, that refuge (v. 3).
 - How kind He has been to preserve us, and how powerful has His preservation been that keeps us in a hostile world.
 - It is a marvellous kindness that only those who know the LORD know, and that only matters to those who have true faith.
 - We bless Him for His powerful hand of deliverance that rescues us when we cry out to Him as those who would otherwise sink into sin and rebellion.
 - Verse 22: **For I said in my haste, “I am cut off from before Your eyes”;**
 - In the midst of the fray, it can seem like God is not keeping us at times, but then, at last, He always comes through.
 - The rest of v. 22: **Nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried out to You.**
 - This makes our faith and confidence in our God even stronger.
3. And so our Lord Jesus leads us in calling each other to love the LORD our God and to place our confidence in Him as the one who daily preserves us in the battle.
- V. 23-24: **Oh, love the LORD, all you His saints! For the LORD preserves the faithful, and fully repays the proud person. ²⁴ Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the LORD.**

Conclusion: Christian, your God is good and your hope is sure.

- He is good beyond all measure. He is the one who preserves us until the day that Christ is manifested and we are manifested before the world.
- He will strengthen your heart until that day.
 - Love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength!
 - Trust Him in the midst of the fray.