

Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – July 2, 2020

The Lord be with you.

Imagine sitting with a close friend for an hour or so and looking back at your life, talking about some of the highest, the lows, some good days, some perhaps not so good, but looking back on your life, I just bet that you would have some lessons learned, some real distilled wisdom.

I count it one of my greatest privileges and pleasures in ministry to have served some time as a hospice chaplain, where I spent literally hours with people young and old looking back at life, telling their stories, lessons learned. Lessons learned is what we have in today's scripture from Psalm 37, a Psalm of David, in which David is passing down with the help of the Holy Spirit, he's passing down some hard earned life wisdom.

Bible scholars think that in writing this Psalm David was hoping that people would memorize it, they think that because David wrote a Psalm as an Acosta poem, that means that every other line of the song begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and this was oftentimes done to help people memorize. I'm thinking maybe David was hoping his kids and grandkids would memorize life lessons learned. Now, the overarching theme of Psalm 37 is found in verse 25, where David says, I have been young and now I'm old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken.

The verses I wanna focus on today come just before that great first. Psalm 37:23-24, as David reflects back on his life journey, David writes, our steps are made firm by the Lord when He delights in our way, though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong, for the Lord holds us by the hand. David is fond of the imagery of walking in many of his Psalms. David did a lot of walking in his life and... And he did a lot of running too.

Last year, my wife and I, we were in hills and mountains that David walked and we were struck by how rugged and rocky they were. Just to give you a picture, if you go up from Jericho to Jerusalem, it's a steep climb of 3,400 feet in just 18 miles, and it's a dangerous walk, there's the danger of stumbling, of slipping, of falling headlong over a cliff.

Now, the journey of life has been difficult for David, often very dangerous, but listen again, as David passes on a life lesson learned, our steps are made firm by the Lord when He delights in our way, though we stumble. We shall not fall headlong, for the Lord holds us by the hand. I am struck by David's phrase, though we stumble. That just jumps off the page at me. Though we stumble. David does not say if we stumble... Oh no, though we stumble. There's a big difference between if and though, if we stumble, what that holds the possibility that we might stumble...

No, David says, though we stumble, it's a certain, a reality that the people of God do stumble, and I think that the Bible holds up David as Exhibit A, that even the greatest people of God to stumble. Though some people might fancy that they don't stumble... That David knows better. The word of God knows better.

I mean, I've been a pastor. I know that we stumble, we lose our way, we get off the path a straight and narrow. Now, I'm interested in this word, stumble. What does it mean? So I did a little word

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study this past week, and I found at the Hebrew word yippol - that's translated here as stumble. It is used in the Hebrew scriptures in two ways. It is, it is use of a stumble into sin and a stumble into trouble.

David is expert on both kinds of stumbling, David knows stumbling into sin, he knows stumbling into trouble and inspired by the Holy Spirit, David can say, though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong. David knows by experience, God's people do stumble into sin, God's people do stumble into calamity, but let me tell you, there's a huge difference between stumbling and hurling headlong over a cliff. Here's how Proverbs 24:16 says it though, that doesn't say if it says, Though the righteous fall seven times, they will rise again. Here's how the prophet Micah says it in Micah 7:8, do not rejoice over me, oh, enemy, when I fall, I shall rise. When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my life.

How is it that David can say something so bold, so audacious as though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong. Is it the power of positive thinking? Is it the little train that could? The key for David, and the key for you and me is in that last phrase, for the Lord holds us by the hand, though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong for the Lord holds us by the hand. There's a big difference between God holding you and me by the hand, and you and me holding God by the hand, there's a huge difference between God holding on to us and us thinking we hold on to him.

When I was young, much of my Christianity was me thinking that I was holding on to God, which was pretty tenuous, and then finally I just wore out, I wore out trying to hold on to God, I couldn't do it, and then I made that wonderful discovery that has turned everything around for me, that all the while I thought I was holding on to God, God was holding me by the hand. Imagine crossing a busy street with a little child, you do not want the child holding on to you, you want to hold on to the child, and God is holding you by the hand, and one thing I've learned over the years of life lessons for me is that God has a strong grip. Jesus said it like this in John chapter 10, He says, no one can pluck you out of God's hand. God's got your back. He's got you covered.

The Lord holds us to by the hand.

I am Tim Smith, a fellow traveler on the pilgrim way.

Thanks for listening until next time.

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