

FLEE LIKE A BIRD - PS. 11

LIFE OF DAVID IN THE PSALMS #2

Steve Richardson is regarded as one of the premiere puzzle-makers in our country today. Steve left an accounting firm in New Jersey in 1969 to join a small computer company in the smaller town of Hanover, New Hampshire. 6 months later Steve was laid off - unemployed. It was then that Steve decided to join with a friend named Dave Tibbetts in doing what he wanted to do most - making jig saw puzzles. Stave Puzzles, Inc. was born and the 2 have been in demand ever since. Now I am not an avid jig saw puzzler myself, but I understand that there are many people who absolutely love them.

Steve's goal is simple - *I want to make a puzzle that's possible to do but that nobody can do.* The puzzles that Steve produces are not cheap - they range from about \$100 to over \$7000 - but each one is uniquely handmade. Most are composed of an original art print bonded to some plywood backing. Then the puzzle is cut by an electric jigsaw with a blade about as thin as the hair of a horse's tail. Steve's puzzles have found their way into Queen Elizabeth's palace and our own White House – the Bush's are big fans of Stave's puzzles.

Many of the puzzles are novel. The one, for instance, which is made entirely out of chocolate - I wonder how long that one would last around our house. Or the one which is so small that it comes with tweezers. One of Steve's favorite is called *The 3 Little Pigs*. The pieces fit together 63 wrong ways and only one right way. A 26 year old administrator from Texas requested a special puzzle for his girlfriend. As she assembled it, she discovered a Victorian Bride putting her veil

on for her wedding. Only when the puzzle was completed did the message appear:

Will You Marry Me?

But of all the puzzles that Steve Richardson has made, there is one that was a complete failure. A couple of years ago, he designed an April Fool's Day Puzzle called *5 Easy Pieces*. It was a joke - no matter how a person put it together, one piece always wouldn't fit. Steve's customers didn't think it was funny. After demanding for the solution, all of them asked for their money back. *I had to buy back all 30 of those puzzles*, Steve recalled glumly in a recent interview. The people just couldn't stand to have a puzzle that couldn't be completed - a puzzle that wouldn't fit together properly.

There is something within us that desires that everything fits together properly. I am sure that if a psychological study were done of jig saw puzzle enthusiasts, the major attraction of the puzzles would be the satisfaction found at the completion of the puzzle when it all fits together perfectly. There is nothing quite as irritating as coming across an old puzzle in a box, perhaps bought at a garage sale, spending the time in putting it all together, and finding out in the end that there were 1 or 2 pieces that were lost. We like to have completion in life, don't we? Completion brings order and stability to our lives.

This inner longing that we have is the reason for our distress and frustration when those elements of life that we consider to be foundational begin to fall apart on us. When we have family struggles or breakups, when churches split, when the economy plunges into recession, when there is a major scandal that is uncovered in some government office - we are deeply bothered and affected. It is as if a piece

to our life puzzle has been lost and we long for it to be found and put back into place again.

David went through a rather lengthy period of his young life when the world seemed to be falling apart around him. We have begun a study looking at the life of David through the Psalms that he wrote. This morning we looked at David's childhood. We saw some lessons that David learned as a young boy shepherding the Family Flocks which are revealed in Psalm 23. As just a young boy, David learned the importance of trusting in the Lord as his shepherd for all of his physical and emotional and spiritual needs, relying upon the Lord as his shepherd to free his mind from anxieties and fears and hoping in the Lord as his shepherd for direction and blessing in the future.

Now this evening, we want to begin a very difficult period in David's life and look at some lessons which he learned which would give guidance and direction to the entirety of his life.

Few people have ever risen from obscurity to national prominence more quickly than David did. We live in a day when it is not uncommon for an athlete or movie star to become a household name overnight, but that didn't regularly happen back in David's time. There was no T.V. back then. There were no theaters or national newspapers. No, the normal course of fame was a long, slow climb through all of the proper channels.

But that is not what happened to David. There were 2 events in his mid teenage years that quickly propelled David into the national spotlight. The first was his victory over a Philistine giant named Goliath. We will not dwell on this

event long because the story of David and Goliath is well known. A 9 foot 6 inch Philistine named Goliath had intimidated the entire Israeli army. He had come out regularly to challenge any Jewish soldier to a duel. As he stood there with his bronze armor weighing about 125 pounds and carrying his spear whose point weighed about 15 pounds, he had the entire army of Saul quaking in fear. David had been sent by Jesse, his father, to give some provisions to his brothers who were in the army when he happened to hear Goliath's boastful challenge. As you know, David accepted that challenge and armed with only a sling and 5 stones, David killed Goliath, routing the entire Philistine army. David's victory brought a welcome relief to Philistine oppression for just a little while and made him an instant hero in the land. David immediately went from being a shepherd nobody to a soldier idol. Even to this day, when somebody faces immeasurable odds, the story of David and Goliath is often brought up as a source of encouragement and inspiration.

The other factor in David's quick propulsion to fame was necessitated by Saul's emotional problems. King Saul had a severe emotional disorder. He would often plunge into depths of depression. His aides found that music was helpful in soothing his spirit. So David was called upon on a regular basis to play a personal concert for the King on his harp in order to bring tranquility to his troubled soul. David's skill as a musician made him not only a regular personality around the palace, but also a much needed help in maintaining order and keeping up morale. So it should not be surprising that David's popularity and fame skyrocketed in the nation of Israel.

It is ironic that it was the very help that David gave to Saul which resulted in his increasing popularity that also brought about so much trouble for the teenager. For while Saul needed David so much to help soothe his troubled spirit, Saul resented David's popularity and became insanely jealous of him. Interestingly, it was a short song that Saul heard some women singing that was the major source of irritation for him. *Saul has killed his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.* After Saul heard the women singing this song, the Bible says that he became very angry and this refrain galled him (1 Sam. 18:8).

Now one might think that Saul would be pleased that he was being exalted as a great war hero - after all, the song did praise him as a courageous leader. But all Saul could hear was the greater praise being given to David - and this gnawed at his insides.

It has been said that when some people look at a land of milk and honey, they only can see cholesterol and calories. Sadly, that is what happened with Saul. Instead of being pleased with the praise being given to him, he became insanely jealous of David and began looking for a way to kill this person who was his greatest asset in ruling his kingdom.

The situation became very tense for David when Saul's anger and jealousy boiled over into overt action. Several times, Saul hurled his spear at David while he was playing the harp at the palace. Each time, David managed to escape in a miraculous way. But it was clear to everyone that David's life was in great danger.

It was during this period of time, when David was trying to maintain his loyalty to King Saul as court musician in a most dangerous situation that Psalm 11 probably

was written. Let's read this brief 7 verse Psalm together:

PS 11:1 In the LORD I take refuge.

How then can you say to me:

"Flee like a bird to your mountain.

PS 11:2 For look, the wicked bend their bows;
they set their arrows against the strings
to shoot from the shadows
at the upright in heart.

PS 11:3 When the foundations are being destroyed,
what can the righteous do?"

PS 11:4 The LORD is in his holy temple;
the LORD is on his heavenly throne.
He observes the sons of men;
his eyes examine them.

PS 11:5 The LORD examines the righteous,
but the wicked and those who love violence
his soul hates.

PS 11:6 On the wicked he will rain
fiery coals and burning sulfur;
a scorching wind will be their lot.

PS 11:7 For the LORD is righteous,
he loves justice;
upright men will see his face.

Close friends were warning David to get away from the palace while he still could. They feared for his life. *Flee like a bird to your mountain. For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the*

shadows at the upright in heart, they were advising him as David admits in Ps. 11:1b,2. Run, David, run. Get away while you still can. But David was hesitant to go. Perhaps he just didn't want to believe that Saul really wanted to kill him after all that he had done for the king. But probably it was even more than this. David's world was falling apart. He had come to the palace as a teenager with high ideals and hopes. He had only heard about the glories and the palace and King Saul as a shepherd boy - but now he had the opportunity to experience them personally. But he didn't find what he thought he would. Instead of a regal, courageous monarch he found a raving lunatic. It is likely that David just didn't want to face the reality of his disillusionment. He didn't want to admit the fact that his life and the lives of his family members were in serious danger. He didn't want to face the fact that his world - so much of what had been foundational in his life - was just crumbling under him at such a young age. *When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?* David asks mournfully in Ps. 11:3.

What does a person do when the foundations in his or her life are crumbling? When a person receives word that his plant is shutting down and he is going to lose his job - what does he do? When the family is struggling along, just hanging on by a thread - what does the person do? When we pick up a paper and read about seemingly unsolvable problem after problem throughout the world - what can a person do? What does a person do when the foundations of life, the institutions that have brought security and stability to life, appear to be crumbling?

Well, let's ask David this question. Let's see together how David handled this most difficult period in his life when the foundations seemed to be crumbling all

around him. And what we specifically see as we look at this Psalm is 4 insights that David had into the person and character of God that allowed him to keep going when it seemed like the foundations were being destroyed.

NOTICE THESE 4 INSIGHTS WITH ME:

1. FIRST OF ALL, DAVID REALIZED THAT GOD HAD NOT ABDICATED HIS SOVEREIGN THRONE.

READ 11:3,4

³ When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?" ⁴
The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. Now this is very critical and it forms a key to David's being able to cope with his feeling that the foundations were being destroyed. Whenever we feel that the foundations are being destroyed, right along with that comes the feeling that everything is completely out of control. David's friends reveal that kind of panicky feeling. "Flee like a bird to your mountain" was their advise to him. Run for your life, David. Everything is out of control. There is no hope. Just run for it and try to save yourself.

And there are times when we feel the very same way. But it is exactly during those times that we must again realize that God has not abdicated his throne. God hasn't gone anywhere, he is still there. The same God who overturned the might of Pharaoh, the same God who toppled the walls of Jericho, the same God who raised Jesus Christ victoriously from the grave, that same God is on the throne. He knows what is going on, he is not blind. He is aware of all that is happening, he never slumbers or sleeps. The Lord is in his holy temple; the

Lord is on his heavenly throne." We must start here with this statement.

Perhaps the greatest President that our country ever had was approached by a concerned citizen during the turbulent times of the Civil War. Our whole country seemed to be falling apart as brother was fighting against brother and hatred reigned across the land. The citizen asked Abraham Lincoln if he had the confidence that God was on the side of the north in the struggle against the south. President Lincoln's answer showed great wisdom. *My greatest concern, sir, is not whether or not God is on my side, but rather it is whether or not I am on God's side.*

You see, a key in Abraham Lincoln's maintaining his perspective and balance during the Civil War was his knowledge that God was still on the throne. As long as he remained on God's side, he could have confidence in any direction taken.

2. But then notice a 2nd insight that David had. Not only is God still present on the throne, but his character has not changed. God remains a righteous God.
READ Psalm 11:4,5

The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them. ⁵ The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates.

The God in heaven is not an absentee God. He is rather a God who is very interested in the affairs of his creatures. He carefully observes all that they do. He scrutinizes them. He not only looks at the outward actions, but he also has the ability to look at the inward attitudes and motives. God knows the difference between a righteous act, one that is done with sincere and proper motives, and a wicked act, one that is done to hurt someone else or for purely selfish reasons. The word for righteousness comes from the root word meaning "straight" in the bible. Therefore, the righteousness of God simply means that he by his character is committed to doing that which is straight, that which is proper, that which is in the loving best interests of his creation, that which is right.

Human standards change- that which was considered to be unethical or immoral yesterday might be accepted by society today. But God's standards never change. He knows what is right because he is a righteous God. And He is committed to act according to his nature.

3. And David's knowledge of God's character led him to yet another insight. Because God is a Sovereign King ruling on His throne, he has the power to act in the defense of his people. And because God is righteous in his character, he will defend those who do right and oppose those who do wrong. When we sense the foundations crumbling beneath our feet, we must never underestimate the power of God.

READ 11:6.

⁶ On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot.

Now one of the major conflicts that we have when we sense foundations crumbling is with the injustice of it all. Sometimes it appears that only those who are dishonest or unethical in our day really get ahead in life. Only those who can shade the truth and speak out of both sides of his mouth can be a good politician. Those who are most aggressive in seeking to destroy the stable institutions of our society seem to be rewarded with honor and fame and money. Whatever happened to the honest person of integrity who faithfully performed his or her duty before God?

We need to remember that God is observing all that is going on here on the earth. And that even when he does not reward righteousness and punish wickedness immediately (as he sometimes does), there will be a day of reckoning coming. David realized this truth and it allowed him to maintain his integrity in an upside down world.

In 1620, a group of God-fearing people braved the storms of the Atlantic Ocean to come from England to America. We remember them today as the Pilgrims. By all rights, they never should have survived the trip - the odds were certainly stacked against them even surviving the trip across the ocean crammed in the belly of that ship. There had originally been 2 ships, but the one failed to pass the safety inspections. So all who had been booked on the 2 ships were crammed onto the one, the Mayflower. They left England at a very poor time for trans-Atlantic travel - but they were desperate people because the persecution had been so severe that they had suffered. As if the trip itself weren't bad enough, there was one salty seaman who was wicked and sadistic. He delighted in making fun of these landlovers who were not used to sea travel. He would taunt them and curse at them. He would constantly tell them that they would never make it - that they would all die at sea. And he would always conclude by saying that it was going to be his delight to bury them all at sea. Fishbait, that's what you will be, fishbait. But God was with those early Pilgrims and He honored their faith and courage. And every single passenger, every man, woman and child survived that voyage. Yes, history records for us that every person aboard the Mayflower survived that 67 day nightmare- that is except for one person. The only one who did not survive was that profane, godless sailor. Just past the halfway point, he fell mysteriously ill with a serious illness, and he died several weeks later in lingering agony. Our pilgrim fathers were convinced that his death was the result of God's justice, and they were undoubtedly right.

Usually God does not execute his judgments in such an immediate fashion. But his mercy and patience do not indicate weakness on his part. David realized this, and the fact of God's righteous character and his unchanging power gave to him the strength needed during those days when he sensed the foundations crumbling under him.

When one studies the character of God and realizes his awesome power to judge, one can and should become very fearful of such a mighty God. An omnipotent being who is committed by his character to rain fiery coals and burning sulfur on the wicked strikes great apprehension into our hearts. The image that David's words bring to mind is that of Sodom and Gomorrah burning in God's judgment. Perhaps that was the picture that David was seeing when he penned these words.

How happy we are that God has revealed to us that way to become righteous in his sight, and that way is not thru our own feeble attempts at good works. No, the Bible tells us that God's son, Jesus Christ, was made sin for us on the cross of Calvary so that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. 2 Cor. 5:21. God has provided the means for our becoming righteous like his is. God became man so that man could become like God. Jesus Christ came to earth and died so that we might thru him be able to attain the character of God. David knew that gracious God as well as the God of great wrath and judgment. David knew a God who forgave sins, as well as a God of power and justice. And this very God brought to David stability during the times when the foundations seemed to be crumbling all around him.

4. So then, David answers his question by remembering that God has not abdicated his throne, that his righteous character has not changed and that he remains a powerful God. The injustice that David was witnessing was not a testimony to God not caring, or God changing his standards or God being too weak to stop it. Not at all. God remained in the heavens the same God as always.

But notice now in closing with me a 4th insight which David shares. After reviewing the wonderful character of God, David concludes with the affirmation of fellowship with God.

READ 11:7.

⁷ For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face.

What has kept many a prisoner of war alive during the times when there appeared to be no hope was the mental image of his family and his hope that one

day he would be united in fellowship with them once again.

And what can keep the Christian faithful in service to the Lord during days when the foundations appear to be crumbling is the hope of one day being united with the Lord in fellowship forever. The righteous person, the upright person will one day see the face of God. And that will make every sacrifice in life worthwhile. Perhaps you are here this evening and you just feel like the foundations are crumbling under your feet. Perhaps you feel that your life is just falling apart. David knew just how you feel because he felt the same way. But David in spite of his feelings was able to gain strength from the Lord and go on to live a very product and successful life. He did this by affirming the fact that even in the midst of the storm, God is still on the throne in heaven, his character and his power remain unchanged. And he welcomes the fellowship of his people. He longs to reach down to them in their time of need and give to them sustaining strength and grace. And the one who lives the life of the righteous looks forward to eternal fellowship with Him in heaven.