

Grand Park July of, 1990 P.M.
Prayer meeting

"WHICH WAY AMERICA?"

Psalm 80

The 80th Psalm gives us a prayer and a call after the kingdom had been ravaged by the enemy, destruction had come,

The outline reveals some great needs. V. 1 - He calls to the shepherd of Israel, who leads Joseph as a flock. To once again turn them, restore their strength. Smile upon them in V. 3. That they might find salvation and be saved.

The prayer continues, Oh Lord, of the Sabbath - how long. V. 4. Will you look at our tears. We have been uprooted from Egypt. V. 7-8. And in V. 7 - he once again makes that plea. Turn us again, oh Lord, God of hosts. Then cause thy face to shine. That we shall be saved.

V. 8 - He continues his prayer by relating the experience of Egypt. They were planted among the other nations. And they filled up the country. But their fences have been destroyed in V. 12. And in V. 14 - they are like a vine that is unprotected. And he desires that the shepherd would visit. In V. 19 - the great prayer is heard again the third time. Turn us again, oh Lord, God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine and we shall be saved.

This is a great Psalm to consider as we approach July 4th.

The United States of America is actually a very young nation. The fact that we have spanned 202 years of history - has just about covered the lives of 4 presidents. When Thomas Jefferson died, Abraham Lincoln was a young man of 17. (Lincoln's) life was

short. When he died, Woodrow Wilson was a boy of 8. By the time President Wilson died, Gerald Ford had reached the age of 10. So we think of the years. The United States has risen rapidly.

But there is one thing before us - we could fall just as quick. Let us look at the question, as the Psalmist does here, which way Israel. Which way America?

In September 1976, there was a ban put on fireworks and it ran across the United States. From now on, July 4th will be a great deal quieter. But actually fireworks were very dangerous. But this kind of quietness, many people had lost their enthusiasm anyway. To celebrate our Birthday.

Time Magazine said the belief that America has created - a kind of Heaven on earth - has been badly damaged. People have been disillusioned.

A recent Harris survey, which was made in 1975, just 3 or 4 years ago - in which the public was in some degree questioned about their confidence. 9% expressed a great deal of confidence in our Congress. The Executive Branch rates a little bit higher with 11%. The public confidence in non-governmental groups rated a little better - 16% showed confidence in people running major businesses. 24% in those who lead organized religion. 23% in those who are our military leaders. 20% have confidence in the nation's press. But these votes are disappointing. We are experiencing material crisis. High prices, joblessness. But a spiritual depression. People are not happy. Many ordinary people have felt these things and these times for some time. In spite of the incredible past, in the United States - we have some serious problems.

Archibald McLeshe said, the founding of America was more than a political event. It was a promise to the colonies and to the world at large, that people could govern themselves. That they could live in freedom and equality. The assumption was that they would act in accord with reason and equity. And out of this came what we often call "The American Dream".

The hope of this dream is that our children could reach a level of well being and opportunity. But now many people wonder that our American dream has vanished. We have enemies. We have weaknesses.

What is this condition which makes sense. That we still find untreated.

First, (disillusionment and cynicism.) Some people have lost their enthusiasm about the future. There is a lack of old-fashioned trust and confidence in one another.

Second, there is a loss of (national integrity and character.) Everyone knows that crime is increasing. And violence throws a shadow over the security of our citizens. Stealing is epidemic. Divorce is shattering marriage at an astounding rate.

Third, the (pre-occupation with unworthy things.) Such as materialism. Sex. Pleasure. Here and now, within and without regard for others. We have lost much of the will to sacrifice for the good of others. And even for the national good.

Fourth, we have (lost our fear of God and our awareness of his sovereignty.)

And I think this is basic. As a nation, how far can we go before we reach the point of no return. Some people believe that we have already passed that point. There are those who think we lack the will and the determination to change the course of this nation.

When I speak of turning back, I do not mean mere reform or self-correction. I personally believe that it is too late for that. But I am talking about a sincere turning back to God for divine help and intervention.

Can a nation cry out to God for help when the essence of its problem lies in its lack of will to follow God? The answer is yes. God hears the weakest cry. And he responds.

The prophet Jeremiah in Lam. 5:21 - turn thou us, unto thee Oh Lord, and we shall be turned. This is what America needs as she celebrates her Birthday. And the prayer is the same prayer found in Psalm 80. It is fervent, it is earnest, turn us again oh God, and cause our face to shine, and we shall be saved.

Now this Psalm says three vital things.

I. WE NEED TO BE TURNED

We need God's help. We cannot turn ourselves by law. Or by education. Or by any other kind of rational choice. Our beloved America needs a change of heart.

Our problems are the problems of the inner life. It is the problem of

sinful wills. The bitter truth is America wants a new God. At least to fear him. In 200 years we have largely turned away. And this is not to say that ours has ever been a wholly Christian nation. But it does say, that we have known some moral and spiritual strength, that comes from fear of God. Awareness of the Bible. Faith in Jesus Christ.

In 200 years, we have moved a long way toward pride and trust in (men). We have not feared to push aside the word of God. We minimized the rights of God. And worst of all, we have heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but as a nation, we have given very light heed to it.

Romans 1:18 - For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness, of men - who hold the truth in unrighteousness. America's deepest sin is it's lack of esteem for the word of God. Although we have known the Gospel, we have held the truth carelessly and not as we should.

Therefore, the first vital thing is - we need to be turned.

II. WE NEED GOD'S TURNING

Now this sounds a little bit like the first point. Which we have made. We need to be turned - however, we need God's turning. Psalm 80 says, turn us again, oh God of hosts. Three times he says that. Only God can meet our need. He is the God of hosts of Heaven. And yet he knows the human heart.

And only God can change the heart. Your knowledge cannot do it. Your experience cannot do it. The law cannot do it. Now we can try to profit from past mistakes. And even make some good resolutions. We can put some restraints - but without the might of the Gospel of the cross, nothing will save us.

There is really only one doorway to eternal life. And that door is Jesus Christ. John 10:9. "I am the door, by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." Jesus did not die for nations - but for people, who constitute the nations. And no nation can rise upon the faith of the character of the individual citizens.

America has a choice to make. Either we must turn back to God by faith in Jesus, or we will join the fate of long forgotten nations. God warns Psalm 9:17 - the wicked shall be turned into Hell and all nations that forget God. Let me repeat, all the nations that forget God.

Therefore, these two vital things need to take place. We need to be turned and secondly, we need God's turning.

III. WE SHALL BE SAVED

What a prayer - how vital it is. Turn us again, oh Lord, God of hosts. Cause thy face to shine. When this happens and we shall be saved. Yes, God can meet our nation's need if we will sincerely call upon him and say, oh God, turn us. And cause his face to shine upon us, we shall be saved. That was the experience of Israel.

✓ Did you know, seven times in the period recorded, by the book of Judges - Israel fell away from God. Seven times in bitter bondage. Seven times in tears, Israel cried to God, and God delivered her every time.

God does respond to nations. Jer. 18:8. If that nation against whom I have pronounced, turned from their evil - I will repent of the evil that I thought to do under them.

|| Much more, God will not only just in withholding judgement as Jer. 24:7 says, and I will give them a new heart to know me - that I am the Lord. And they shall be my people and I will be their God for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.

I submit to you - America needs this - a change of heart. And only God can give that.

Arnold Toynbee, a historian said that 19 major civilizations had existed since the beginning of time. Only 5 remain today. Of which, our Western civilization is one.

But you say, we cannot turn the tide of unbelief. No, but God can!

Think of Ninevah, the capitol of the Syrian empire. It was like modern New York - a complex city. It was nearly 8 miles in circumference. Who does know the story of Jonah - the reluctant prophet who sailed the other way and refused to

preach repentance to the great city. Who does not know about the great fish that swallowed Jonah. And finally cast him on the shore. But what happened next. It was to Ninevah that God sent Jonah, finally ready to obey. His message was plain to the point. Chapter 3:4. (Yet 40 days) and Ninevah shall be overthrown. The Bible tells us the whole city repented - from the greatest to the least. And God in grace spared that city for more than another century.

Now we do not need a prophet like Jonah. We have had hundreds of Godly prophets. We have had the open word of God. But we do need to hear God's voice and turn to him before it is too late.

Now the future of America may lie in the hands of this present generation - before the next generation takes its place. America made be at a point of no return.

How will you cast your vote.

Can we trust - or be trusted with the future of the American dream. Even more important, do American Christians have the vision and the faith, to intercede and urge our nation back to her rightful God and sovereign. How many of you today would be willing to pray with the Psalmist. V. 3. Turn us again, oh God, and cause thy face to shine and we shall be saved.

The Saviour is waiting. When the prodigal son in the Gospel of Luke started for home, the father ran to meet him. It was an individual return and repentance.

If we make an individual turn and God's blessings will be upon us - and we shall be saved. As one person, will you make your decision to obey God's will. And as thousands of individuals turn to Jesus Christ, America will be turned.

Look at V. 18 - he says quicken us and we will call upon thy name. Quicken us. That's life. Faith is, we will call upon Thy name.

Turn us again. That means consecration.

Cause thy face to shine means fellowship. Fellowship with him.

We shall be saved - that is full salvation.

John - Teach our work -

Dr. Holcomb and job -

Prayer - "Give us this Day our Daily Bread"

Room - wit being -

only one left - we need one "left you and -

The Pulpit

of Walnut Street Baptist



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Published weekly by
Walnut Street Baptist Church,
220 W. St. Catherine,
Louisville, Ky. 40203

Second-class postage paid at Louisville, Ky.

Vol. IX

June 15, 1978

No. 24

GOD'S ANCHORS FOR LIFE'S STORMS Acts 27:26-29

Arrested in Jerusalem, Paul was taken to Caesarea for trial where he stayed two years. Finally, he decided he could not get an equitable and fair trial before the Roman authorities so he appealed to Caesar. As a Roman citizen he was entitled to this supreme court appeal. He was put on a ship and started on the journey to Rome for trial.

After switching ships halfway in the journey, Paul was now on a grain ship going from Alexandria to Rome. It was late summer and early fall, when the storms came upon the Mediterranean. Sailing along the island of Crete looking for a harbor for winter, they pulled into a place called Fair Havens, so small the captain decided this was not a good place for the moral of the crew to be there all winter. Up the coast some fifty miles was a port with a larger city.

So the soft winds blew, the scriptures say. Believing the seas would be calm and all would be well, the captain decided to make for the next port against Paul's advice. No sooner were they on the high seas when a storm - a northeaster - out of the Taurus mountains swept down with violence across the sea. It drove the ship across the stormy waters for fourteen days and nights. They saw neither sun nor stars nor moon. In utter despair, they gave up. The sailors said, Let's execute the prisoners on board and cast ourselves in the sea, literally, to commit suicide.

THE STORMS

The storms of life. It will not always be soft wind blowing and glassy seas. It will not always be a life free from care. The storms will come. Even as I marry a couple I say to them, God be with you in the days ahead, in the sunshine hours. The times of joy and happiness and victory and success will come as a part of life. But, also - may God be with you in the times of sorrow, distress and heartbreak and tension and conflict that come as a part of life.

How do we react to the storms? The storm of sickness - of financial despair and difficulty - of depression and discouragement, of shattered dreams of life.

Do we say, O God, why has this happened to me - how could you do this to me! Do we try to explain the storm, saying, God sent that storm down upon us - there must be some reason.

We seek out spiritual counsel. Tell me, preacher, why did this happen to me - what have I done so terrible? I have tried to serve God, and give my tithe, and be faithful in church. Why did God send this storm to me?

Look at the storm in the story - there is no explanation as to why this storm came upon them. It does not say God sent that storm. I can almost say that God does not send storms. There may be some rare occasions in life where God does send the circumstance to discipline us. When we get on the other side God will say, I do this to you to help you find a new way.

But storms come in life because of climatic conditions. Air pressures. The movement of the winds. Natural phenomena. And the storms come to your life and my life because the general trend of business brings financial bankruptcies to many people. God does not bankrupt you, circumstances do.

Cancer does not come because God says, I am going to lay cancer on you, and lay it on you, and exempt you from it. It comes because of a sickness in life that is general. There are medical reasons.

So we do not approach the storms of life by saying, Lord, explain to me why this happened. We must say, Life is full of storms, they are going to break, we do not understand why; but we have the promise of one who will be with us in the storms of life. He says, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

I think out of this simple story, concerning the storms that break upon us, there are three things I want to say.

First of all, as you have faith in God, do not lose your head in the storm of life. Do not panic. Do not throw up your hands and say, It is all over.

The sailors did. Kill the prisoners; let's jump overboard and try to swim for it. That was certain suicide. How many of us commit suicide, one way or another, in a rash panicky decision! The storm suddenly breaks; we go to pieces and decide impulsively to do something.

You say, How can you keep from going to pieces? How can you keep your head when a storm breaks and you are fourteen days and nights in the darkness! Did you ever feel like that?

Paul has the answer. Paul said, Last night I saw my God, face to face. He spoke to me and he said all is well. Your life is in my hands. You may lose the ship, but I have a purpose for your life. I have seen the face of God. I have had a personal experience with the living God.

That is where we go in the time of the storms of life - that is how you keep from losing your head. I know God; I have had a personal experience with the living Lord. I have talked to him. I know that somehow I am in his hands. I will not panic.

The second thing I see in this storm: Do not lose your courage. Do not give up. The sailors took down the sail - they threw the gear overboard - they threw the cargo overboard. Finally, Let's give up, let's quit.

Do not give up. We are whipped when we lose our courage. Paul said, Be of good cheer.

Then, third, do not lose the opportunity that comes. Every storm brings an opportunity to us. Every storm in life opens

the door for us to discover new powers and new potentialities within us. It opens the door for us to bear a Christian testimony we could not bear otherwise. Every time we go through the storms we preach a sermon by our attitudes.

I am sure Paul tried to preach sermons to these old hardened sailors and the captain and the owner of the ship. But they turned him off. As long as the seas were still and everything was going right, nobody wanted to listen to the preacher Paul.

But when the storm came, the door opened for Paul to stand up. With eager ears they said, Do you have a word for us? Tell us about your God now. I want to know about God who can take care of someone in a time like this. What an opportunity we have when everything is going to pieces. What an opportunity to say, God is with me and all is well.

A man of great wealth lost all he had, even his home. Someone said to him, I am so sorry, I understand you lost all. He said, Lost all? You're wrong. I did not lose everything I had. In fact, I haven't lost anything that is important.

I have a wonderful wife, she loves me, and we have a grand marriage. I have three wonderful children; they are a blessing to me and to God. We have a great church; I have a family of Christian friends. You would not believe the kind of friends I have - people that stand by you when you have problems and difficulties.

I have my health. I have my experience and my ability; nothing can take that away from me. I have not lost anything that is really important. I lost some things over here, but the real values of life - I still have them.

What a chance to preach! What an open door when the storm comes! Paul preached to them about his God.

So, the storm broke. Paul said, Do not lose your head - do not lose your courage - do not lose this opportunity to know God. Let him become real to you.

THE ANCHORS

As they came into the fourteenth night, they began to hear the roar of the waves breaking on the rocks. We are near land and the ship is driving in that direction; it sounds like rocks. We are going to be shipwrecked! And they began to panic again.

And Paul said, Throw out the anchors. Then fearing lest we should have fallen rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished - prayed - for the day.

Anchors - for the soul - in the storms of life. That is it. Ships have changed through the centuries. The mode of power from wind to sails to steam and diesel engines. The speed of ships radically changed, even to hydrofoils that skim across the top of the water. But one thing has not changed in all these thousands of years; that is the anchor.

The anchor is the sailor's last hope in the storm. When you can no longer guide and sail the ship by the wind or by the power-driven propellers - when the storm is so bad that all else fails - then you throw out an anchor. The sailor's last hope for salvation and security.

The anchor became one of the great symbols of the Christian faith. Even today you can walk in those subterranean tunnels of the catacombs in Rome and see on the walls those symbols of

their Christian faith - the fish, the dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit - and the anchor, a symbol of the Christian faith, no different than in Paul's day.

What are some of the anchors, then, that our Christian faith can give us? I would like to name four of them.

Implicit in this story, I see the anchor of hope. In fact, the word, anchor, is used only one other time in the New Testament. In Heb. 6:19, Paul says, We have fled for a refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast.

How important hope is. Doctors say when we lose hope, we lose the will to live. Do not let this patient give up or he will die.

Our faith is an anchor sure and steadfast for us because it gives us hope - hope that transcends the physical material world - hope that transcends this little span of life from birth to death - hope that transcends that six-foot ditch where we are thrown at the time of death - hope that transcends all of time and goes into eternity. The hope of eternal life in Jesus Christ himself. The hope of reunion with loved ones. The certainty that death cannot break a single relationship we have in Jesus Christ in this world.

My first church out of the Seminary was at Rogersville, a county seat town in East Tennessee. I was a young pastor with little experience in many of the pastoral duties and responsibilities. One of the first funerals I had was a tragic one.

During World War II a young man from out in the country was in the army at Ft. Jackson. He was to marry one of the fine girls of that church. The plans for the wedding were made. The boy was coming home on leave. On the very day he was to leave camp, the truck he was driving turned over and he was killed. He came home in a casket. Instead of the wedding in the church, we had his funeral.

What do you say to the young bride-to-be? What do you say to the widowed mother living on a tiny farm in the country? I did not know how to strengthen her; I needed help myself to understand this.

When I went to the home, the mother came to the door, her eyes red and bloodshot from lack of sleep; her face was drawn with care. But there was a strange smile and light in her eyes. As I spoke, I am so sorry - what can I say - let's read some scripture -- she said, Pastor, that's all right. Last night I could not accept this - I tossed all night. This morning I said, Oh, God, I can't believe in you.

But I had to write out the obituary for you and the funeral home. I got to the place where you are to write about the church. I wrote how in a revival service in our church, as a nine-year-old boy, he accepted Jesus as savior. He had been active in BYPU and president of his Union. He had been faithful in Sunday School. And he took his Bible with him when he went into service.

As I wrote all those things down, I suddenly realized how wonderful it is to be a Christian and how death cannot hurt a single thing. He has gone to be with the Lord and I am going to be with him, too. I will see him. That is the anchor of hope. What an anchor! Sure and steadfast. Life eternal in Jesus Christ.

Another anchor is duty. Paul said, Get to work. Untangle

the chains and get the anchors loose - throw them out and do your job as sailors. We are in a storm - get to work.

That duty that chafes upon us, that burden we carry, those obligations we have - I wish I could get rid of them. But they are really anchors for us.

Thank God for the anchors of duty and obligation and responsibility. For the man who says, I would quit but I cannot because of my family - my wife. Thank God for that wife and family. I would give up, I would go to pieces if it were not for so-and-so depending on me. Thank God for them.

In the time of sorrow, I say to many people, Get busy. Thank God for your job. Get back on the job. Get as busy as you can now. Your loved one has died. Don't sit around feeling sorry for yourself, looking in on yourself. Self-pity is the worst form of selfishness. Get busy. Duty. Obligation. Responsibility.

I will tell you I would be a very sorry person today if I had not been saddled with responsibilities and obligations all through the years. How many times I would have slipped and been the lesser of myself if my wife, or someone, had not said, Remember, you are a minister. a minister cannot do that. You cannot let down the bars. Live up to your obligations.

I chafe under it and say, I am tired of doing this and that just because I am a minister. Thank God for a family that demanded of me my best. Thank God for longterm pastorates that made me dig and study and study. God knows me. He knows how lazy I would be if I did not have the demands every week of a schedule.

Duty - what an anchor it is for us. Thank God for your obligations, for the demands life makes upon you.

Then I think of the anchor of prayer. They prayed for the morning. There comes a time when we have done all we can do and we say, O God, I am praying. Be with us. You have to lay it before the Lord. What an anchor prayer is.

And the anchor of patience. It says, They waited for the sun to rise and the storm to quit. You have to come to that place where you say, I am just waiting on the Lord. I have done my part. I have shouldered duty. I have thrown out the anchors. The last anchor, patience. Wait on the Lord. My life rests in his hands. He will take care.

I grew up in Oklahoma City First Baptist Church during the days of the depression. I remember some vivid experiences -- when there were 5,000 people living in a tent camp on the banks of the Canadian River - homeless people. I remember the figures quoted by the Salvation Army. We fed 8,000 people today in the soup line. One meal a day for people who did not have anything to eat. Just get in line.

I remember the story of a woman who came from the eastern mountains. She had been a school teacher and had lost her job. She came back and found her mother, an invalid, literally starving to death. This girl could not get a job anywhere.

She was a member of the First Baptist Church; the mother was, too. She came to see Dr. Holcomb - the pastor. I've got to do something. No jobs, no money - what can we do? He said, Yes, my dear, there are bricklayers and no bricks to lay. There are housebuilders and no homes to build. There are no jobs. Men are jumping out of the windows, two a day, committing suicide - downtown businessmen - because of the depression.

And there are no schoolteaching jobs, my dear. The only thing I know to do - let's get on our knees and pray. He had her repeat with him the Lord's Prayer. When they came to the place where it says, Give us this day our daily bread, the pastor interrupted and said, Do you really believe that? Pray it again. Give us this day our daily bread. She said, I believe it. That is what I need.

Dr. Holcomb told her, In the morning, you go down to this address - go in the room there. That is a store where they do some hiring sometimes. You will find the room full of people. There is a window and about eleven o'clock in the morning, they will open that window and the man will say, We're hiring, or, We're not hiring. You be there, they may have a job.

She went down the next day. The room was full with about fifty people. They sat and sat. Finally the window opened. The man said, We are not hiring today, and closed the window. Everybody left; she sat there stunned. She did not know what to say or do. Her faith began to go from her. Then she felt a tap on her shoulder. She looked up and there was that same man. He said, We had only one job, and I just looked out over the crowd and somehow I felt you needed a job and could do it. Would you come on back? She got the job and started to work at three o'clock that afternoon.

THE ULTIMATE ANCHOR

Oh, my friends, do you have that faith that is an anchor steadfast and sure. Notice how that anchor even looks like a cross. The cross of Jesus Christ, the anchor of our faith. In him we trust. We commit ourselves to him. He is the anchor. Would you make a decision for Jesus Christ today?

As preached June 11, 1978, transcribed and condensed with minor editorial changes. All rights reserved. Dr. Dehoney's messages now available on cassette tape. \$2 per tape (2 sermons). Order the tape and The Pulpit from the Walnut Street Baptist Church, 220 W. St. Catherine, Louisville, Ky. 40203.

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69

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