

STAY IN THE PLACE OF PRAYER

There's a wonderful verse in Ephesians 3:12 that says, **"In him and through faith in him, you may approach God with freedom and confidence."**

As I was preparing this message the Lord spoke to me through this verse, and I would like to share what he said:

"While men are seeking to take your freedoms and silence your voice, I am calling you into a place where you have freedom and you can speak boldly, says the Lord, and that place is before my throne, the throne of grace."

I believe there is an urgency for us as the body of Christ to rise up and pray. The title I have given to this message is: 'Stay in the Place of Prayer'.

1. STAY ON THE RIGHT SIDE

Let's begin by looking at a story from the life of Joshua. We are told in the book of Joshua that one day he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Now the children of Israel had just crossed into the land that God had promised to give them. The people in the land were their enemies, so who was this man?

Joshua challenges him, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" In other words, 'whose side are you on?'

- It's so easy for people to take sides on an issue isn't it? And there are plenty of issues currently that people are taking sides on. Often we become defensive of our side of the issue and relationships are affected.

But this man with the drawn sword replies, 'Neither'. Neither! How was that possible? He couldn't be in the middle! If he wasn't on Israel's side, then he was considered an enemy. The man continues, "Neither, but as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come."

- Surely if he was the Commander of the Lord's army he would be on Israel's side, after all God had made a covenant with Israel. Yet this man replied, 'Neither.'
- You see God is not on anyone's side – he is on the side of righteousness, justice and truth.
- It is not a matter of God being on their side, but them being on his side.
- The same is true for us.
- Christians often say, "God is on my side." And of course we have promises like, 'If God is for us who can be against us.' However God is only on our side, when we are on his. His side is always the side of righteousness, justice and truth.

These qualities are the foundation of God's throne.

Psalm 89:14

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness (or truth) go before you.

Psalm 97:2

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne.

Psalm 85:13

Righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps.

We are seeing righteousness, justice and truth being eroded from our society at an alarming rate, and this is happening all around the world.

- The Bible is very clear that **'righteousness exalts a nation.'** Proverbs 14:34
- When a nation has been built on righteous laws, based on God's Word and there has been true justice, then that nation has prospered.
- We have seen that here in New Zealand, but those foundations are quickly being eroded.

God is calling us, his people, to stand with him on the side of righteousness, justice and truth – and to pray.

- Our battle is not against people, or leaders – not against flesh and blood, but it is against the powers of darkness that influence and control people in places of authority.
- And we do that battle on our knees.

Whenever the Children of Israel moved camp in the wilderness they were to move in a certain formation. God gave detailed instructions that the 12 tribes were to be divided into 4 groups of 3 tribes in each group.

- The Ark of the Covenant would go first, and a pillar of cloud would cover it during the day and fire at night. This represented the throne of God.
- The first group to follow the Ark was led by the tribe of Judah and they carried a banner or a flag with a lion on it.
- The next group was led by the tribe of Reuben, carrying the flag with a man's head.
- The third group was led by Ephraim, carrying a flag with an ox on it.
- Finally the tribe of Dan with a flag of an eagle.

Why was this so important?

In the book of Revelation John saw the Throne of God and surrounding the throne were 4 living creatures – one was like a lion, one like a man, one like an ox, and the fourth like an eagle.

- So as the people set out the throne of God went before them, and the tribes were like those gathered around his throne. It was as if the glory of God was moving forward.
- Moses would cry out: **"Rise up O Lord! May your enemies be scattered. May your foes flee before you."**

The Lord is calling us to cry out: “Rise up O Lord. Let righteousness, justice and truth prevail, and your enemies be scattered.”

As the glory of God increases in our midst, and we welcome his presence through our worship and prayer, and our love for him – the powers of darkness will be driven back. So let’s stay on God’s side.

Secondly, we need to stay united together.

2. STAY TOGETHER IN UNITY

Let’s look at another incident from the journey of Israel in the wilderness. After leaving Egypt and crossing the Red Sea, the people headed towards Mount Sinai. They came to a place called Rephidim. Apparently it was a beautiful fertile oasis, with palm trees and a spring. They were expecting to find water there, but there was none.

- So the people began to complain and grumble. There was division and discontent. After all they had seen God do, you would think they would pray, but no they blamed Moses!
- Moses cried out to God, and he told him to strike a rock – water gushed out.

Immediately after this, they were attacked by the Amalekites.

- When God’s people grumble or are divided, it opens a door for the enemy to attack.
- That’s true in our lives, in our families and of course the church too, so we need to stay in unity.

The Children of Israel were attacked by these Amalekites. These people were the descendants of Esau, and known as the ‘people of the valley.’ Perhaps this area was important to the Amalekites too as it was a fertile area.

- Moses tells Joshua to gather some men to go out and fight, to protect their families.
- And he said, while you fight, I will pray. Let’s read from the book of Exodus.

Exodus 17:10-13

¹⁰ So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. ¹¹ As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. ¹² When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. ¹³ So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

- Moses stood on the hill overlooking the Oasis and he raised his hands as an act of prayer, worship and intercession.
- But whenever he lowered his arms, the enemy would begin to overcome Joshua.
- Aaron and Hur rolled a rock over for Moses to sit on, and they held up his arms.
- At sunset they had won the victory – phew that was a long day for Moses!

Lessons we can learn from this story:

1. Leaders can also get tired! They are only human, and need others to support them. Moses could not have got his arms raised without the help of Aaron and Hur.
2. However what I want to emphasize is how this story beautifully demonstrates what God can do when his people work together. Joshua and the men were on the battle front, Moses spent the time in prayer and worship, while Aaron and Hur supported him.

Years ago I was invited to attend a prayer gathering in Genting Highlands in Malaysia. There were intercessors there from all over South East Asia, including New Zealand. It was an amazing time and I saw demonstrated how God could use people in prayer in different ways, just as he did during this battle at Rephidim.

God began to stir my heart to do something similar in Sarawak. And so we had our first gathering in Kuching. There was about 20 of us from different parts of the country and different churches, all with the same desire to pray for God to move in our land. We met for 4 days, and we continued to meet each year in different places.

What we discovered is that God used each one in different ways, just as I had seen at that gathering I had attended in Genting Highlands. One of the ladies often saw pictures, but she didn't always understand what God was saying, but God revealed that to another. Then there were those who moved in deep levels of intercession with tears and groaning. Another saw in the realm of the Spirit and sometimes saw angels around us. Then there were those who seemed to be used more in standing against the enemy's plans, while others were used powerfully in worship and dance. We learnt to flow together under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. What a privilege to be part of God's army!

We need to understand that God does use us differently – not just in the things we do, but even in praying together. Some are like Moses, who intercede, others more like Aaron and Hur, who support with their 'amen', while others, like Joshua, come against the enemy. You may feel inadequate, or that you can't pray as well as someone else, but prayer is not a speech – it is you pouring out your heart to the Lord, or agreeing with what others pray. God is calling all of us to rise up and pray – so don't let the enemy whisper in your mind that you can't pray well.

- Let's go back to the story at Rephidim. By sunset they overcame the Amalekites – they had worked together and God had given them victory.
- Moses built an altar to offer thanks and praise to God, and he declared '**The Lord is my Banner.**' He is the one who gave the victory and he was the one who received the glory.
- When we see answers to prayer, no one is praised for being the best pray-er! It is God who gets the praise and honor.

We are under the Banner of the Lord Jesus Christ – and he is calling us to stand together on his side, to see God arise, to see his Kingdom come and his will be done.

As it says in Isaiah 60:1 **"Arise shine for your light has come and the glory of the Lord rises upon you."**

3. STAY SAFE IN THE SHELTER OF THE MOST HIGH

Often we hear the phrase today 'stay safe' 'be safe' 'keep safe' and these days this is often linked with 'stay at home'. And we need to follow the directives we have been given.

However for us as believers there is a place where we are truly safe – it isn't a physical place, but a spiritual place. We read about this in Psalm 91.

Psalm 91:1-4

**1 Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.**

**2 I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."**

**3 Surely he will save you
from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.**

**4 He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.**

We are not sure if this Psalm was written by Moses or King David, but it doesn't matter. It is a wonderful Psalm that God has used to strengthen his people down through the centuries. It begins by giving us 3 pictures that show how God takes care of us.

Three Pictures of God's Protection

1. Shelter of the Most High

- Some translations say 'secret place' or 'hiding place', and it means all of those things – shelter, safe place, place of protection, a secret place where to you are kept from the enemy.
- Children love to play hide and seek don't they? I grew up on a ¼ acre section and there were so many place to hide. We had a huge hedge down one side of our property and there were so many places you could crawl into under that hedge, places that kept you hidden and safe.
- God is like that place for his children. We are safe in him, kept hidden from the enemy.

2. Shadow of the Almighty

- This really means to be under his covering.
- Recently the playground in the park by us was renovating and they put shades up. Those shades produce shadows that give shelter from the heat of the sun.
- God is like that for his children.

3. Under his wings v4

- Doesn't that bring the picture to your mind of a mother bird sheltering her baby chicks.
- God keeps us safe when we remain in him, or dwell in him.

This is the only place where we are protected from the enemy. That place 'in him'.

We had a family in our church in Malaysia who had a young son called Albert. The mum was one of our wonderful Sunday school teachers. The children had all learnt Psalm 91 and so one Sunday Albert recited it in the church. Unbeknown to us Albert had recently been to the doctor as he wasn't well. The day after we heard him recite that Psalm they were given the results of the tests – he had leukaemia.

The family were facing a battle, but the church family rallied – this became our battle. Someone made a bookmark with Psalm 91 on it and we all had one in our Bibles. In those days we took paper Bibles to church! We read Psalm 91, prayed it, claimed it, held onto its' promises. And Albert was healed.

You see Psalm 91 is full of wonderful promises of what God does for us when we stay in his protection.

Psalm 91:3

'Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence.'

- The fowler's snare is someone who traps birds. We have an enemy, Satan, who seeks to trap us.
- The verse then it goes on and says that God will save you 'from the deadly pestilence'.
- This is mentioned again in v6: **'the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.'**
- This is what we are facing right now – a deadly pestilence, a plague, a pandemic.
- This doesn't mean we take the situation lightly and become careless. In fact Satan quoted from verses in this Psalm to tempt Jesus, telling him to cast himself off the temple and the angels would lift him up. Jesus refused.
- However we need to take a hold of God's promises! Let's spend more time listening to them, rather than listening to the news, more time reading his promises than reading the news, because when we do, v5 will be true in our lives:

Psalm 91:5

"You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day."

Our true safe place is IN Him – and when we are in that safe place fear cannot overtake us. In fact it says later in this Psalm, we will tread on the lion and the serpent.

- If we are going to be effective in prayer and to come against the enemy's schemes, then we can't walk in fear. We only overcome the enemy when we walk in faith and faith comes from hearing the Word of God. It is from that safe place in him, that God can use us to stand with him on the side of righteousness, justice and truth.

CONCLUSION

As you come to the end of Psalm 91 it moves from the third person – ‘he will save you’ to the first person. God is speaking directly to us and he gives 7 wonderful promises:

I will rescue him

I will protect him

I will answer him

I will be with him in trouble

I will deliver him and honour him

I will satisfy him with long life

I will show him my salvation

God is saying – “because you love me, because you acknowledge my name”, this is what I will do for you. “I will rescue you, protect you....”

So let’s stay on the right side – God’s side, the side of righteousness, justice and truth. Let’s rise up and declare, as Moses did, ‘Let God arise.’ Let’s stay together as one in Christ – so we can move as an army, led by the Spirit and see darkness pushed back. Guard your heart against fear and stay in that secret place where he promises to keep you safe and he with you in trouble.