

Psalm 124

This world can be inhospitable. We can frustrate ourselves by expecting it to be more like heaven. If God wanted us in heaven right now; we would be there. There are just some things that cannot be done from heaven. Jesus came to earth, for that same reason. This world provides a series of opportunities for salvation. It is not only broken; but purposefully so.

God has been showing me that a mental recalibration is in order. I can dedicate my waking hours to *mapping out the monsters in the road* if I let my imagination carry me away. I have spent a lot of anxious moments over how things may or may not come together in my life. Perhaps all of these mini-dramas and villains in our lives are just good casting for a mini-series for the gospel.

There needs to be a villain in every compelling movie. We love the stories of David becoming *the people's choice*, partially because Saul kept hunting him down. We love the story of Joseph partially because his own brothers *sold him down the river*. God delivers his saints supernaturally. I can also reflect Christ in my daily challenges.

Life's surprises create a platform for the gospel. Living here requires divine assistance. We are like *tea bags* that get into *hot water* from time to time. I can say that things get spiritual when the heat turns up in my life. All of a sudden it becomes very easy to talk about God.

God also uses trials to sober up the world to some hard realities. The further that men walk away from God, the more dangerous it becomes. The world is a series of U-turn signs. There was a song by Glen Frye of the Eagles in the 80's called the Smugglers Blues that captured this dog eat dog, heartless world. The most-evil men have even more perils than the rest of us.

You see it in the headlines, you hear it every day
They say they're gonna stop it, but it doesn't go away
They move it through Miami and sell it in L.A.
They hide it up in Telluride, I mean it's here to stay
It's propping up the governments in Columbia and Peru
You ask any D.E.A. man, he'll say there's nothing we can do
From the office of the president right down to me and you
Me and you
It's a losing proposition, but one you can't refuse
It's the politics of contraband, it's the smugglers' blues
Smuggler's blues

As Christians, we can find ourselves in dangerous situations, even though we may be minding our own business. Our natural reaction is to strike back or get away when we are blindsided. We need to pause and gather ourselves. We are entering another *opportunity for the gospel*. When evil men put us in *hot water* they will *taste our tea* too. The question is what flavor will people taste coming out of us in a hot trial? Will they taste the bitterness, in our soul for what they have done to us...or will they find something else? If we want to help gain a *first down for the kingdom*, then we need to get out of the focus; and somehow let God be the star. We are just messengers; not stars.

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. (Matthew 10:16-20)

Close Calls

Read Psalm 124:1-5: How many of us have had close calls in our lives? Perhaps there was a random pause at a traffic light when a car came speeding through. Perhaps you had a bout with a deadly disease. Perhaps a heavy piece of equipment or materials swung right where you were standing. **Name a close call that you have had.**

The writer knows better than to attribute *chance* or *good luck* to his escape from some life-and-death situations. There is no such thing as *random or coincidental*. Part of Christian maturity is just *recognizing God’s hidden blessings and protections* that blend in around us each day. I have seen that I am not lacking in daily miracles. I just have my back to them, as I stare at the next challenge. I am starting to keep a written inventory of today’s blessings and answered prayers. It’s an eye opener.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, *Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction,* who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s. (Psalm 103:2-5)

David made a lot of enemies. He had a target on his back from the day he stepped out in faith to kill Goliath. God's people have an enemy of their soul. You can characterize demons as *parasites sucking our energy in daily disappointments*, or like *spiders trapping their prey with alluring and entangling webs*. You can describe Satan like a *roaring lion* or a *trapper*. The devil and his demons become more active against us as we step out in faith. They want to turn off our lights.

For the enemy has persecuted my soul; He has crushed my life to the ground; He has made me dwell in darkness, Like those who have long been dead. Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me; My heart within me is distressed.
(Psalm 143:3-4)

We have talked about how trials serve to mature our faith; and force us into a better prayer life. The devil wants us to *abandon ship* or run away from our post. We cannot minister to anyone if we lose our composure and have no peace. I cannot hardly read my bible or pray if I am overwhelmed. If I do not feel good about myself, I am not going to effectively minister to others. Some problems in life can be solved by humbling ourselves and acting in deference to others. Other problems *chase us around*. There is nowhere to run from our problems. We have learned that only God can deliver us. It is more common to deliver us *through* the trial than *from* the trial. They are equally miraculous.

From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.
(John 6:66-68)

It is helpful to see the big picture, instead of obsessing over how unfair something feels to us. Sometimes we are set *within a cast of characters*. Hopefully we are the good guy. People are not generally moved by success as much as they are compelled by the underdog. David, Joseph and Daniel became some of the most inspirational biblical characters because of their unfair treatment.

One reason that we are like *lightning rods for Christ* is that God allows all the bad actors to *show their true colors* with what appears to be total impunity. I have to look like a tempting piece of *alligator bait* to attract the more careful predators around me. **How many times have you been placed into a situation where you have a strong sense of the right thing to do; but you are being blocked ?**

Predicaments come up for a reason. What seems to be the way forward is often not. Sarah took matters into her own hands; when it looked like God was not

doing anything. King Saul made some bootleg decisions against what Samuel told him, *when it looked like he had to save the day*. In both cases, God memorialized these situations. Our human logic can be used to override God's word. We miss out on something that is not even in our thinking when we reach out to save the day. We derail our own blessings.

God lets things *go south* in our world to make needed changes. Sometimes creatures of habit need a new rut to travel in. God also likes to unveil what is hidden. God allowed Satan to rise up take 1/3 of the angels with him to go their own way. God always knew who his holy angels were, and who were going along reluctantly. Lucifer unknowingly did God's work for him by *creating a tempting free choice*. Lucifer only served as a catalyst to bring true intentions to the surface. So it is with us as *harmless doves* amidst wolves. In the same way, the nation Israel looks like a *tempting morsel* to Russia and Iran. They are judging themselves without knowing it.

'Thus says the Lord GOD: "On that day it shall come to pass that thoughts will arise in your mind, and you will make an evil plan: You will say, 'I will go up against a land of unwalled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates' — to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places that are again inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land. (Ezekiel 38:10-12)

God stood back and allowed the demonic realm to think that they were getting away with something time and time again in order to show how his judgement is accurate and righteous.

With Him are strength and prudence. The deceived and the deceiver are His. He leads counselors away plundered, And makes fools of the judges. He loosens the bonds of kings, And binds their waist with a belt. He leads princes away plundered, he deprives the trusted ones of speech, And takes away the discernment of the elders. He pours contempt on princes, And disarms the mighty. He uncovers deep things out of darkness And brings the shadow of death to light.
He makes nations great, and destroys them; He enlarges nations, and guides them. He takes away the understanding of the chiefs of the people of the earth, And makes them wander in a pathless wilderness. They grope in the dark without light, And He makes them stagger like a drunken man. (Job 12:16-25)

Jesus came as a spotless lamb, in his first coming to the earth. He let men do to him as they pleased; though he had the power to stop it. That would not have happened if he came as a lion. It seemed like the Pharisees and priests trapped Jesus. The truth is that Jesus trapped them all at the cross.

No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. (John 10:18)

Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. (Colossians 2:15)

You could say that taking the torch of faith includes knowing that we are almost *calling fire upon ourselves*. We know that God is our shield and our rock and our fortress; but attacks will surely come.

While he was still speaking, another also came and said, “The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them; and I alone have escaped to tell you!” (Job 1:16)

Demonic forces are often compared to opposing winds. The best sailing is essentially straight into the wind. We should re-characterize how we view these unwelcomed setbacks. Most of what seems like a curse is actually a blessing.

Jesus is defeating every opponent to our peace. It takes a while for us to *buy into it and trust the process*.

Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, got into the boat, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them. Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing. So when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near the boat; and they were afraid. But He said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going. (John 6:16-21)

I have asked God to use me or to increase my fellowship with him at different times over the years...only to find myself *up to my eyeballs in alligators* (so to speak). I really expected more of a *peaceful walk through the garden* with a song in my heart. It is a scary thing to be attacked; but being divinely-rescued glorifies God.

The bible uses floods in this psalm to describe *death situations*. Noah's flood was the largest loss of life of all times. The bible also uses the imagery of streams that

overflow their banks as *threats from various nations*. A streams and rivers have specific origins; making it like a nation. Streams and rivers often serve as national boundaries. When a stream floods it is going outside of its historic boundaries and invading the adjacent lands. In the same way; neighboring nations can rise up and venture out with malicious intentions.

Hunter or Hunted?

Read Psalm 124:6-8: We are compared to a hunted animal. God does not make us so powerful that we overpower our trappers and hunters. That would result in more pride and independence from God. He pulls us out of their nets and traps. We are like sheep that can easily be consumed; but God rescues us.

But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep his father’s sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.” (1 Samuel 17:34-36)

We are like recon Marines who are not supposed to engage the enemy. We are just to call in air strikes in enemy territory.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

Daniel was known for doing the right thing; and he was thrown into the lion's den. As men, we want to have self-determinate lives and solve our own problems. We want to be able to fight our own battles. It is hard to get excited about being the one rescued. We need to be prayerful to all who are watching...not to just get out of it.

Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm.... Then these men said, “We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God.”... So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. ... Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and

shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you." Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God. (Daniel 6 various verses)