

Psalm 37:1-11
August 5, '18

“HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL”

THIS SUMMER, WE’VE BEEN ENGAGED IN A SERIES WITH THE ALBATROSS OF A TITLE – “*MOVIES, BOOKS & SONGS WITH A SPIRITUAL MESSAGE THAT AREN’T NECESSARILY RELIGIOUS.*”

THIS IS THE FINAL SEGMENT OF THE BOOKS PORTION OF THE SERIES AND I ADMIT TO A BIT OF CHEATING WITH THIS ONE.

I SAY THAT BECAUSE MOST OF YOU WILL KNOW THE *MOVIE* VERSION OF THIS BOOK BUT FEW OF YOU PROBABLY EVEN KNOW THAT THE MOVIE YOU SO DEARLY LOVE IS BASED ON A BOOK.

IT’S ACTUALLY A NOVELLA WHICH MEANS IT’S A LONG STORY & IT’S REALLY A NOVELLA THAT’S BASED ON A *SHORT* STORY.

THE SHORT STORY ON WHICH IT’S BASED WAS WRITTEN BY LEO TOLSTOY, SO I SUPPOSE – HAVING LOOKED AT A DOSTOEVSKY NOVEL LAST WEEK – YOU COULD SAY THAT THIS IS A SUB-SERIES OF A SUB-SERIES OF AN OVER-ALL SERIES WITH THIS PARTICULAR SUB-SUB-SERIES BEING “RUSSIAN WRITINGS.”

THE SERMON TITLE TODAY – “*HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL*” - IS ACTUALLY THE SUBTITLE OF THE PARTICULAR NOVELLA & IT’S A PERFECT FIT FOR THE STORY & A PERFECT FIT FOR THE 37TH PSALM AS WELL.

WE’VE BEEN STUDYING THE BOOK OF PSALMS IN OUR ADULT SUMMER SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS & WE’VE BEEN ENCOURAGED TO READ THROUGH ALL THE PSALMS THIS SUMMER.

I’VE ALWAYS BEEN FASCINATED BY THE WAY IN WHICH THE PSALMS ARE SO HONEST.

THE VARIOUS WRITERS – DAVID & OTHERS – DON'T HOLD BACK ANYTHING AS THEY OPENLY & HONESTLY EXPRESS THEIR EMOTIONS.

SOMETIMES IT'S JOY & OTHER TIMES IT'S DESPAIR.

IT MIGHT BE AN EXPRESSION OF DEEP SORROW OR OVERWHELMING PRAISE.

THERE'S DISCOURAGEMENT MINGLED WITH HOPE.

SOMETHING ELSE THE PSALM WRITERS AREN'T HESITANT TO EXPRESS IS THEIR ANGER – ANGER AT GOD OR ANGER AT THEIR ENEMIES.

SOMETIMES IT FEELS VERY UNCOMFORTABLE TO READ THE WORDS OF THE PSALMIST AS HE HOPES & PRAYS FOR THE VIOLENT DESTRUCTION OF HIS ENEMIES.

IT FEELS ODDLY OUT-OF-SYNC WITH SO MUCH OF THE REST OF SCRIPTURE.

BUT THAT'S WHERE THE HONESTY OF THE PSALMIST IS SO VERY CLEAR.

LET'S FACE IT – WE ALL HAVE TIMES WHEN WE EXPERIENCE THE SAME FEELINGS THAT ARE EXPRESSED IN THE PSALMS – THOSE TIMES WHEN WE WISH THAT GOD WOULD SIMPLY DESTROY OUR ENEMIES IN THE MOST VIOLENT FASHION IMAGINABLE.

THE 37TH PSALM IS NOT A FAMILIAR ONE – IT'S NOT LIKE THE 23RD OR 46TH OR 53RD OR 100TH OR 150TH.

IN FACT, ONE COMMENTATOR BEGINS HIS ANALYSIS OF THIS PSALM WITH THESE SURPRISINGLY CRITICAL WORDS – *“PSALMS ARE OF DIFFERENT QUALITIES – AND THIS IS NOT ONE OF THE GREATEST.”*

PERSONALLY, I REALLY LIKE THIS PSALM BECAUSE IT GIVES US A GOOD OVERVIEW OF WHAT WE FIND IN SO MANY OF THE OTHER PSALMS.

THE WRITER ADDRESSES THE ISSUE OF “WAITING” & HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO WAIT FOR GOD’S DELIVERANCE IN OUR LIVES.

HE ADDRESSES THE ISSUE OF THE ANGER & FRUSTRATION WE FEEL WHEN WE SEE THE WICKED PROSPER WHILE THOSE WHO ARE RIGHTEOUS ARE OPPRESSED.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, HE WRAPS THOSE TWO TOGETHER WITH A MESSAGE OF UNWAVERING HOPE EVEN IN THE MIDST OF WAITING & EVEN IN THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR.

TO ME, THESE ELEMENTS MAKE THIS A PSALM FOR OUR DAY & FOR OUR LIVES.

FIRST OF ALL, THERE’S WAITING.

WAITING IS SOMETHING THAT – WITHIN THE CHURCH – WE MOST OFTEN ASSOCIATE WITH THE SEASON OF ADVENT.

BUT WAITING IS FOR ALL SEASONS OF THE YEAR & ALL SEASONS OF LIFE.

WE WAIT FOR DELIVERANCE FROM SOMETHING THAT WEIGHS US DOWN.

WE WAIT FOR GOD TO ACT IN THE WORLD & IN OUR LIVES, BRINGING US TO A BETTER PLACE – PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY OR SPIRITUALLY.

SECONDLY, THE PSALMIST ADDRESSES THE ANGER & FRUSTRATION THAT WE FEEL WHEN WE SEE EVIL PREVAIL IN OUR WORLD.

WE KNOW WHAT THAT’S LIKE.

WE KNOW THE ANGER & THE FRUSTRATION WE EXPERIENCE WHEN IT SEEMS AS THOUGH EVIL HAS WON THE DAY.

WE SEE IT ALL AROUND US & DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW IT CAN BE ALLOWED TO CONTINUE UNABATED – HOW IT CAN BE ACCEPTED – HOW IT CAN BE NORMALIZED & EVEN CELEBRATED AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

FINALLY – AND MOST IMPORTANTLY – THE PSALMIST ADDRESSES THE ELUSIVENESS OF HOPE THAT MUST ALWAYS BE MAINTAINED IN THE MIDST OF OUR WAITING & IN THE THROES OF OUR ANGER & FRUSTRATION OVER THE EVILDOERS AROUND US.

THREE TIMES WITHIN THE VERSES WE'VE READ THIS MORNING, THE PSALMIST SAYS – “*FRET NOT...*”

IT'S AKIN TO THE “*FEAR NOT...*” THAT WE READ ALL THROUGH THE BIBLE.

“*FRET NOT*” & “*FEAR NOT,*” THE PSALMIST SAYS, “*FOR IN THE END, GOD WILL PREVAIL. YOUR FAITHFULNESS WILL BE REWARDED. DON'T GIVE IN TO THE EVILDOERS. DON'T ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE SUCKED IN BY THEIR EVIL WORDS & WAYS AND DON'T ALLOW YOURSELF TO SINK TO THE SAME LEVEL OF DESPICABLE BEHAVIOR.*”

OVER & OVER AGAIN – HERE AND ELSEWHERE IN THE PSALMS – WE HEAR THESE WORDS – “*THEY WILL SOON FADE LIKE THE GRASS, AND WITHER LIKE THE GREEN HERBS.*”

NOWHERE IS THIS MORE CLEAR THAN JUST A COUPLE VERSES AFTER THE ONES WE'VE READ THIS MORNING WHERE THE PSALMIST SAYS, “*...THE LORD LAUGHS AT THE WICKED, FOR HE SEES THAT HIS DAY IS COMING.*”

BUT, SERIOUSLY, CAN WE BELIEVE ALL OF THAT?

CAN WE BELIEVE THAT THE WICKED “*WILL SOON FADE LIKE THE GRASS?*”

CAN WE BE EXPECTED TO BELIEVE THAT “*THE WICKED WILL BE CUT OFF*” OR THAT THE LORD “*LAUGHS AT THE WICKED, FOR HE SEES THEIR DAY IS COMING?*”

THE ANSWER OF THE PSALMIST IS A RESOUNDING “*YES!*”

YES, WE CAN BELIEVE IT & THIS MAY BE THE MESSAGE THAT MANY OF US DESPERATELY NEED TO HEAR.

THE PSALMIST IS TELLING US THAT THE WICKED MAY NOW HAVE THE UPPER HAND.

HE’S TELLING US THAT EVILDOERS DO PROSPER.

HE’S TELLING US THAT MANY OF THEM ARE SHAMELESSLY BRAZEN IN THEIR SCHEMES TO PLOT AGAINST THOSE WHO PUT THEIR TRUST IN THE LORD, REGARDING THEM AS LIFE’S LOSERS.

BUT THE PSALMIST ALSO ASSURES US THAT GOD WILL NOT BE MOCKED.

GOD’S EYE IS UPON THOSE WHO HUNGER & THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

HE ASSURES US THAT GOD’S JUDGMENT & RECOMPENSE WILL ARRIVE – SOONER OR LATER, IT WILL ARRIVE.

THE FINAL TWO VERSES OF THIS PSALM AFFIRM THE ULTIMATE HOPE OF THE WHOLE THING – “*THE SALVATION OF THE RIGHTEOUS IS FROM THE LORD; HE IS THEIR REFUGE IN THE TIME OF TROUBLE. THE LORD HELPS THEM & RESCUES THEM; HE RESCUES THEM FROM THE WICKED, AND SAVES THEM, BECAUSE THEY TAKE REFUGE IN HIM.*”

THAT CAN TAKE US BACK TO THE BOOK – OR MOVIE, OR NOVELLA – FROM WHICH WE GET OUR SERMON TITLE THIS MORNING – “*HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL.*”

AS I SAID, IT'S THE SUBTITLE OF THE NOVELLA WITH THE MAIN TITLE BEING *"RITA HAYWORTH & THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION,"* WRITTEN BY STEPHEN KING & BASED ON A SHORT STORY OF LEO TOLSTOY ENTITLED, *"GOD SEES THE TRUTH, BUT WAITS."*

THE MOVIE, OF COURSE, IS "THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION."

I ASSUME MOST OF YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH IT, BUT IF NOT, HERE'S A THREE-SENTENCE SYNOPSIS:

A BANKER NAMED ANDY DUFRESNE IS CONVICTED OF TWO MURDERS HE DIDN'T COMMIT AND SPENDS 28 YEARS IN PRISON BEFORE HE ESCAPES AFTER BEING USED BY THE WARDEN TO LAUNDER MONEY.

DUFRESNE REVEALS THE WARDEN'S CRIMES WHICH LEAD TO HIS DEMISE – IN THE MOVIE, BY SUICIDE & IN THE BOOK, BY A DISGRACED RESIGNATION.

DUFRESNE, WHILE IN PRISON, HAS MANAGED TO ACCUMULATE A RATHER SIZABLE BANK ACCOUNT & A NEW IDENTITY AND IS JOINED BY HIS CLOSEST FRIEND & FELLOW INMATE IN A NEW LIFE IN MEXICO ON THE PACIFIC COAST.

THERE IT IS – "RITA HAYWORTH & THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION" IN THREE SENTENCES.

OTHER THAN THE MOVIE BEING BASED ON A STEPHEN KING BOOK, THERE ARE PROBABLY SOME OTHER THINGS MOST OF YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT "SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION."

THE INITIAL HOPE WAS THAT TOM CRUISE WOULD BE CAST IN THE ROLE OF ANDY DUFRESNE & HARRISON FORD THAT OF "RED" – THE ROLES THAT ULTIMATELY WENT TO TIM ROBBINS & MORGAN FREEMAN.

IT'S REALLY HARD TO IMAGINE ANYONE – EVEN TOM CRUISE & HARRISON FORD – IN THOSE ROLES OTHER THAN TIM ROBBINS & MORGAN FREEMAN.

IF YOU READ THE BOOK, IT'S VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE *NOT* TO READ IT IN THE VOICE OF MORGAN FREEMAN BECAUSE IT'S TOLD FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FREEMAN'S CHARACTER, RED.

IN THE BOOK, THOUGH, RED WAS A RED-HAIRED IRISHMAN!

A SUBTLE LITTLE VISUAL JOKE IN THE MOVIE THAT CAN EASILY BE OVERLOOKED IS THE PLACEMENT OF ANDY'S ROCK HAMMER IN THE CARVED-OUT SPOT IN HIS BIBLE.

IT'S RIGHT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE BOOK OF EXODUS.

THOUGH THE MOVIE WAS SET IN MAINE, IT WAS FILMED IN MANSFIELD, OHIO AND MANY OF THE LOCATIONS STILL REMAIN AS THEY WERE IN THE FILM.

IT'S FASCINATING TO WALK THE STREETS OF MANSFIELD AND RECOGNIZE MANY OF THE FAMILIAR SCENES.

IT'S THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK, THOUGH, THAT RESONATES SO CLEARLY WITH THIS PSALM.

IT'S ABOUT ANDY DUFRESNE WAITING IN PATIENCE & IN HOPE, KNOWING THAT THE EVILDOERS' DAY WOULD END & THAT HE – IN HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS – WOULD RECEIVE GOD'S FAVOR & FIND HIS FREEDOM.

IN RED'S WORDS IN THE BOOK, HE TALKS ABOUT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ANDY & MOST OTHER PRISONERS.

HE SAYS THAT ANDY HAD “...*A FEELING OF INNER PEACE, MAYBE EVEN A CONSTANT & UNWAVERING FAITH THAT SOMEDAY THE LONG NIGHTMARE WOULD END.*”

WHATEVER YOU WANT TO CALL IT, ANDY DUFRESNE ALWAYS SEEMED TO HAVE HIS ACT TOGETHER.

THERE WAS NONE OF THAT SULLEN DESPERATION ABOUT HIM THAT SEEMS TO AFFLICT MOST LIFERS AFTER AWHILE; YOU COULD NEVER SMELL HOPELESSNESS ON HIM.”

THAT’S THE CHALLENGE OF THE PSALMIST - A FEELING OF INNER PEACE – AN UNWAVERING FAITH THAT OUR LONG NIGHTMARE (IN WHATEVER FORM THAT MAY TAKE) WILL END.”

HE’S CALLING US TO A LIFE ON WHICH “YOU COULD NEVER SMELL HOPELESSNESS.”

THE PSALMIST DOESN’T WANT TO CONVEY THE MESSAGE, THOUGH, THAT WE SIMPLY SIT BACK PASSIVELY & WAIT FOR “THE SWEET BY & BY” WHEN THE LORD PUTS EVERYTHING IN ITS PROPER ORDER.

ANDY DUFRESNE – FOR 28 YEARS – WORKED DAILY – SLOWLY BUT SURELY - TO CREATE A PATHWAY TO FREEDOM.

THE PSALMIST OFFERS US GUIDANCE IN OUR OWN WAITING. RATHER THAN RAGE AGAINST THE WICKED, HE URGES ANOTHER KIND OF ACTION.

IN THREE SUCCESSIVE VERSES IN THIS PASSAGE, HE SAYS, “TRUST IN THE LORD AND DO GOOD” – “TAKE DELIGHT IN THE LORD” AND – “COMMIT YOUR WAY TO THE LORD.”

AND AT THE END OF HIS DIRECTIVE, HE GIVES THE ASSURANCE THAT WE CAN “TRUST THE LORD FOR THE LORD WILL ACT & VINDICATE.”

AS HARD AS WAITING IS FOR US – AS IMPOSSIBLE AS IT MAY SEEM THAT THINGS WILL EVER TURN IN OUR FAVOR - THE PSALMIST ASSURES US THAT GOD CAN BE TRUSTED TO ACT.

HE PROMISES THAT IF WE HANG ON TO HOPE, GOODNESS WILL PREVAIL IN THE END.

HE OFFERS HIS OWN ENCOURAGEMENT TO US AND WE CAN THEREFORE OFFER *OUR* ENCOURAGEMENT TO OTHERS.

THAT HOPE – THAT ENCOURAGEMENT – CAN BE CONTAGIOUS. THAT’S WHAT HAPPENED TO ANDY DUFRESNE’S HOPE. RED CAUGHT IT.

PERHAPS RED’S MOST MEMORABLE LINE – IN THE BOOK & THE MOVIE – IS WHEN HE DECIDES HE’S NOT GOING TO JUST SIT BACK & WAIT ANY LONGER, BUT ACT ON THE HOPE INSIDE HIS SOUL.

HE SAYS, “GET BUSY LIVIN’ OR GET BUSY DYIN’.”

HE CHOOSES THE FORMER & HIS FINAL WORDS OF THE BOOK & THE FINAL WORDS OF THE MOVIE, ARE SPOKEN AS HE ANTICIPATES HIS LONG-AWAITED REUNION WITH ANDY.

HE SAYS, “*I HOPE I CAN MAKE IT ACROSS THE BORDER. I HOPE TO SEE MY FRIEND AND SHAKE HIS HAND. I HOPE THE PACIFIC IS AS BLUE AS IT HAS BEEN IN MY DREAMS.*”

AND HIS FINAL – ALL-ENCOMPASSING WORDS – “I HOPE.”

MAY WE, TOO, EVEN IN THE MIDST OF OUR LONG WAITING FOR DELIVERANCE, DO SO WITH HOPE. AMEN.

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