

vista

May 31, 2020

He Is Faithful

(a parable of God's covenant with his people based on Psalm 41)

by Valorie Quesenberry



He was old, shriveled, with papery skin and blue veins.

Daelynn stepped up to his bed and reached for his wrist. It was clammy, bony, the pulse weak as she counted. He stirred under the sheet and turned his face toward her, eyelids fluttering to open. She laid her other hand on his shoulder.

“It’s okay, Mr. Goldstein. I’m your nurse, Daelynn. Just making sure you’re doing all right.”

In the dim light of the room, she was surprised by the brilliance of his eyes. “Thank you, daughter.”

Daughter? He must be hallucinating. The medications he was receiving could have that effect. Perhaps he thought his family was in the room. She patted him again and straightened the IV tubing, made sure the call light was within his reach. “You call me if you need anything, okay?”

He nodded, eyes shining intently. Daelynn fluffed his pillow, smoothed

his sheets and walked out to continue charting at the nurses’ station. *Jacob Goldstein, 90 years old. Comfort care. Identifying tattoo on left arm.*

She entered his vitals and cognitive condition—and his call light lit up. Daelynn put her computer in sleep mode and fast-walked to his room. She approached the bed and pressed the button to deactivate the call, then turned to the patient. “How can I help you, Mr. Goldstein?”

He smiled. “He is faithful.”

“Pardon?”

“He is faithful, daughter. To every generation. To me. To you.” He grabbed her hand. The man was strong, despite the parchment skin.

“Oh, you mean, God? Why, yes, of course.”

“It isn’t like that, young lady. It’s not just because I’m dying. It’s true for life. He is faithful, no matter what.”

There really wasn’t time for theological discussions, but the patient

seemed anxious. As a nurse, she needed to be attentive to that aspect of his health. “Why don’t you tell me about it?”

The Lord Preserves His People

The old man turned his face to the wall and then back to her, gripped her hand.

“I saw it, you know. I was twelve when they came for us, old enough to know what was happening. The trucks, the dogs, the shouts, the guns—I will never forget it. My grandfather sat in his parlor, reciting the Mishnah. He didn’t get up fast enough, and they hit him on the head and killed him in his own house. The rest of us were herded like cattle onto trucks—little children cried, people injured themselves in the crush, families were separated. Our rabbi had his beard shaved off in front of all of us; it was a terrible humiliation. Then they took us to the railroad cars, and it only got worse.”

His voice trailed off for a second but resumed in shaky tones. “I can’t

describe what it was like. Jewish tradition tells of a place named Gehenna in old Jerusalem where refuse was dumped and where there was continual fire and the crawling of maggots over the dead things brought there. That was the camps. Always fire. Always death. Always vermin. Always rot and evil.”

Mr. Goldstein turned haunted eyes full onto her. “You work in this place. You have seen suffering and death, daughter. But you have never seen pain on a scale to compare to that. I hope that you never do. I cannot forget it. The misery of fathers as they watched their families torn apart never to be together again. The little white bodies of children gassed to death before they were old enough to talk. The living skeletons that we became. The question we all asked was ‘Where is God? Where is Yahweh? He promised to preserve us and make us a great nation. Is this how he shows us we are the chosen people?’”



There is no fire that can burn up the image of God in me.

The Lord Raises Me Up; My Enemies Do Not Triumph over Me

His eyes were brighter now; his face flushed. Daelynn laid quiet fingers on his wrist, wanting to stay aware of his degree of excitement. His heart was fragile. But obviously, his mind was vigorous. He seemed to expect her to be part of the conversation.

“And what answer did you find, Mr. Goldstein?”

“We didn’t find one. Not then. Like King David of old we felt forsaken, forgotten, drowned in troubles. It was as if our people would be erased from the remembrance of the earth. But I know the answer now.”

His pulse had to be over a hundred by now; Daelynn thought he might bolt right out of the bed. A wild thought zagged through her brain that she should be prepared to catch him if he fell. But he was talking ecstatically now.

The Lord Sets Me before His Face Forever

“We didn’t remember that his covenant with us is an everlasting one. We were focused on the panic and pain of the present. We forgot that he has preserved us from generations past and will preserve us for generations to come. He has put down the pharaohs and the pagans and the conquerors and the dictators. We are in his hands. And it will not change.”

Daelynn felt as though she were in church, not the hospital. This withered, ancient man had more life in his soul than many she had seen in the pews on Sunday. He had struggled with his understanding of the ways of God. She knew a little about that. She had struggled with similar issues. The medical profession brought with it its own unsolvable questions. But this man was at peace with his answers. And it was certain he had seen worse than she. She should be the one with reassurance. But she needed some of her own.

She clasped his arm in both hands and raised it gently off the bed. “And this?” She nodded to the ugly blue-black numbers.

“That is the mark of the enemy. But it only scars my body, not my soul. Jews believe in the sanctity of the body. That is why the burning of bodies in the Holocaust was a desecration to us. That’s why we call it the Shoah. But there is something else I have learned, another answer. There is no fire that can burn up the image of God in me. Our father Job wrote that though worms may destroy the body, yet in living flesh will we see God. This number is not a sign that God has forsaken me. Rather, it is a marking which tells me all the more that I am meant for more than skin that others can burn and scar. I am made for an eternity which only the soul can see.”

Daelynn had to admit her faith was piqued but her spirit angered that he had an answer. This old man should be bitter, turning on others and parading his tattooed arm around on the news shows, getting mileage out of the injustice forced on him. Instead, he was lying serenely on his deathbed, taking away her excuses for ignoring God.

The Lord God of Israel Is from Everlasting to Everlasting

“That’s a wonderful attitude, Mr. Goldstein. I’m glad you’ve found peace.” She laid his arm back on the hospital blanket and tucked in his sheets. “You’re an amazing man.”

He shook his head. “No, not me. God is amazing. He gives peace. Everlasting peace. Because he *is* from everlasting to everlasting. I said with the psalmist ‘Lord, be merciful to me. Heal my soul, for I have sinned against you.’ That prayer brought me more peace than all of the other therapies I tried. It takes the Creator of peace to make peace. You can have that, daughter. He just asks that you follow him.”

“Mr. Goldstein, I tried that. But when my parents divorced and my boyfriend walked out of my life and everything turned upside down, I needed something solid.”

“What did you find?”

She knew it was over then. She hadn’t found anything. Her very questions tonight proved it. She shrugged. “I . . . uh. I’m sorry, I have to go check something at the desk.”

He patted her hand then. “You go, daughter. But you’ll never be out of his sight. You’ll never be anywhere that his faithfulness won’t be there.”

She made her escape, heart pounding. The old man made too much

sense. She wasn’t ready for that. She walked to the nurses’ station and grabbed her coffee, took a swig.

The next time she went to check on him, he was sleeping, his breathing rough but his face calm, the dim light illuminating the number on his arm. And he slept through the rest of her shift.

Daelynn crashed at home for several hours and then got up, put in some laundry, ran a few errands, and headed back to work. The charge nurse greeted her.

“Daelynn, did you have any connection with Mr. Goldstein in unit 22? A connection outside of being his nurse last night?”

“No, why?”

“We found this on his bedside table, addressed to you. He died this morning.”

It was a simple piece of paper bearing her name. On it was a string of numbers. 233956. His number. And three words. *He is faithful.*

Her supervisor looked puzzled. “Does this mean anything to you?”

Daelynn choked, caught her breath. “Yes.” She smiled. “It means I’ll be going to church this Sunday. And it means there’s an answer. An answer he found.” And she turned to start her shift. •



Songs of Praise

Continue learning about and praising the Lord at home with your family. Here's an idea how to do that.

A hymnbook is a collection of songs used by a congregation to worship God. The book of Psalms was Israel's hymnbook. Many of the psalms include clues to their musical role: "a song," "for the director of music," "with stringed instruments," "for flutes," "to the tune of." Some psalms refer to the temple or to the worship performed there.

Individual psalms were first compiled into smaller collections, such as the "psalms of David" and "psalms of ascent." Over time, these collections were joined together. The 150 psalms are divided into five books (Pss. 1–41; 42–72; 73–89; 90–106; and 107–150) with a brief doxology—or statement of praise to God—added to the end of each book.

As a family, sit down and write out words and phrases that reflect your respect and devotion to God. Make sure to include thankfulness for his faithfulness to your family down through the generations. Then compose a hymn out of those phrases, ending with a doxology. When you're done, sing or chant your composition to the Lord. •

(Taken from God's Story Revealed by Stephen J. Lennox, www.wphonline.com.)

WORDS FROM WESLEY

Psalm 41:13

Amen—Signifies an hearty assent and approbation, and withal an earnest desire of the thing, to which it is annexed. And as the psalms are divided into five books, so each of them is closed with this word; the first here: the second, Psalms 72:19, the third, Psalms 89:52, the fourth, Psalms 106:48, the last in the end of Psalms 150:6, the doubling of the word shews the fervency of his spirit, in this work of praising God.

(John Wesley's Explanatory Notes, www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=wes&b=19&c=41, accessed August 2019.)



THROUGH THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Monday	June 1	2 Samuel 14–15
Tuesday	June 2:	2 Samuel 16–18
Wednesday	June 3:	2 Samuel 19–20
Thursday	June 4:	2 Samuel 21–22
Friday	June 5:	2 Samuel 23–24
Saturday	June 6:	Galatians 1–3
Sunday	June 7:	Galatians 4–6

SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY

GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS PEOPLE

The Christ of the Psalms

The Book of Psalms

Into the Subject

Psalms is a book about Christ, continuing the theme of redemption that runs throughout the Bible. The law is perfectly fulfilled in Christ. History is perfectly fulfilled in Christ. And we see that poetry—the expression of the human heart—is perfectly fulfilled in Christ.

The Psalms are also replete with allusions to Christ. Psalms 40–41 are included with some of the principal “messianic” psalms.

Into the Word

1. What psalms have been particularly meaningful to you over the years?
2. What have you learned about God through the book of Psalms that you didn't know from reading the rest of the Bible?
3. What have you learned through the Psalms about the emotions of mankind?
4. How can the Psalms be used in expressing your emotions to God?
5. How can reading the Psalms help us to give God more of the praise and worship he deserves?
6. How can the Psalms be used as your personal prayer book?

Into the World

God has remained faithful and patient to his people down through the generations, as illustrated through Joshua, to the time of the judges, and then through the story of Ruth. Join the writer of Psalm 89 and sing of the Lord's great love and faithfulness to all generations.

(Taken from Through the Bible by Patricia J. David, www.wphonline.com.)

Light from the WORD

Psalm 40

PUSHBACK

*May those who long for your saving help always say,
“The LORD is great!” (Ps. 40:16)*

Writing often leaves me feeling exposed. I’m a people-pleaser at heart, so when God often asks me to share something that might ruffle some feathers, I hesitate. I weigh the risk of leaving my heart exposed. But the reality is that no matter what story I tell and with how much grace I tell it, someone will inevitably frown her brow and decide to unfollow me. And I shouldn’t be surprised because God is pretty clear that we should expect opposition in this life (see 2 Tim. 3:12).

Vulnerability comes with risks. Sharing about our struggles or about God’s triumphs will inevitably leave someone disgruntled, and that someone may even go on the offensive. They will watch for that moment when you slip up. They will point out your flaws and discredit your reputation. And like David, in these moments of opposition we must choose to seek God anyway, to keep saying “God is great!” when everyone else is saying we are not.

Because the reality is that, left alone, we are not enough. We are flawed. We are selfish. We are prone to saying the wrong thing at the wrong time in the wrong way. But when we keep turning back to God and find our identities in him, we are enough. We become a beautiful piece of his tapestry that proclaims “God is good!” even in the midst of protesters.

—Sarah E. Westfall

Find your identity in the One who is enough.

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