

BETWEEN THE DREAMING AND THE COMING TRUE

Ready, Steady, Go!

We live between the dreaming and the coming true. We live between the time when we chose to follow Christ, and meeting him face to face. We live between the time when we began to recognise our own human failings and the time we will be made perfect in Christ. We live between the time when we chose not to live just for ourselves and when we will fully live for God. We live between the time of our doubt and when we are assured in faith.

We are living between the time when we are like children and when we become mature adults in faith. We live between the time when we left home and when we will arrive at our destination. We are living between the dreaming and the coming true.

Like the people of Israel before us, we live between the time when God called us to the time of arrival in his rest. Like the people of Israel before us, we live between the time we left the world's ways and fully embraced God's ways. Like the people of Israel before us, we live between the burden of the law and liberty of grace. Like the people of Israel before us, we are on the journey of faith. And like the people of Israel before us, we need some encouragement and some help on our journey.

The writer to the Hebrews describes it this way:

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12 v 1-2)

The people of Israel had been saved and rescued by God. The people of Israel had experienced a miraculous escape from Egypt. The people of Israel had been shaped and preserved by forty years of wandering in the desert. The people of Israel had become the people of God and given his law as the best way to live. The people of Israel needed help and encouragement to live between the dreaming and the coming true, as they lived as God's people.

Three times a year the people of Israel would go to Jerusalem for great worship festivals. They went to remember God: they went to remember what God had done; they went to remember how to live between the dreaming and the coming true. It is quite possible that as they walked to Jerusalem they sang the Psalms of Ascent. It is also quite possible that they sang them in sequence as we have them today.

Jerusalem was the highest city in Palestine – the people literally ‘went up’ to Jerusalem. Metaphorically the people also ‘went up’ to God, to meet him, celebrate him and be reminded of the truth they were living between the dreaming and the coming true. As the people walked to Jerusalem to meet with and remember God, they also acted out their journey of faith, of going from one level of understanding and maturity to another – going higher! And we can do the same – we can walk in the footsteps of those who have gone before us.

The first psalm to be sung on the road, the first psalm to be sung on the journey of faith is there to remind us of the choice that we have made to be on the journey. Psalm 120, is, perhaps the ready, steady, go of their journey of faith. Learning to trust God is difficult and often involves waiting. It also involves letting go.

Perhaps it is helpful to think of trapeze artists at the circus. We get our word trapeze from the Greek word *trapeza*, which means table. About the only time it is used in the New Testament is when Jesus gathers the disciples for the last supper – around the table. This is the moment when Jesus will let go of his fear of death and trust himself to the Most-High God.

When we watch a trapeze act, we mostly find ourselves watching the flyer – the one who lets go and flies from one trapeze to the other, but we would do well to watch the catcher. For the flyer to fly from one trapeze to the other it is the catcher who must have perfect timing. They must be in exactly the right place at the right time. The flyer will only be able to let go of their trapeze and perform, if they have complete trust and confidence in the catcher.

In the trapeze troop, ‘The flying Rodleigh’s’, one of the flyers said it this way: *The secret is that the flyer does nothing and the catcher does everything. When I fly to Joe (my catcher), I have simply to stretch out my arms and hands and wait for him to catch me and pull me safely over the apron... The worst thing the flyer can do is to try to catch the catcher. I am not supposed to catch*

Joe. It's Joe's task to catch me. If I grabbed Joe's wrists, I might break them, or he might break mine and that would be the end for both of us. A flyer must fly, and a catcher must catch, and the flyer must trust, with outstretched arms that his catcher will be there for him.¹

Psalm 120 is there to remind us that we have made the choice to let go and trust ourselves to the catcher.

Psalm 120

A song of ascents.

- ¹ I call on the LORD in my distress,
and he answers me.
- ² Save me, LORD,
from lying lips
and from deceitful tongues.
- ³ What will he do to you,
and what more besides,
you deceitful tongue?
- ⁴ He will punish you with a warrior's sharp arrows,
with burning coals of the broom bush.
- ⁵ Woe to me that I dwell in Meshek,
that I live among the tents of Kedar!
- ⁶ Too long have I lived
among those who hate peace.
- ⁷ I am for peace;
but when I speak, they are for war.

If the Jehovah Witness's knock on your door they will usually begin with a question: 'Are you happy with the way the world is?' They anticipate the answer 'No!' And the truth is, that for most of us, and probably all of us, we are not. Recent events in the political arena, sadly it seems, simply reflect much of the way the world is. We are surrounded by lies and malice.

For many people there is a dissatisfaction with the way the world is and the way the world behaves. We know deep down that something is not right, that something is seriously amiss. All we ever seem to hear about is war and fighting and arguing and blaming. We find that deep inside us there is a longing for peace – a deep and lasting peace.

¹ Lucado, M., "Anxious for Nothing," Thomas Nelson 2017, page 46

Friends, there is such a thing as holy discontent. It is that deep unease about the way the world is and a longing for something better. And, when we recognise that deep longing, that discontent, we are beginning to sing the song that beats across the universe... It is the same song that is sung in Psalm 120. It is the song of God's great and magnificent love.

The opening words of Psalm 120 tell of a holy discontent: "I am in distress," or "I am in trouble," (The Message.) The psalm ends with the word, war. This psalm tells the truth of the world in which we live. It is a world of trouble and war. The world doesn't seem to know how to live well together. The whole of human history seems to be one of not being able to get along very well with one another.

We seem to have persuaded ourselves that if we try a little harder, adopt a different political persuasion, live a different way, we can make it better. But the evidence tells us we can't! We still fight, we still argue, we still go to war, we still treat others as enemies, we still hate, we still abuse the vulnerable, take from the poor, ignore the suffering, mistreat our children and lie to ourselves.

Psalm 120 recognises the truth of how the world really is and that we live here between the dreaming and the coming true. Psalm 120 is a recognition that the world, in fact, has no answers to its own problems. Verse seven – 'I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war.' Here is the holy discontent that feels, knows and dreams of something different.

This is the beginning of letting go. The Christian journey begins with letting go. It begins when we recognise the truth of this Psalm: that the world has no answers to its problems, and something is terribly wrong.

The word God or Lord only appears twice in the psalm, but it changes everything. Letting go of the world and trusting God is the choice that begins the journey of faith. The moment we let go of the world and its promises we become the flyer and we trust ourselves to the catcher – to God. The moment God appears in the Psalm the truth about the world is exposed. God is the creator and sustainer of the world – not us. God is at the centre of the universe – not us. God is God – not us! And there is a song of God that beats across the world and finds its way into our hearts. It is the song of God's great love.

The truth is that God loves me because he loves me because he loves me.....
The truth is that God loves you because he loves you because he loves you...
The truth is that God loves the people you find difficult and challenging. The truth is that God loves the people we might find we hate. The truth is that God so loved the world that Jesus died on a cross. The truth is because of that we can participate with God in a new life, trusting him, accepting his mercy, responding to his love and living well between the dreaming and the coming true. But it begins by letting go and trusting God.

‘Woe to me that I dwell in Meshek, that I live among the tents of Kedar.’ (v5)
Meshek and Kedar are places that represent those who are strange and hostile. This cry recognises that this world is not our home!

Friends, isn't that the truth? We feel this world is not our home – we are for peace. The beginning of the journey towards God is saying “Yes!” to God and “No!” to the world. The word the Bible uses for this is, as we know, repentance. And repentance is not an emotion or a feeling – it is a decision. A decision to say “Yes!” to God and “No!” to the world.

Verses 3 and 4 call for God's judgement

- ³What will he do to you,
and what more besides,
you deceitful tongue?
⁴He will punish you with a warrior's sharp arrows,
with burning coals of the broom bush. (Psalm 120)

We would do well to remember that God's judgement is always about bringing people to repentance. That's another way of saying that God's judgement is always about people coming to know God's great and magnificent love. Turning from living without God to trusting him can be painful – we have to say no to the world. Judgement is never easy or painless, but it leads us towards God's love, it sets us free to love and be loved.

Here's the truth of Psalm 120: we don't have to live in Meshek and Kedar. We don't have to live the way the world does. We don't have to settle for the way things are.

Friends, could it be that you need to sing this psalm again, now, in these moments? Friends, could it be that in these moments you would do well to say, 'Yes' to God and 'No!' to the world – again? Friends, could it be that in these moments, if you are honest, in a part of your life, you are choosing to dwell in Meshek or Kedar, a place that is not your home? Saying “Yes!” to God and “No!” to the world can be painful, but it always moves us towards God’s great and magnificent love.

Friends, when we celebrate communion, we do so around the table, the trapeza. Friends, when we celebrate communion, we remember the gift of God’s sacrificial love that beats at the heart of the universe. Friends, when we celebrate communion, we let go of the world and trust ourselves to the one who catches us. Friends, when we choose to let go of the world and say “Yes!” to God, we trust ourselves to the one who is not in the habit of dropping us. Friends, when we say “Yes!” to God he is there, perfectly to meet us, catch us and hold us in his great and magnificent love.

Friends, we may be at the very beginning of our journey towards God, but there is a holy discontent within us. We may be one who has journeyed to Jerusalem many, many times before. Psalm 120 reminds us, and invites us, to continually be those who say “Yes!” to God, for to say “Yes!” to God is to be on the journey to our full redemptive potential.

So, perhaps the question friends is: Will you say “Yes!” to God?

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