

# Thank God

## Psalm 30

© August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2026 by Rev. Rick Goettsche SERIES: Psalms

If you've ever gotten to be part of a building project, you know how daunting it can be. A little over 30 years ago, our church undertook a significant building project, adding on the part of the building that has the lobby, offices, bathrooms, elevator, and nursery. Today it is hard to imagine a Sunday morning without those things, but for most of our church's history, that section of the building wasn't there.

We worked many different times at trying to build again, hoping to build a fellowship hall and activity center. We kicked around ideas for many years and even brought at least one of those ideas to the congregation for a vote (which the congregation voted no on). We hadn't planned on purchasing the building next door to us, but when it became available, we ended up with something far better than we could have afforded to build.

My point in taking this trip down memory lane is that when you finally get to enjoy the fruits of your labor in a building project, it's a time of great rejoicing. It takes a lot of work to get there, but in the end, you are grateful for where you are.

That is the attitude at the core of Psalm 30. The description before the psalm says it was a psalm of David, a song for the dedication of the temple. And what we see in this psalm is a collection of praise and thanksgiving, recognizing the Lord's many blessings. My hope is that as we see David's heart revealed in these verses, we will take a page from his playbook and work to cultivate thankful hearts as well.

### Debate

As I mentioned, the description at the beginning of this psalm says it was a song for the dedication of the temple, but that statement raises some questions. The primary issue is that the temple was not built during David's lifetime. David built himself a palace and then wanted to build a permanent temple for the Lord in Jerusalem. The Lord told David that was a worthwhile idea, but that he would not be the one to build it. Instead, his son, Solomon, would be the one to build the temple. So, David spent his remaining years collecting materials for the temple, but it wasn't until after he died that Solomon moved forward with actually constructing it.

This has led to a debate about why Psalm 30 was written. After all, how could David have written a song for the dedication of the temple if he wasn't around when it was dedicated? There are a few competing ideas.

**First, David wrote the song ahead of time, to be sung when the temple was dedicated.** This seems reasonable. David made all sorts of preparations, including collecting materials and lining up workers for the temple, so it's possible that he also composed a song for when it was finally finished. He may not have been there to sing it, but he could have written it ahead of time.

**Second, the song was actually about the dedication of his palace, not the temple.**

The word translated as temple is literally the word house. So, it literally reads for the dedication of the house. Most have understood this to mean the house of the Lord (the temple), but some have pointed out that if the song was about David's house (the palace he *did* construct in his lifetime), then the controversy goes away.

**Third, the song is prophetic in nature, talking about Jesus.** Jesus described himself as the temple. He told people, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again." John helpfully tells us that Jesus was not talking about the physical building, but about his body. While there are certainly messianic parallels in this passage, I think trying to read it that way is somewhat contrived. The general principle of understanding the Bible is that if the plain sense makes sense, don't look for another sense! I think saying this passage was only about Jesus is probably too much of a stretch.

**Fourth, it was about dedicating the temple before it was built.** As I studied this passage, I came up with another possibility (and then discovered I was not the only one who made this connection). I think it's possible that this was about David dedicating the land on which the temple would be built (land he acquired). I suspect the same psalm would have been sung when the temple was completed as well. While this is not the majority view, it's the one that makes the most sense to me. We'll talk about why I think that as we go through the text.

However you look at this passage, the conclusion is the same. David was thanking the Lord for His provision, His mercy, and His power. That's the overarching theme, and it's one we ought to embrace as well.

## **Praise for Deliverance**

The opening lines of this psalm record David praising the Lord for His deliverance.

<sup>1</sup> I will exalt you, Lord, for you rescued me. You refused to let my enemies triumph over me. <sup>2</sup> O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you restored my health. <sup>3</sup> You brought me up from the grave, O Lord. You kept me from falling into the pit of death. (Psalm 30:1-3, NLT)

David appears to be thanking the Lord for his deliverance in a time when he thought himself to be near death. Based on his declaration that the Lord restored his health (in v. 2), it leads us to think that David may have written this after a time of severe illness, a time when he was so ill, he thought he would die.

The problem is that we have no record in of David facing such an illness. We do in the lives of some other kings of Israel (most notably, Hezekiah) but not of David. But we also don't have an encyclopedic record of David's life either. Just because we don't know the details doesn't mean David didn't have a life-threatening illness at some point, and was praising God for delivering him from it. I see no reason to try to come up with an alternate interpretation for these verses. It seems clear that he was thankful to the Lord for saving him from dying.

David's example has much to teach us, because we tend not to be very good about thanking God for the blessings He gives us. We do not tend to be good about coming back to Him in thanks for our answered prayers. Sometimes we don't even give Him credit at all! We pray for Him to act and then conclude it was a wonderful coincidence, or that we are so lucky to live in a time with such medical technology, or that we were fortunate to figure out a solution to our problem on our own. Jesus once condemned the ten lepers he healed after only one came back to thank Him for the miracle He had performed in their lives! David, however, was constantly thanking the Lord for how He had moved.

We should work to make the discipline of thanksgiving a regular part of our prayer lives. Instead of merely thanking God for our food and the hands that prepared it, or thanking Him for the day, we should take time to really reflect on all the ways we have seen God's hand and His blessing and turn to Him in thanksgiving. If we will cultivate this habit in our prayer life, we will see the content and the attitudes of our prayers (and our hearts) change for the better.

## **Praise for Mercy**

Most of this passage is focused on praising the Lord for His mercy.

<sup>4</sup> Sing to the Lord, all you godly ones! Praise his holy name. <sup>5</sup> For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime! Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning. <sup>6</sup> When I was prosperous, I said, "Nothing can stop me now!" <sup>7</sup> Your favor, O Lord, made me as secure as a mountain. Then you turned away from me, and I was shattered. <sup>8</sup> I cried out to you, O Lord. I begged the Lord for mercy, saying, <sup>9</sup> "What will you gain if I die, if I sink into the grave? Can my dust praise you? Can it tell of your faithfulness?" <sup>10</sup> Hear me, Lord, and have mercy on me. Help me, O Lord." (Psalm 30:4-10, NLT)

This section of the psalm contains many important elements, and it is this section in particular that makes me think David composed the psalm for the dedication of the land on which the temple would be built.

David begins by urging others to praise God because, "His anger lasts only a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime!" As I read this phrase initially, I was bothered by it. God's anger is not capricious; He does not change His mind on a whim. And scripture tells us that God's punishment will last for eternity. Those who refuse to submit to Him will experience His eternal anger. So what could David have meant by this statement?

I don't think David was speaking about God's punishment of the wicked, but how the Lord treats His own. David believed that the Lord was gracious and that while He will correct us when necessary, He will not destroy those He loves. David knew he was dependent upon God's mercy.

My mind immediately went to the story of when David took a census of his army, despite knowing the Lord had commanded him not to do so. After doing what he knew

was wrong, the Lord spoke to David through a prophet and said he (and his people) would be punished because of his sin. He gave David three options.

<sup>11</sup> So Gad came to David and said, "These are the choices the Lord has given you. <sup>12</sup> You may choose three years of famine, three months of destruction by the sword of your enemies, or three days of severe plague as the angel of the Lord brings devastation throughout the land of Israel. Decide what answer I should give the Lord who sent me." <sup>13</sup> "I'm in a desperate situation!" David replied to Gad. "But let me fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is very great. Do not let me fall into human hands." (1 Chronicles 21:11-13, NLT)

David was faced with three options of punishment and judgment. He elected to have the Lord Himself mete out punishment, because if nothing else, he knew the Lord would be just. And David also knew that the Lord was merciful.

The rest of the story is fascinating. The Lord sent a plague throughout Israel, killing 70,000 people. Then He sent an angel with a sword to destroy Jerusalem. But as the angel was approaching the city, the Lord relented of His anger and told the angel to stop. The place the angel stopped was at a threshing floor owned by a man named Araunah. David came there, purchased the land, offered burnt offerings to the Lord, and then declared that this would be the site on which the temple of the Lord would be built, because it was a testimony to God's mercy.

This story seems to fit with what we see David saying in Psalm 30. David had become overconfident in his prosperity, declaring "Nothing can stop me now!" and that may have led him to take the census when he knew he shouldn't. But when the Lord turned away from him, David became utterly aware of his helplessness apart from God. In David's own words, he was shattered. He begged the Lord for mercy and asked for His help.

This is why I think David may have composed this psalm when he dedicated this land to the Lord. It sure seems to me like David's prayer dovetails nicely with this account. Ultimately, I don't think it matters the exact time or occasion for which David wrote it, but it's an interesting connection nonetheless.

Regardless, David's attitude was one of gratitude for being spared what he knew he deserved. He praised God for His mercy. We often presume upon God's mercy, simply expecting that He should forgive us when we sin. But each time the Lord relents of the anger we deserve, it is a miracle. We should celebrate His mercy and praise Him for relenting of the punishment we deserve. Like David, if we cultivate this attitude, it will change the way we look at the Lord and ourselves.

There is one more statement in these verses that deserves attention. David reasons with the Lord, asking Him to spare his life. His reasoning for why the Lord should spare his life is that he cannot praise God if he has turned to dust, and his bones cannot tell of God's faithfulness.

David's statement belies his understanding of his (and all people's) purpose in life. I believe this is one of the chief issues facing our world today. We have no concept of our purpose, and therefore many spend their lives drifting along, feeling like we have no meaning or direction.

David was clear on his purpose. It was to honor the Lord. This has long been the conviction of the church at large. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, which was written to teach children essential truths of the Christian faith, has as its first question: What is the chief end of man? The answer to that question is: The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. In his plea to the Lord for mercy, David acknowledges our purpose. We exist to bring honor to the Lord. He loves us and cares for us, but our overarching purpose in life is to honor Him for who He is. It is not to amass fame or fortune or even to leave a legacy in our children. Above all, our purpose is to make God's greatness known to those around us. When we focus our lives in that direction, we will find the meaning and direction we have been looking for.

## **Praise for Reversals**

The concluding verses of this psalm offer wonderfully poetic descriptions of the way God tends to work in the lives of His children.

<sup>11</sup> You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing. You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy, <sup>12</sup> that I might sing praises to you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever! (Psalm 30:11-12, NLT)

David talks about how the Lord turned his mourning into joyful dancing and changed his clothes of mourning into clothes of joy. This is the wonderful promise the Lord has given to Christians. He does not promise that life will be easy or free from trouble. What He does promise (in Romans 8:28) is that He will cause all things to work for good.

The story of Joseph is a great depiction of this principle. Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt and then spent years as a slave and then in prison. Eventually God caused him to become the second most powerful man in Egypt. When his brothers, who had sold him into slavery came to Egypt asking for help (not knowing they were asking their brother) he said, "What you intended for evil, God intended for good." Though he had spent years mourning what had been taken from him and facing constant injustice, he was able to see that the Lord was working in it all.

What I love most about that account is that the Lord was doing something even bigger than Joseph could have anticipated. God used Joseph's slavery to move the Israelites to Egypt, where they would eventually become slaves. Then, nearly 500 years later, God would lead them out of Egypt, revealing His power through plagues and then leading them through the Red Sea on dry ground. Joseph's brothers had indeed intended evil with their actions, but God would use them to accomplish a greater good than they could have ever imagined.

David had similar experiences and arrived at the correct conclusion. The Lord allowed hard things in his life so “that I might sing praises to you and not be silent.” David knew that God was working, and when we see His deliverance, it should drive us to praise Him. Our recognition of His goodness and His perfect plans should lead us to trust Him, to rely on Him, and ultimately to praise Him, as He deserves.

## Conclusion

As we conclude our study of Psalm 30, we want to ask what lessons we should glean, and I have a few suggestions. **First, we should live our purpose.** David reminds us that our purpose in life is to honor our Lord. Our world tells us that there is no purpose, or that our only purpose is to cram as much fun as we can into this life, because “You only live once!” But that’s not true—we live now to live again. David understood that our purpose in life is to bring honor to the One who made us. Ask yourself, is my life honoring the Lord? Am I living for His glory, or am I primarily concerned about my own? If your focus in life isn’t to honor Him now, how can you arrange things in your life to honor Him more completely?

**Second, faith means trusting God’s plans, even when it’s hard.** David understood that God is always working for good, even when we can’t see it or understand how. Psalm 30 reminds us that we serve a God who turns mourning in joyful dancing and trades our clothes of mourning for clothes of joy. There are many circumstances in life when we can’t see or understand how the Lord could possibly be working for good, but He is. David had seen this in his own life and throughout history. The same is true for you and me. As we look at God’s track record, we can understand that what others may intend for evil, God works for good. God doesn’t work on our timetable, and He rarely works the way we think He should or the way we expect Him to, but He is always working for good. So we should rest in that knowledge, especially in the hard times.

**Finally, the best way to build our faith is to recount God’s blessings.** David wrote this psalm intending it to be sung at the temple of the Lord. It doesn’t matter exactly when he wrote it or for what occasion specifically, because the heart behind it is the same no matter what. David knew that we need to recount the ways the Lord has blessed us, provided for us, shown us mercy, and kept His promises. This needs to be a regular part of our spiritual disciplines—taking time to thank God for who He is and how He has dealt with us. Weak faith comes from not remembering God’s goodness. When we don’t take time to rehearse the ways He has shown Himself faithful, it’s easy to forget that He has consistently kept His promises. So, like David, we would be wise to cultivate a thankful heart, continually looking for the myriad ways God has blessed us, and turn to Him in praise.

The culmination of a big project is usually a chance to think back on all the things that had to happen to make things work. But we should learn to do that every day of our lives. The more we thank God, the more we’ll trust Him, and the more we’ll live our purpose, which is to honor Him with everything we do in life.

© August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2026 by Rev. Rick Goettsche SERIES: Psalms