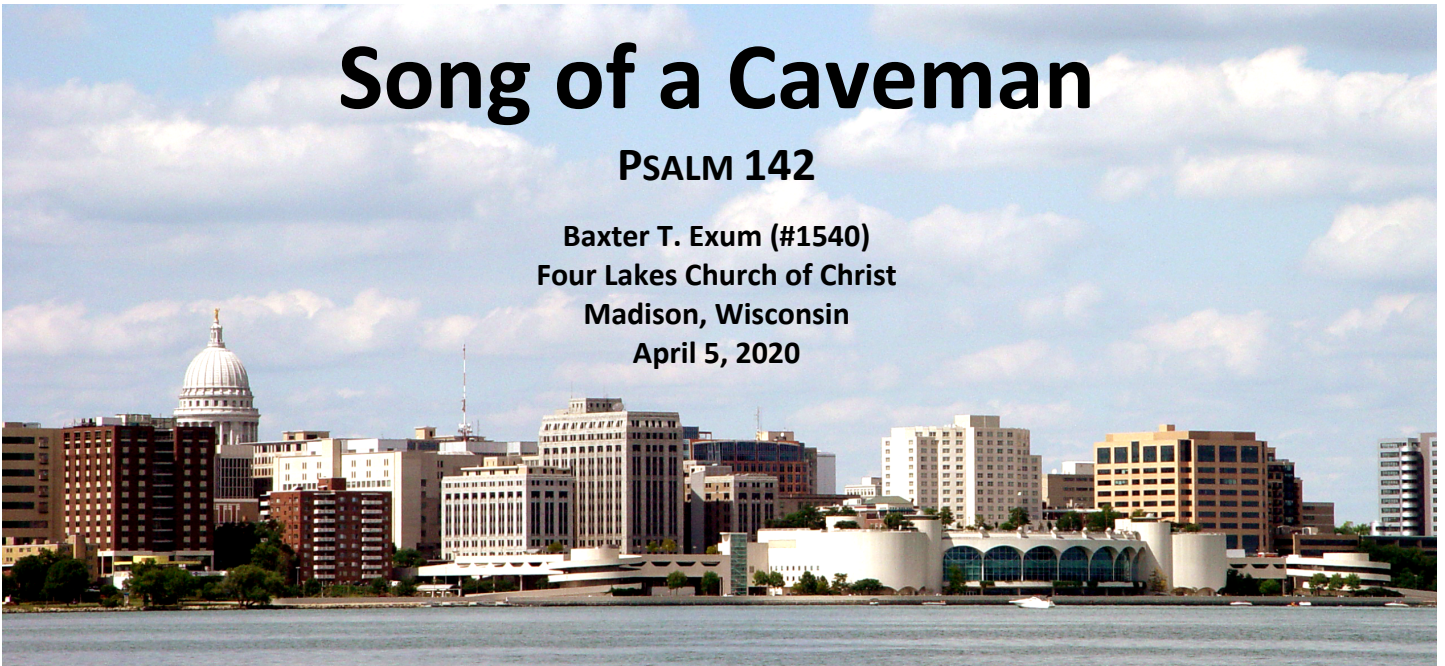


Song of a Caveman

PSALM 142

Baxter T. Exum (#1540)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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*****COVID-19 LIVESTREAM*****

It is good to be with you this morning! As we've been doing the last few weeks, I want to start by putting our contact information up here. If you have something we need to be praying about, or if there is some way we can serve you, we hope you will get in touch.

Some of you have perhaps had some extra time to think about spiritual things this week. If that's the case, if you would like to study together, if you have any questions at all, anything we can look into, we would love to help in any way we can. In the big picture, we have sinned, but long before we were even born, God could foresee this, and he has a plan to restore the relationship. He sent his only Son into this world to live a perfect life and to die on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. He died, he was buried, and he was raised up on the third day. And now, we respond to that sacrifice in faith. We trust his word, and we respond with obedience to the good news. We turn away from sin, we publicly confess our belief in Jesus as the Son of God, we allow ourselves to be buried with Jesus in baptism for the forgiveness of our sins, and then we live the Christian life. If we can help with this in any way, regardless of where you are in this picture, we hope you will give us a call, send a text or an email, or reach out in some way, and we would be glad to do whatever we can do.

Before we get into our lesson today, I want to share a drawing that was sent in by Colton, a young man in Tennessee, who watched last week's lesson and illustrated it for us! Some of you know that Colton and his family used to be a part of our congregation. His dad, Rob, was one of the first deacons appointed here. Last week's lesson was about Peter walking on the water, and we appreciate the good artwork! This is obviously a picture of Peter walking on the water but getting distracted. So, we are thankful for this. And I would add: If anybody would like to illustrate today's lesson, I would appreciate it. Draw, or paint, or do a sculpture, or something, send me a picture, and I would love to share your artwork next Sunday, if you would be willing to do that.

Earlier this week, one of our members asked that we study a lesson on somebody in the Bible who was isolated for a time. She didn't have anything particular in mind, but the request was for a lesson on somebody who was cut off, somebody who had to spend a lot of time alone. Some of you, of course, are perhaps spending more time with other people than you ever have before – you're out there providing food, you're keeping our hospitals up and running, you're helping in any number of ways. But others, of course, are somewhat isolated.

Many of us are “safe at home,” as our governor has described it. Some of you haven’t been out for a few weeks now. And most of us have only been out a time or two (at the most) for food and basic necessities.

Obviously, there is a benefit to being alone. Some of us enjoy the peace and quiet. But most of us also realize that it’s a challenge. We were created with a need to interact with other people. And when this is taken away, we miss it. Several days ago, I posted a picture on social media, with a note suggesting that I miss this. For those of you joining us by phone and for those of you listening to the MP3 later, the picture we’re looking at right now is a picture of one of our worship assemblies from a few months ago. It’s a picture of the backs of everybody’s heads as Michael is leading the singing. We miss being together. We miss our crowded building! We’ve been struggling with not having enough room lately. It’s elbow-to-elbow sometimes. Now, of course, our building is completely empty. I stopped by a week ago to drop off some Bible correspondence course material, and I basically turned off our furnaces. I took them off of the timer mode where they automatically come on 8 hours or so before we meet together on Sunday and Wednesday. The place where we usually meet is basically hibernating for a while. And we miss being together.

So, in light of the request, I started thinking about people in the Bible who were cut off, and isolated, and alone, for at least some period of time, and I kept coming back to a scene from the life of King David, to a time when he was basically forced to live alone in a cave for a while, to the time when he was on the run from King Saul. For a time, David had to live in a cave, knowing that if he left that cave he would probably die.

On the screen, I’m showing some pictures of the cave where David perhaps stayed. It’s known as the Cave of Adullam, and these pictures were taken just a few years ago by Ferrell Jenkins, a gospel preacher down in Florida. He gives permission to use his pictures in PowerPoints, and we are thankful for that.

But to understand how David ends up hiding in a cave, we need to remember how Saul disobeys God’s direct order to kill the Amalekites, and in response, God has the prophet Samuel go looking for a new king. Samuel anoints David, as a teenager, and then there is a time of transition as David continues working as a shepherd. In this time of transition, David is sent to the front lines to check on his brothers, and he ends up killing Goliath. David gets incredibly popular because of this, and King Saul starts getting jealous, even to the point where Saul and his army start chasing David all over Israel. As he’s on the run, David eventually uses the cave of Adullam as something of a headquarters, and he basically becomes something of a magnet for all of the losers in Israel. We find in 1 Samuel 22:1-2 that **“...everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Now there were around four hundred men with him.”** Now, sometime between arriving at the cave and all of these people showing up, for some length of time, David is completely alone in this cave, and he uses this time to write a number of Psalms. At the lowest point in his life up to this point, as he hides out in this cave, David starts singing. And this brings us to Psalm 142. I would invite you to turn with me to Psalm 142, and this will be our text this morning.

We’ve been looking at some of the Psalms in our Wednesday class, and we’ve learned that many of the Psalms have absolutely no background. However, some do, and Psalm 142 is one of those Psalms that does have some background information attached to it. As you make your way there, and when you get to it, notice the ancient heading on Psalm 142. It says, **“A Maskil of David, when he was in the cave. A Prayer.”** A “maskil” is a “skillful song,” a “contemplative” Psalm, a “didactic” Psalm, a song intended for teaching. But what I want us to notice is that this one is written by David **“when he was in the cave.”** Certainly, we could just ignore the heading, but to me, the little bit of background here helps us understand something of what David was going through when he wrote this. He is on the run for his life! He is living in a cave!

It might be hard for most of us to imagine living in a cave. But most of us have at least been in caves from time to time. We do have some caves near Madison. The one I've been to most recently is right off a trail at Governor Dodge State Park over in Dodgeville. Hans and I went there last summer and did at least part of our hike in a pouring rainstorm. You might be able to see Hans in the middle picture, at the mouth of the cave. The cave did provide a bit of shelter, but as you might imagine, it was also wet inside the cave – very wet! I had to crawl like a spider, from one rock to another, over a giant puddle in the entrance to the cave. I took the picture on the right from inside the cave, looking back toward the entrance.

I came prepared with a headlight and an extra flashlight. If my sister is able to see this livestream, I need to let her know that I also had three sources of fire on me at all times! This is something she taught me, something she learned with her work with search and rescue out in the Pacific Northwest. So, I did have the Ten Essentials with me, including the multiple sources of fire.

Inside the cave, there was another large puddle, and the cave itself was maybe 8 feet across by roughly 20 feet long. It's been a few months, but that is my memory of it, at least. Some of you have been here, so you can either verify or correct this. But I show these pictures to emphasize that you could live in a cave for a time, but it would probably not be very pleasant! And I could not imagine hiding in a place like this without a light and without a source of food. It would be dark, and wet, and cold, and lonely. And this is certainly not what David imagined when he was first anointed by Samuel as being the future king. He probably envisioned living in a palace, with good food, and all of that. But here he is.

We come, then, to Psalm 142, and I'm referring to this study as the "Song of a Caveman." Some people might want us to think of cavemen as living in prehistoric times (and all that), but we do have a number of Bible characters who did live in caves, and David is one of these. So, as we think about living in isolation, let's notice what David shares with us here – all seven verses of Psalm 142,

- 1 I cry aloud with my voice to the Lord;
I make supplication with my voice to the Lord.**
- 2 I pour out my complaint before Him;
I declare my trouble before Him.**
- 3 When my spirit was overwhelmed within me,
You knew my path.
In the way where I walk
They have hidden a trap for me.**
- 4 Look to the right and see;
For there is no one who regards me;
There is no escape for me;
No one cares for my soul.**
- 5 I cried out to You, O Lord;
I said, "You are my refuge,
My portion in the land of the living.**
- 6 "Give heed to my cry,
For I am brought very low;
Deliver me from my persecutors,
For they are too strong for me.**

**7 “Bring my soul out of prison,
So that I may give thanks to Your name;
The righteous will surround me,
For You will deal bountifully with me.”**

- I. **As we think about what David writes here, I want to divide our thoughts into two parts, starting with the first four verses, as David (the future king) POURS HIS HEART OUT TO GOD.**

Notice how personal this is. Notice all of the personal pronouns in the first few verses. This is personal. And he is begging for mercy. At the end of verse 1, some of the other translations refer to **“pleading”** or **“begging”** for mercy. In verse 2, when he pours out his complaint and declares his trouble **“before Him,”** the word we translate here as **“before,”** literally refers to a face. And so he is coming to God face-to-face, in a sense. And when he comes to God face-to-face, David lets it all out. Notice, he **“pours out”** his complaint before the Lord (in verse 2). I looked it up, and the word he uses here was usually used with reference to the shedding of blood; it was used with reference to pouring out blood onto an altar for sacrifice. I think it is sometimes used with reference to “gushing.” David, then, is pouring out his concern before the Lord. He doesn’t hold back, but he pours out his concerns before the Lord.

Also, notice how desperate David is. In verse 3, he is **“overwhelmed.”** His enemies have **“hidden a trap”** for him. In verse 4, as he **“looks to the right,”** no one is there. Normally, a king might have protection or maybe a trusted advisor. Today, we might refer to somebody being our “right hand man.” In the Bible, we think of Jesus being seated **“at the right hand of God.”** David, though, looks to his right, and nobody is there – nobody for support, nobody to give advice. He’s completely alone.

As I was researching Psalm 142, I read an interesting reference from one author in a book published twenty years ago. He was addressing the issue of loneliness, and he made the comment that young people are seeking companionship in chat rooms, but he argued that electronic relationships are an “unfulfilling, cheap substitute for in person friendships and interaction.” How interesting! And here we are twenty years later, reduced to nothing but the cheap substitute!

Obviously, we are not in a cave like David is. But some of us might relate, at least a little bit, to what David is going through here. We might be feeling a bit stranded, a bit cut off, a bit alone, a bit isolated, maybe even overwhelmed by all of this. Maybe it’s the quarantine; maybe it’s something else – working overnight, working unusually long or strange hours, going through some challenge in life, facing a health concern, struggling with a sin we’re afraid to confess – so many things have a way of making us feel alone, as if we are the only ones facing these things. And the reminder for us is: Like David, we also have the ability to take our concerns directly to God. We have the ability to **“pour out”** our concerns before the Lord, face-to-face. We take what we are feeling, we take our stress, we take all of our anxiety, and we dump it on the Lord. We pour it out. We don’t wait until we have everything worked out, but we take our concern and we pour it out to God, even as we are overwhelmed. We pray to God from the cave, so to speak. We think of Peter’s inspired advice in 1 Peter 5:6-7, where he said, **“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”** Or, as the writer of Hebrews says, we have a high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses, **“Therefore, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need”** (Hebrews 4:16). Whatever we are going through, we take it to the Lord, and we pour it out, and that is exactly what David does here.

II. As we look at the rest of Psalm 142, we find something of a shift (starting in verse 5), as David starts expressing his CONFIDENT EXPECTATION THAT GOD WILL FIX THIS SITUATION.

So, we have the problem in verses 1-4, and now we have the solution. In spite of his discouragement and despair, David also knows that God is his *“refuge”* (in verse 5). He knows that God is his *“portion”* in the land of the living. God is his inheritance, is how we might say that today. We might think of the song we sometimes sing, a direct quote from Lamentations 3. As the prophet Jeremiah sits on the side of the hill weeping at the destruction; as a Levite, as his inheritance goes up in smoke, he cries out to God, *“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his compassions never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my PORTION,’ says my soul. Therefore, I will hope in Him.”* Like Jeremiah, in spite of his circumstances, David knows that the Lord is his *“portion.”*

He’s in a low spot, but he’s confident that God will deliver him from his persecutors (in verse 6). He’s confident that God will bring him out of prison; not prison-prison, but he’s talking about the cave here. He sees himself as being imprisoned, but he’s looking into the future, and he’s confident that God will bring him out of it. And the goal is: So that David can give thanks to God’s name, and that he would someday be surrounded by the righteous. He knows that God will be generous with him. He knows that God will go far above and beyond what he is asking for here. In his cave, he’s looking forward to everything being okay again. He’s looking forward to being reunited with God’s people. In a sense, imagining that reunion is David’s therapy. This is what allows him to continue. And this is what allows us to continue. Until then, we have the privilege of looking out for each other. We have the privilege of checking in on each other. But it’s this thought of fellowship that seems to be giving David a reason to keep going.

So, the idea in the second half of Psalm 142 is that David is confident that God will make things right. In the first half, he pours his heart out to God, and in the second half, he knows, he reminds himself, that God is his refuge and that God will bring him through this.

Conclusion:

As we come to the end of our study, I want us to remember how this Psalm was originally intended to teach. This is a *“Maskil of David,”* a “skillful song,” it is “didactic,” a song intended to teach a lesson. So the question is: What is David teaching us here? What is the point? The point is: When we find ourselves in difficult circumstances, when we find ourselves anxious and afraid, when we find ourselves cut off from the world and isolated (whether it’s because we FEEL that way or whether it’s because we are ACTUALLY isolated like we are right now), we as God’s people are encouraged to pour our hearts out to God, knowing that God will guide us through it, knowing that God is gracious. This song from a caveman is teaching us what to do and how to think when we find ourselves in similar circumstances.

As we learn from what David writes here, I would like to invite you to do something. Sometime today, take a piece of paper and write Psalm 142 in your own words. And try to include these two parts, two sets of bullet points. First of all, what do I need to pour out to God right now? What is my trouble right now? What is weighing on my mind? Providing for my family? The world economy? Staying well? Loneliness? Getting ready to teach online tomorrow? Going to the polls on Tuesday? Fear? Worry? Anger? Whatever it is, pour it out to the Lord. And then the second part: Write down what we know from Scripture. Write down what we know to be true. Write down some of what God has promised. What is our confident expectation? And then, once we have written out Psalm 142 in our own words, I would encourage you to pray that prayer or sing that song! God, here

is my trouble; I'm pouring my heart out; and this is what I know you can do about it. This is what I am looking forward to in the future.

I am so thankful that you have been with us this morning. If you have any questions or concerns, anything we can do to encourage you on some way, please get in touch.

As we close, let's go to God in prayer...

Our Father in Heaven,

We praise you this morning for your infinite wisdom and power. We are thankful this morning for your word and for the Psalms, in particular. We are thankful for what you have told us in Scripture about the life of King David. And today, we are thankful for Psalm 142.

There are many concerns on our minds right now, but we put our trust in you, and we ask for your grace and your mercy – on us as individuals, on our families, on our city and state, on our nation, and on the world. We continue to ask for a cure, and we continue to ask your blessing and peace upon those who are working so hard to bring this to an end and on those who working so hard to keep us well, fed, safe, and connected.

Bless our congregation. We pray that we would have the wisdom and courage to do something to encourage each other this week. Bless our elders and deacons. Bless our seniors. Keep us close to you and close to each other. We look forward to worshiping together again soon.

We come to you this morning in the name of Jesus, the Great Physician and our Savior. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com