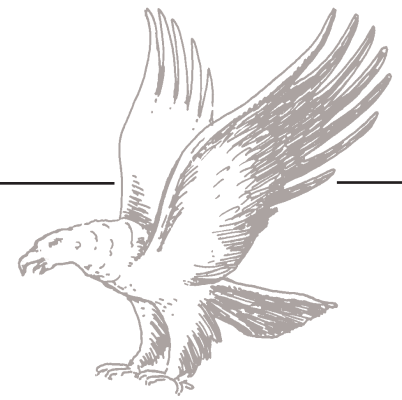


Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



September 7, 2014

The Afflictions of the Righteous

The Bible often speaks of God's deliverance of his people. But how can we reconcile that promise with the harsh reality of pain in the lives of even the best of people?

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all” (Psa. 34:19).

“The Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom” (2 Tim. 4:18).



David knew a thing or two about affliction. According to the preface that leads Psalm 34, he wrote these words during an especially difficult time in his life. He was hounded by enemies among his own people, and scorned by the Philistines in whose company he sought refuge. Life couldn't get any worse for him.

Yet even in the midst of all his troubles, David was confident that someday God would deliver him. Did God live up to David's expectations? Well, sorta. David did eventually outlast his enemies and become a very successful king over all Israel. But that improvement in his circumstances merely traded one set of problems for another. His personal life was an unholy mess involving scandal, estrangement, even treason. Several of his children met violent ends, and one

led an armed rebellion that nearly cost David his throne. Again and again, he felt the bitter heartache of tragedy and loss. Where was God in all this?

The story of David's life illustrates one of the great enigmas of divine providence: If the righteous endure affliction throughout their lives—in some cases, “many” afflictions—how can the Bible speak in such lofty words of God delivering them? With stories like those of David or Job or the exiles in Babylon, that promise seems like a cruel joke. Even the Bible speaks of God's people as being “sheep for the slaughter” (Rom. 8:36). Where's the deliverance in *that*?

There are two answers to this dilemma. First, *comparatively speaking*, for all their hardships, the righteous generally do enjoy a reduced level of suffering compared to the wicked. Life is not perfect for any of us, but the wicked almost always have a harder time of it.

Second, this dilemma is the creation of a terribly limited perspective on life. Yes, the righteous often suffer in this life, sometimes cruelly so. *But this life is not all there is.* When the righteous man

dies from a horrible disease or accident or persecution, his demise does not invalidate God's protection. Rather, his death is merely the leaving of one form of existence for something much better. The few difficult years spent here on this earth cannot compare to the eternity of peace that lies beyond—a deliverance that was promised by God all along.

Like David, Paul also endured many afflictions in his life. At the end, as he faced certain execution at the hands of his captors, he could have railed at God for failing to deliver him. But he didn't. Instead, his impending departure filled him with an eager anticipation of the reward that lay beyond in that “heavenly kingdom.” *The Lord will deliver me* was no idle promise to Paul; it guided every moment of his life.

When we face adversity in our life, we can find comfort in God's promise to deliver us. But we must be careful to place that promise in the much larger context of God's plans, not ours. Whatever good things we may experience here, the real deliverance will not come until after we're gone.

— David King