

## Courage, My Brothers, Courage

In this series of articles from Psalm 102 we've seen that the Psalmist is suffering and has been crying out to God in prayer. In my previous article, we saw that the Psalmist sought to use his personal suffering in such a way that God's people as a whole would be built up and encouraged as we meditate on the promises of God. Verses 23-24a serve as a transition that has the Psalmist going from the *temporal* to the *eternal*. He acknowledges that his "days are shortened" but that God "endures throughout all generations." This section of the Psalm reminds us of the:

### —Permanence of God

Like the Psalmist, we know that our current lives on *this earth* will not last forever. We are finite, but God is infinite. "Of old you laid the foundation of the earth and the heavens are the work of your hands." This theme of God the Father being eternal is picked up in the New Testament by the writer of Hebrews in 1:10-11 who references Psalm 102:25-27. Those verses that are attributed to God the Father in Psalm 102 are attributed in the New Testament to Jesus Christ—God the Son. The fact of God's covenant with a people is not merely an Old Covenant truth but clearly continues on into the New Covenant. The New Covenant people of God are called Christians because, by faith, they've become followers of Jesus Christ—God the *eternal* Son! Verse 28 summarizes this entire Psalm with the comfort that belongs to all of God's Covenant people: "The children of your servants shall dwell secure; *their offspring* shall be established before you." Just as the Psalmist used his suffering to build up the Church, no matter what Christians go through, we too, should be *giving our lives in service to God and his people*. It matters not whether someone is in full time ministry. Each of us is called to give our lives to Jesus Christ and to take every opportunity to use our time, talents and treasures to serve the local, visible Church.

I began this series of articles with a true story from the 16th century. Five young men had just completed their seminary training in Switzerland. They planned to go back to their native France to plant churches with the intent of building up existing, local churches as well as preaching the gospel to non-believers. Before any of those men could preach their first sermon as French pastors they were captured and thrown in prison. It's a mystery only known to God why these five men were never able to use their gifts and training to serve Christ's church. And yet, their story lives on in the history of God's people. After many attempts to have these five men released from prison there came a time where it seemed that it was not in God's eternal plan for this to happen. On May 15th, 1553 John Calvin wrote a letter to these men saying, "God has stopped

the way.” Listen to another portion of this letter that Calvin wrote as he sought to encourage these men in their final hours.

“We who are here shall do our duty in praying that God would glorify Himself more and more by your constancy, and that He may, by the comfort of His Spirit, sweeten and endear all that is bitter to the flesh, and so absorb your spirits in Himself, that in contemplating that heavenly crown, you may be ready, without regret, to leave all that belongs to this present world. Now, at this present hour, necessity itself exhorts you more than ever to turn your whole mind heavenward.....He will strengthen your hands in the fight and will not suffer a single drop of your blood to be shed in vain.” The letter was signed, “Your humble brother, John Calvin.”

Since the letter was written on the fifteenth of May, it’s almost certain that it never reached these men. The *next day* after the letter was written, these five Christians were told to get ready to die. They were each strapped to a stake and the fire was lit. The oldest of the five, Martial Alba, was heard encouraging his brothers as the flames arose. “Adieu, adieu my brothers.” Adieu in French is a word that’s used to say “goodbye” but it literally means “to God.” “*To God, to God* my brothers.” The last audible words that were heard from Martial Alba were, “Courage, my brothers, courage....” May Christians *everywhere* take courage in the fact that—even though none of us can completely understand all that God is doing in our lives and in this world—Jesus Christ is with his people no matter what we go through. Our lives for God matter for eternity. May we seek to be *faithful* followers of Jesus and *faithfully* committed to His Church no matter what comes.

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