**When In the Hour of Deepest Need**

***LSB #615***

Mid-week Lent 2

3.3.2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever experienced “the hour of deepest need?” I am sure that you may have thought that, especially at the time, but have you? I know, this past year and everything going on with COVID may feel like it has been “the hour of deepest need” but has it truly?

Every day you lay in bed praying to fall asleep so that the time ticks by more quickly? You are at the good will of others. Each day someone comes to mover you about lunch time because you cannot get out of bed or even roll to another position on your own. These friends come and feed you, maybe staying for a half hour, or maybe as much as a full hour and a half. But they have their things to do. Now you wait for your husband or son to come home to change your diaper, clean you up, and thankfully get you out of bed for a few a bit. But that relief is still another few hours away.

Have you laid in the dark with your wrists tied behind your back, your body bruised and battered from having been kicked and beaten, your stomach wondering if another three days will pass before you get a bite to drink or eat? And yet you pray to God that your Muslim captors will simply return and behead you to end the misery rather than begin another five-hour session of abuse.

Like I asked you, have you ever experienced “the hour of deepest need”?

Paul Eber was forced home from the boarding high school he attended in 1524 because of serious illness that was beginning. On the way, he was thrown from his horse and painfully dragged for more than a mile. He was left permanently disabled. This illness and the frightening personal tragedy would lead him many years later to compose the hymn we just sang. It speaks of great sorrows wrapped in endless day of anxious thought and helpless counsel. Ultimately, it gives great thanksgiving to the One who abounds I grace.

What finally influenced him to write this hymn? And what year was it? We ultimately are not sure. It appears to be traced back to the Battle of MÜhlberg 1547. Apparently, the Elector of Saxony was captured by enemy forces and it was demanded by the Catholic forces under Charles the V that the city be turned over to them. It is said that Pastor Johann Bugenhagen (whom Eber would replace as pastor) gathered the people together and prayed:

Because we do not know in this time of need what we should do, we have only on thing left, dear heavenly Father: that we lift our eye to You. All on which peole depend we have had in abundance, but through it we have been corrupted, an so that we might not put our trust in created things or human works, You have also taken from us our dear lord and Elector. Therefore we now give thanks, dear Father, for Your grace, that You have forced us with this fatherly punishment to rely solely on Your mercy in Christ Jesus, a s You require of us in the First Commandment. Now You have what You desire from us; deal graciously with Your poor children, and let your Holy Spirit be with our Elector and with us, that You might give good counsel so that we might be saved.

Although, solid evidence connecting the hymn to this prayer is lacking.

What we need to consider is this, have you ever come to “the hour of deepest need” when all earthly measures fail and hope seems far off? Have you come to the point where there is nothing left to do except beg God for mercy, knowing that H will not forsake us?

Throughout Scripture we learn that God is faithful and hears the cries of His people for deliverance. He does free them from their misery, whether their freedom is given in an earthly victory and physical restoration, or by the eternal victory over the second death which has lost its sting because of Christ. And so, this hymn, while stating that it is a reflection of Jehoshaphat’s prayer from 2nd Chronicles, it is a faithful exhibition of many passages from Scripture.

Our first verse says: *When in the hour of deepest need We know not where to look for aid; When days and nights of anxious thought No help or counsel yet have brought.* I do not know about you, but this does seem to be a reflection of the thoughts of many during the last 12 months. Sure, we could say that nothing we have endured in that time is as severe as the situations I mentioned earlier, but do we really need to get to that point before we come before God’s throne of grace?

I am truthfully glad that I know I can come to God when things go south in a handbasket. But you know what, I’m also glad to know that I do not have to wait that long, but can come to Him at any time and in any situation – indeed He desires us to pray “without ceasing.”

Our second verse expresses that our comfort is in God alone. *Then is our comfort this alone That we may meet before Your throne; To You, O faithful God, we cry for rescue from our misery.* Do you hear this verse? Is our comfort that we meet God before His throne? Yes! But, it is, but listen again. Then is ***OUR*** comfort this alone that ***WE*** may meet before Your throne.

Do you understand the significance of this verse? ***WE*** meet before the throne of God’s grace. It is obvious that we do that on Sunday mornings (or Wednesday evenings), but is there any other time that we meet together before the throne? Jesus did give us a hint about this. Remember that prayer He gave to us? The Lord’s Prayer? Jesus has this prayer He gives to us begin in a particular way, “***OUR*** Father…”

First, note that this word “our” means that we are all united when we pray this prayer. Secondly, note that as Jesus is teaching us this prayer, He is claiming that ***HE*** is united to us when we pray this prayer. But as this is Jesus teaching us to pray, He is claiming that these things are true whenever we pray any prayer. When we pray, we are united. What a joy it is to know that when I pray, the whole body of Christ is united in prayer with me. It is also why it is such a joy when someone says to me, “Pastor, you were/are in my prayers!” And further why it is wonderful for us to declare to one another, “You are/were in my prayers.”

Yes, “***WE***” cry for rescue from our misery. ***We***, one body in Christ, share our miseries, trials, tribulations, as well as our joys and thanksgivings.

It is nice to have hymns which remind us of what we know and believe to be true, to confess the faith and again teach us. I cannot speak for you personally, but these reminders are wonderful for me for I need to be reminded again, and again, for in my sinfulness, my flesh forgets what I know to be true by faith.

With this thought in mind, we come to our third verse, *For You have promised, Lord, to heed Your children's cries in time of need through Him whose name alone is great, our Savior and our advocate.* We heard in our Old Testament lesson how Jacob wrestled with God. He was in fear about confronting his brother Esau. He knew how he had treated him, stealing both his birthright and his blessing. So Jacob wrestled with God, prayed to Him, begging Him, wrestling with Him in mind and heart that it was as if he was physically wrestling with God. Like Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, so physically engaged that He was sweating, and that sweat was like drops of blood (Luke 22:44)

Jacob’s wrestling with God is reflected in this verse, holding God to His promises. Just as we heard in the Gospel lesson, and focused our meditation on Sunday on the Canaanite woman who wrestled with Jesus, holding Him to the promises of God. We can easily see now why this hymn is used for Reminiscere.

We come to God to help us through His Son Jesus Christ, it is He who is our advocate. We know from Paul (Rom. 5:3-5) that suffering is a tool of God to draw us closer to Him in our dire need. God’s desire is that we trust Him – above ALL things – even things which may terrify us. He has promised to hear us, and so we beg Him to keep His promises.

We are now brought to the right understanding of our relationship to God in our times of trial and tribulation, and are not driven to act. *And so we come, O God, today and all our woes before You lay; for sorely tried, cast down, we stand, perplexed by fears on ev'ry hand.* Why God? Why these troubles in my life? Why God should I have such issues? I am confused, perplexed. If indeed you are victorious, why Lord?

And then it becomes all too clear to us, and verse five takes our confusion and perplexity and turns it upside right! Yes, you heard me correctly. Our true approach to our woes is confession of our sinfulness. Sinfulness in the world – and especially our sinfulness, especially our unbelief and trust of self above God, are confessed. We come to God on bended, repentant knee, knowing that the Lord absolves us repentant sinners (as you heard earlier in the service) and delivers us. What a truly incredible verse, expressing our confession and our confidence. *O from our sins, Lord, turn Your face; absolve us through Your boundless grace. Be with us in our anguish still; free us at last from ev'ry ill.*

We can now, in great confidence, live our lives refreshed and renewed in the forgiveness given to us by God in Christ Jesus – forgiveness given in Word and Meal. Even in the face of trials, temptations, struggles, and all manner of tribulations, we live confident in hope and thankfulness to our gracious Redeemer and God. Do you hear it? *So we with all our hearts each day, to You our glad thanksgiving pay, then walk obedient to Your Word, and now and ever praise You, Lord.*

Yes, as we have confessed in song… so we beg Lord, grant us to live each day in that thankful confidence. Amen.