

Transcription of 18TM823

Psalms 75:4-7 "Go to the Head of the Class" June 24,
2018

Psalm 75. We've been going through the Psalms. Notice from the superscription that we are told that this was a song of Asaph, set to the tune of "Do Not Destroy," whatever that tune might have been. But it is a valuable lesson, only 10 verses about allowing God to open doors for you, rather than seeking to open them yourself. It is certainly one of the big problems we have as believers, that we want to wait upon the Lord, and so often we run ahead and we make our own breaks and then we say, "The Lord's been good to us," and the Lord's had nothing to do with it, but your foot's hurting from kicking in a lot of different doors.

We don't know the context of the Psalm, although the end of this section of songs is a lot of Psalms that apply to the Babylonian captivity, but we can't say that for sure from this verse. From a broader picture, however, it is a strong word from the Lord that God's timing is perfect, that waiting upon Him is a wise thing to do. You'll be blessed. It is a word from the Lord on self-promotion versus that faith that comes from waiting upon God.

I think we all have ideas of what it takes to get ahead, whether it is business decisions or your social life or even for ministry sake. God's counsel is oftentimes significantly different than what we adopted for ourselves, and things that it will take for us to get ahead. But I think if you can adopt in your own life this insight, these few verses from God's Word, it can revolutionize the way that you wait. Because waiting is hard. In fact, I say that waiting upon the Lord can be excruciating. I always thought that I should buy the Lord a watch. You know, like if you can just move along. But His timing is far better than mine, and His ways beyond my finding out. It is absolutely vital that we learn to wait upon God. He will direct our steps. You can wait upon Him and know that His plans are good. And in so doing, find you right where God wants you to be. It's necessary to find His perfect will. And then if you do and wait upon Him, you can go to the head of the class, which is where I think He would want to put you to use

you anyway.

Verse 1 says this: "We give thanks to you, O God, we give thanks. For Your wondrous works declare that Your name is near. When I choose the proper time, I will judge uprightly and the earth and its inhabitants are dissolved; I set up its pillars firmly." The Psalmist begins by being assured that God is always near to His people. It's important that you and I remember that; that God has a wonderful history of being faithful. And His record is perfect. There is no place in the Bible that you will read where people will say, well, the Lord let us down. And if you read that at all, it's false information from people that are distraught. But there's no justification for it. God doesn't fail, ever. In fact, not only are His works declaring that the Lord is near us and aware of us and our needs, but we are told in verse 2 that when it comes to His relationship with us, He can choose the proper time, whether it is your days or the earth's future history, if you will; that God will establish it until He decides otherwise. In other words, that He has the final say in your life and mine. But you should underline if you're taking notes at all the words "I choose the proper time." It is the appropriate time to move. God has a time. It may not be your time.

Like I said, I have a hard time with His time, but that's my problem, not His. He determines when to promote, when to deliver, when to heal, when to exalt, and maybe even when to sit down for a time. His timing is proper. It's never late. It's never delayed. It's never faulty. It only seems that way to us because we have such difficulty and very little patience with God, and even less confidence in His timing. Yet look, He's the Lord. He sees it all from the beginning. He acts accordingly. In fact, He goes so far as to say that the days of your life, the length of days for you are determined by Him, and that He sets up the pillars firmly. In other words, nothing is going to move Him from the plans that He has. While we are waiting for His deliverance for victory from His hands or for direction in the midst of turmoil and indecision, God assures us that nothing will fall apart, even when the earth shakes around us, because He sets its pillars firmly.

I have said to the Lord before, "You've missed an opportunity to do a good thing." And that's awful and wrong. He declares, He holds its pillars to the earth firmly. His will is going to get done, so you can hang on and hang in there, because His record is perfect.

And then notice that word at the end of the verse, "Selah." We've mentioned it a lot. It's a rest note in music. It literally in Hebrew poetry means to stop and consider this, or think this through before you move on; right? Get this in your head. Because really, verses 1 and 2 and 3 are the principles upon which verse 5 and 6 -- or verse 4 and 5, I should say, are applied and then the consequences that follow just to the end of the chapter. So before moving on, before, striving some more to get what you want and how you want it, it is a verse that says stop and think this through. Now, having done that, the Lord is near. His timing is perfect. He sets the pillars firmly. His ways will be accomplished.

He then says in verse 4, "I said to the boastful, 'Don't deal boastfully.' I said to the wicked, 'Don't lift up your horn. Don't lift up your horn on high; don't speak with a stiff neck.'" To the self-confident overachiever in the flesh, here's God's counsel: Knock it off. It's right there in Hebrew, knock it off. It's the original. To the wicked and to the boastful, neither of which we really want to be, but those who would live their lives ignorant of the lordship that God has over our lives, His oversight, verse 2 and verse 3, His wonderful works in verse 1, we instead decide that we're going to live our lives by our own power, by our own strength, by the position that God has given us. We live a life without God. It is a life lived on its own. And if you'll do that, then you really forfeit the relationship that you have with God to begin with. You live like the world. You live like the lost. You live like the unbeliever. He only has himself to rely on as well. You give up what God gives you, an advantage of knowing Him and walking with Him, and you lose everything that He makes available. Because it is so hard for us to wait upon the Lord. It's such a struggle.

As a warning to us who belong to Him, we need to know that to seek a position for ourselves on our own is to live like the world. We should avoid the self-led path. It makes us different, doesn't it? We've been saved from that life, from the old way of life. It's a battle in the flesh. It definitely is where the old man and the new man meet, isn't it? Where I let God open the doors that I think I could open on my own accord. I should wait for His hand to guide me, wait for His blessing to fall upon me, make sure that it is Him, make sure that the door is opened from the inside. After all, your life's not your own. You've been bought with a price.

So don't lift up your horn on high. The Hebrew word is "keren."

It means an animal horn. It is used in poetry as well as in symbolic terms in the Bible to speak of the animal that because he has a horn in his head kind of throws it around and pushes his way around and gets what he wants. He's kind of set, if you will, in his own ways. He's defiant, he's challenging. Notice what it says here, "Don't lift your horn up on high." Be careful when you start pushing your own will with God, because until you surrender to Him you'll never find what's best for you. It's easy to stand in defiance, isn't it? You get a little status, get a little power, you get a little might, you get a little position; all of a sudden, you know better. But you don't.

Hannah spent years praying every year at the tabernacle, "God, I need a child." She finally said, "Lord, if You'll give me a son, I'll give him back to You." When she finally became pregnant after all those years of praying, I Samuel, Chapter 2, verse 1, she went to thank the Lord for what He had given her, a son, and she said, "My heart rejoices in the Lord; and my horn is exalted in the Lord." God has given me a position. He did it though. I didn't do it; He did it. When David found himself for those seven and a half years running from Saul, where God had called him to be king and Saul wasn't having any of it, and David refused to lay his hands on God's anointed, after one of those times of escape he prayed there in II Samuel, "God is my strength, in whom I trust. He's my shield, and He's the horn of my salvation. He's the one that's been my stronghold. He's been my refuge. He's gotten me out of some tough spots." But he saw his strength or his position not coming from his own hand, but coming from the Lord. When Israel was fighting its enemies at a time when they actually were doing fairly well, the Lord said through the prophet Jeremiah to them, "The horn of Moab is going to be cut off. His arm is going to be broken. His strength is going to dissipate. He's going to be overthrown. Your enemy, who throws his head around like he is able."

Notice the words "wicked" and "boastful" to explain someone who is proud and arrogant in their self-promotion. Stiff necked, rigid; right? Fixed in his own ways. And in so doing, you return that kind of attitude towards heaven, not submit to the Lord. You're striving in your own strength, you're fighting with God, and you're not able to discover what God wants.

I'm always amazed at people who push their way through, and then try to give God credit. Well, He doesn't want the credit. He will take the credit when you surrender to Him. But whenever it

comes to something that we think will get us ahead and get us what we want or get us what we think, the only will we oftentimes consider is our own will. It's the raging of that sinful way of life that we fight with to let God be God.

You know, Jesus watching that wedding there in Luke Chapter 14 was interested in how the people came to the wedding to sit down and they picked the best seats for themselves. And the Lord watches them, and He said, you know, whenever you're invited to a wedding feast, you should not sit down in the best place, because the host could come and in front of everyone say to me, yeah, that's not your seat. Go sit over there by the door. And then you're kind of embarrassed. You should just take the low place, so that when you're invited to come up, you would have honor. And then He said whoever would exalt himself will be humbled, but if you humble yourself, you'll be exalted.

And so it is a common issue. You find it even in the church, you know. Jesus wants His own to be different; to wait upon Him to open doors, to let Him work. It's not a new concept, by the way. Solomon will write in Proverbs, the next book -- not Psalms, Proverbs 25, "Don't exalt yourself in the presence of the king, don't stand in a place of the great; it's better that you hear 'come up here,' than you be put into a lower place in the presence of the king whom your eyes have seen." You know, don't be pushing yourself around, man. Let the Lord raise you up. When we ignore God's counsel and forfeit that understanding, we are left on our own to fend for ourselves. Now you have to rely on this: Craftiness and personality and politics and contacts, just to get ahead.

I remember the story of a mom struggling with her kids who were always arguing about he got more than I did, and no, she got more than I did. And she came up with a revolutionary idea when she handed out cake. She let one cut it, then the other deal it out. All of a sudden, the scales came out to weigh it. You could cut it however you want, but I get to pick which piece I want. Jesus said humble yourself, you'll be exalted.

And it's a big battle. We want what we want, and yet God has so much more for us. It's so hard to wait. We don't like His timing. We're not completely convinced that His choices will be what we want, and so we tend -- we do this: Oh, let the Lord handle it, when we don't care. Let the Lord handle it when we tremendously care, now, that's a step of faith.

We hate to see it. You know, I think that most of us hate to

see self-promotion in the lives of others; right? Somebody's always pushing themselves and bragging about themselves and promoting. Oh, that guy's obstinate. We hate it, but somehow we're pretty capable of having it in our own lives without batting an eye. But there's a danger that your nose can get so far up in the air you'll fall into a ditch. What was it, Psalm -- no, no. It's Proverbs 16, I think. It says, "Better to be of humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud."

So here's the balance: Ambition is biblical. Hard work is biblical. Drive and goals and vision are all biblical. The problem becomes when we pursue those things to the exclusion of dependence and submission to God's will so that I'm just driven by want or self.

Notice what it says here in verse 5: "Don't lift up your horn." Modern translation, don't toot your own horn. Don't toot your own strength, your own capability. Don't look out to make a way for yourself. Let God do that. That's a contrary, I think, position to the world and what you would be taught in school. The world will just use this verse. The verse -- the world's philosophy is he who toots not his own horn will have a horn that remains untooted. I'm pretty sure that's the way that would go. I'm making it up as we go. But look, the Psalmist is pretty clear about the fact that it can backfire. You can find yourself in a place God doesn't want you to be. In fact, if you get down to verse 10 and you read that the horns of the wicked will be cut off while the horns, a position of power of the righteous, will be exalted.

When Saul first became king, and he was the king because these are --, the people wanted a guy that looked like everybody else, head and shoulders taller and good looking, and the Lord gave them what they wanted. He didn't have that for them. But it was the first time in their history after two years of rulership that Israel had a standing army. It amounted to 3,000 men, 2,000 of which were with Saul in Gibeah, his hometown where he liked to lay around under the trees. His son Jonathan had 1,000 men, but Jonathan was a man who'd not only loved the Lord, he wanted to serve his people. And so he was forever going out to battles and praying, "God, go with us." He was always outnumbered. And God continued to deliver Israel; not through Saul, but through Jonathan. But you'll read there in I Samuel, I think, Chapter 13 that whenever Jonathan had a victory, Saul would stand up and begin to blow the trumpet and began to speak to the people about how he had delivered them. When David came

upon the scene a couple of years later and God used him to slay Goliath and the people began to see that this was a man who served, and they began to sing his praises rather than Saul's, it only got worse for Saul and his desire for self-promotion. It actually became his ruin, his downfall.

Self-promotion took out Lucifer. I mean, if you read Isaiah 14 or Ezekiel 28 where the description of this angel created by God is laid out for us, I mean, Lucifer was made in a place of great prominence. He seemed to be the worship leader. He had access to the throne of God. He had others that followed him. He sang beautifully. He was made with an ability to worship. And then he began to do these things. In fact, there's six of the "I wills" in Isaiah 14: I will be like the most high God, I will sit on the side of the north, I will be worshipped. And the Lord said, I don't think so. You'll be leaving. And Lucifer became Satan. Cast out. A third of the angels gone with him. It didn't pay off. It never does. It will never pay off.

It is such a common malady, however, for us that God is constantly warning us to wait upon Him. Look it up sometime. Just wait upon the Lord. Man, you'll get tired of reading the same verse over and over and over again. You see it in churches. They seem to try to, I know, grow through slick ad campaigns or computerized letters or whatever it might be, forgetting that the Lord draws people in. He builds the church. The gates of hell don't prevail against His words. So why fall for that worldly way when we can rely upon the Lord? "Unless the Lord build the house," Psalm 127, verse 1, "they labor in vain that build it. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, and to go to bed late, just to eat your bread of sorrows; for the Lord can give His beloved sleep." But it all comes down to the Lord is able to do that work, so let Him do it.

I remember when I first started teaching a home Bible study. It was in the early '70s. I was three years old if you're trying to do numbers. I would try everything I could to get someone to come. I'd talk to them about the cheesecake we had and the -- you know, and the -- or I'd meet guys that were my age, I'd go, "Oh, there's some beautiful girls there. You should come and say hi to my sisters in the Lord," you know. And I'd try everything. We'll have dinner. Nothing worked. It was a hassle. I was always like, what else could I come up with? And when I finally said, Lord, You do what You want, then the place filled up. I didn't have to be striving all the time. You see it in people that look for positions or titles, not willing to

let the Lord raise them up. We'll get some people that will just show up at church, they start hanging around. You just wonder what they're up to. They're just trying to get in.

I used to try to chide people into going to church. I'm glad you're here on Sundays. I wish some of you would be here during the week. I'd chide you if I would think it would help. But I used to shame my buddies, "Oh, Mr. Spiritual Guy can't get out to church during the week. Hey, what is wrong with you? Is your Bible still in your trunk for a week?" I'd try anything. Nothing worked. Nothing worked. It was just a struggle. But if the Lord's the head of the church, then the Lord is the head of the church.

Folks that have ministries here in the church, sometimes they'll say, "Have you put it in the bulletin? Could you give it a little push? Could you announce it one more time?" Well, we can do that. We try to announce things as best that we can for the things that the church can be involved with. But look, it's God's work. It's God's work. Self-promotion is a short-lived art form at best.

Do you remember Nebuchadnezzar? He was the world leader of the Babylonian government. It ruled the world. He walked out on his porch in chapter 4 of Daniel, he looked around and he said, "Oh, isn't this great Babylon that I've built, by my power and by my strength, for my honor?" And that was about all he got out of his mouth and the Lord had enough of him. He drove him out with the animals and for seven seasons, seven years, he lived just like a crazy man, running around outside. But then something remarkable happened to a world ruler. He came to his senses and acknowledged that the Lord ruled in the kingdom of men. And you can read his testimony there in Daniel of a man who came to the Lord from the world, and what it took to bring him to his knees.

Herod was furious when Peter had gotten out of prison after he had killed James and made some headway getting some political capital with the Jews. He was so angry that the Lord had broken Peter out of jail, he killed the guards that were watching him. He went down to Caesarea where the Roman headquarters were, if you will. The people from Tyre and Sidon in the north who depended on his government, the Romans, for food, came and they met with him in the amphitheater in Caesarea, and it said that Herod came out that day dressed in some silver flashy outfit like Elton John early on. And the people wanted to go make a deal with him, began to say, "Well, this is not the voice of

man, this is the voice of a god." And he liked every bit of that. But the Lord didn't. And three days later he had intestinal worms and he died. It was gross.

Peter wrote in his first epistle, "If you'll humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, He will exalt you in due time." Verse 6 says that exaltation doesn't come from the east, from the west, or from the south, which makes you conclude it must come from above, from the north. The word "exaltation" or "promotion" here is the same word as the word "lifted up" in verse 4, in verse 5, the word "exalt" in verse 7, the word "exalted" in verse 10.

Promotion for the saint is a work of God. Whether He opens the door or shuts them, He's the only one who has the key. And He has a proper time. The qualification for you and I is not what we know or what we do as much as it is in whom we trust.

Notice what he says in verse 6, don't look in every direction, just look to me. Now, I know the rational argument immediately comes, well, that's great in theory, but this is the real world, and if you don't push yourself, you're never going to be seen. Really, is that true? I would challenge you to go read the verse again and then ask yourself this question: Do I really believe God or not? And then live accordingly. Do your best, serve the Lord, wait upon Him. Do your best, commit the rest. Easy counsel. Because verse 7 tells us that God will have the final word. He'll take one down, exalt another, bring judgment. His people will sing forever. The wicked horn will be cut off. The righteous will be exalted.

The common approach of scheming and making friends in high places and selling yourself and positioning yourself and relying upon yourself, your personality, there's a lot of challenges to that in this very revealing Psalm, because self-promotion is the wrong approach. And I'll tell you why: It presumes that you know God's will, and it also presumes that God has forsaken you to do it yourself. Hang on now. Okay. You know where God wants you. Now get there, buddy. It's up to you now. Breathe hard, try hard, push ahead. In reality, self-promotion limits God. You sometimes can see it in churches in ministries where they are kept alive by just artificial means, driven by the determination of someone that's still involved, but it is pushing and shoving. There's no clear proof that it is a work of God or a sustained work. There's nothing about striving. It's a lot of hard work to make things stay. It is a lot of rest to find God working through you and in you.

So we must work hard, but put our trust in the Lord. Perhaps sometimes we forget to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, Matthew 6:33, and then God will add everything to you. When the 50,000 or so people went back to Jerusalem from their Babylonian captivity, they were determined to rebuild the temple, the place only where they could worship. They weren't allowed to go anywhere they wanted. It was one place where God would put His name. And they quickly laid the foundation of the temple before they began to look at each other and go, we don't have a house to live in, so let's just put some construction tape around the foundation and let's go build our houses, and then we'll come back and finish this house for God. And they bailed out for 16 years. They floated, expensive wood down from Egypt just so they could build their own places. And then God sent to them Haggai the prophet to speak to them about how having made those decisions, it wasn't gain for them at all, it was loss. He said to the people, "I've watched you. You've sown much and you've reaped little. You eat, but you never have enough. You are not filled with your drink. You clothe yourself, but you're never warm. You earn wages, but you put them in bags with holes. Consider your ways." And he began to point out to them that because they hadn't put the Lord first and sought His will but their own, they were losing on every front. They decided finally, all right. He's right. They repented. They began to build again that place of worship. They neglected planting their own fields, which it was planting season, but, no, no, God first. And that year God gave them a rich and bountiful blessing, but they learned to put Him first. For the next four years they dedicated themselves to the place of worship. It wasn't building His church, it was building the only place where you could worship God, where you could bring your sacrifice. To do anything else is to come up short.

Jeroboam was a faithful kid. In fact, if you read I Kings 11, Solomon saw him as a young industrious boy, and as a result he said to him, "I'd like to put you charge of the labor force of the house of Joseph." And so he showed a lot of ambition, a lot of drive, and Solomon went, that's our man. And he did well for a while, except three chapters later or so it is a word from the Lord that is sent to him in I Kings 14, "And the Lord said to Jeroboam, because you've exalted yourself among the people. I've given you a position, I've put you in a place of responsibility, but you haven't served like My servant David. You're doing what's right in your own eyes. You're going back to the other gods. You're not putting Me first at all. You've cast Me behind your back. Disaster's headed your way." The

same industrious guy that started out so faithful didn't turn out so good. He lost a lot of his gain.

Compare him to someone like Joseph, who gets thrown in the pit and he's faithful. Gets thrown in prison, though he'd done nothing wrong, and he's faithful. Ends up being, placed on the pinnacle of the world, second in command to the Pharaoh, ruling in his kingdom, and he's faithful. He says to his brothers when they find out that it's him, "It's not you that sent me here, God sent me here, to make me a father to Pharaoh, to make me a Lord of his house, to make me a ruler over the land. You've saved -- God has used me to save the people." So different. One pushed his way and his agenda. Joseph just trusted God. Didn't always go the way he wanted. God is greater than our ambitions. He is certainly greater than the wicked ambitions of these brothers of Joseph.

The Lord said to David when He exalted him, "I've taken you from the sheepfold. You used to watch over the sheep. Now you're going to be a ruler over My people. I've been with you wherever you've gone. I've cut off all your enemies. I've made you a great name amongst the great men of the earth, and if that isn't enough, I'd do more for you. But just trust Me." God's plans are better than yours. So here we have this dilemma to face. Do I as a believer throw my lot in with God's goodness, trust Him, seek Him, pray more, ask more questions, don't just run ahead?

You know, Zechariah wrote this, Chapter 4, verse 6, "Not by might, not by power, but My spirit, says the Lord." I guess you could make the comparison -- we'll quit here, but you could make the comparison between salvation and this idea of being led by the Lord. The gospel finds no hearers among the proud or the self-confident, yet there's free life available to anyone who's aware of their failures and of their sin.

So salvation, like promotion, is a work of God. It's a work of God in the heart of the humble. So you can either try to save yourself, which is foolish. And Jesus died for you. It's because you couldn't save yourself. Or you can give up your own abilities and you can hang on to the Lord and His promises, and then you can go to the head of the class, because He knows the proper time.