

THE
WONDERS
OF THE
SNOW

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PREACHING FOR A NEW MILLENNIUM

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SERMON TITLE: Lifted by Things Unseen

TYPE: Faith, Hope, Brotherhood

TEXT: Psalm 56:3–9

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We usually begin a year with twenty-one days of prayer and fasting. The miracles, answered prayers, and genuine sense of direction that follow this season of devotion are many and diverse.

Three weeks into it, the New Year has lost a bit of its newness. Whatever novelty of adding one more year to the date has passed. And now, people seem determined to live out what they sense God is speaking. Faith and perseverance then seem common themes during this time of year.

In fact, inspiring, upbeat messages are generally common for the month of January. This message is no exception. The simple words, “God is for me,” are transformative when we can say these in faith: this knowledge that God is for us and that His eye never leaves us. He may remain unseen, but we sense His presence. Like strong cables secured in a mountain side, this persuasion holds the pullies of hope that lift us from life’s lowlands.

I. Opening Illustration

Boston is one of those fascinating cities enjoyable to visit. Filled with historic sites, interesting people, and stunning vistas. Boston is, to paraphrase an old song, my kind of town.

Outside of the many sites related to the Revolutionary War, a favorite stop of mine is Trinity Church.

Years ago, one of my favorite preacher-authors pastored there, an Episcopal minister named Phillips Brooks (1835–1893).

It's hard to overstate his importance during the Civil War. As a pastor in Philadelphia, the imposing six-foot, four-inch preacher, weighing in at three hundred pounds, thundered for emancipation and voting rights for former slaves. This Harvard-educated minister has a building named after him on his alma mater's campus.

His sermons were whimsical but biblical: Aaron's Excuse, The Tree of Life, The Perfect Faith, The Consolations of God, The Sword Bathed in Heaven, and—oh yes!—The Wings of the Seraphim.

Oddly enough, and as providence would seem to have it, all of this was largely forgotten about Brooks because of a trip he made and a song he wrote.

He traveled to the Holy Land and one evening wrote a song, "O Little Town of Bethlehem." For that song, Brooks would forever be known.

The church he pastored was equally impressive in its edifice and influence. Trinity Church is considered an architectural marvel built in the Richardsonian Romanesque style characterized by its distinctive roof, its rough stone arches, and its massive tower. It became known as the first architectural style unique to America and copied by the rest of the world.

But my focus today is on the tower. Not just the tower—but also the tower’s foundation. The foundation is unusual in that it was built atop thousands of thirty-five-foot-tall spruce trees pounded into the soft soil. Then, the area was flooded with water. The water served a dual purpose: it kept the spruce trees from rotting into the ground, and it permitted the spruce trees to float. This flotation unlocked the tremendous power of buoyancy.

We can see the 150-foot tall tower of granite.
We cannot see the spruce trees that hold it up.

In a sense, that’s true of life.
We are all upheld by unseen forces that give us the stability to build thriving lives.

LIFTED BY THINGS UNSEEN

Psalm 56:3–9, KJV

What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul. Shall they escape by iniquity? in thine anger cast down the people, O God. Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book? When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me.

II. Message Introduction and Transition

Why do things float?

Place a hard-boiled egg in a bowl of water, and it plunges to the bottom.

Place a hard-boiled egg in a bowl of saltwater, and it floats.

We understand that the density of saltwater aids in flotation.

But we also understand that it’s not just the density of the medium that causes things to float.

Things float because they are less dense than the medium in which they rest.

Archimedes, a mathematician who lived three hundred years before Christ, pondered the question of flotation. He wondered why the Greek ships weighing thousands of pounds could float. While taking a bath one day, he noticed the water level rose as he got into the bath. A revelation came to him that the amount of water displaced is in proportion to his weight. He was so caught up with this revelation that he leaped from the tub and raced through the town screaming “Eureka!” meaning, “I have found it!”

We probably don’t get nearly so enthused about flotation. Yet, there is a lifting of the head, hands, and heart that should thrill us.

Yet, the psalmist also had a “Eureka” moment.

III. Text

A. Setting

In Psalm 56, David discovered the lifting power of things unseen. Here he makes that bold statement, “This I know; for God is for me.”

I’m not sure where each of you has come from this evening.
I’m not sure if you have come from a house of mourning or one of merriment.
I don’t know if you feel like crying or laughing.
This I do know—God is for you!

There are many imponderables I cannot fathom.
I cannot, and do not, know why the wicked seem to prosper.
I find it unfathomable to understand why good people suffer.
Why love withers and friends forsake you is to me impenetrable.
But this I know—God is for you!

Injustices cry for justice.

Disparities seek redistribution.
Inequities scream for fairness.
So many voices in the land . . . which voice can be trusted?

Some criticize the government, and sympathetic voices chime in.
Some criticize the way they were raised, and others join chorus.
Still others slam the church, and the pile-on is immense.
Whose can you trust?

Here is a voice worthy of trust.
A seasoned voice full of experience, sound judgment, and fruit . . .
A voice that emanates from a man after God's own heart . . .
"This I know; for God is for me!"

This is no Pollyanna voice!
No silver spoon in this man's mouth.
No idyllic visions seen through rose-colored glasses.
No theoretical notions from some ivory tower.

This is the voice of one who is struggling.
One who has tried, failed, and is seeking to get up again.

He says:

Psalm 56:1–2, KJV

*Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily
oppresseth me. Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many
that fight against me, O thou most High.*

You can almost sense the fatigue in his voice.
Daily opposition. Daily oppression. Daily struggles.
David is tired.

Psalm 56:5–6, KJV

*Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil.
They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps,
when they wait for my soul.*

He doesn't have a hangnail or a sore throat.
 No, this is life and death.
 He recognizes that his opponents are determined to kill him.

He thrashes about in despair.
 His face streamed with tears.

Psalm 56:8, KJV
Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle:
are they not in thy book?

Yet in the midst of this deep despair and confusion, David found
 a force that lifted him.
 What friends couldn't do; what circumstances couldn't do.
 Something unseen did.

Psalm 56:9, KJV
When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back:
this I know; for God is for me.

Yes, that is the voice we need in our lives.
 Not the voice of the defeated, the discouraged, and the dispirited.
 We need the voice of he who was cast into a sea of misfortune
 and survived.

We could delve today into the many ways life will get you down.
 We could discuss the weights and sins of our failures.
 Yet, I'm not here to put you down or further down.
 I'm here to help you up.

Four men lowered a paralyzed man into the presence of Jesus.
 Four is the number of the world: four corners of the earth; four
 points on the compass.
 Four men let another down.

It just seems the best the world can do is let you down.
 But thankfully, when you are let down—there is one to pick you up.

As Eliphaz told the suffering Job, “There is a lifting up!” (Job 22:29).

IV. Speaking Points

A. In God, there is a lifting!

Those near to Him are lifted. From the overflow of her soul, Hannah cried that God raises the poor from the dust and the beggar from the ash heap (I Samuel 2:1).

The psalmist said God lifts up the weak, but casts down the wicked to the ground (Psalm 147:6).

God lifts His people on high—raised to heavenly places.

Listen to David.

Psalm 40:1–3, KJV

I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.

God is in the lifting business!

He will float your boat!

He will cause you to remain high and dry.

Everyone say two words: “us” and “up.”

Say them together: “us up.”

Those two words are found together in Scripture.

Again and again, we read that God brought “us up” out of the land of Egypt.

In the same sense, He brought “us up” from the land of bondage.

Hosea said after two days, God will revive us.

On the third day, He will raise “us up” (Hosea 6:2).

Paul told the Church in Ephesus:

Ephesians 2:4–6, KJV

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

This lifting is not reserved for the special few.

He’s interested in you, too.

He wants to raise “us up.”

Do you remember when Paul and his company were in the storm? Word came from Heaven that not a single soul would be lost. All will stay atop the water. No one would go under. All would receive the same lifting power (Acts 27:22–23).

This is so typical of the God we serve.

He raises the suffering from their affliction.

He lifts the hurting from their misery.

He awakens the sleeping from their slumber.

In God, there is a lifting.

So it seems . . .

B. We need God within us.

Our faith is not superficial.

It’s not skin-deep.

But there is a deep abiding force that lifts us.

None other than God Himself!

Christ in you, the hope of Glory!

The lifter of our head, the exalter of our horn!