

# Sermon Text For October 20, 2019

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

II Samuel 24:10-14, Acts 17:16-21

## ***“What to do when you are deeply distressed?”***

The girls are home for fall break so three of us went hiking on the Appalachian trail on Monday. It was great, first time we stayed overnight in tents. I guess I ran into the smoke that had the poison ivy so that was too bad. I’ve never preached on drugs before, the doctor did say it might make me a little more irritable, so be careful. But my family said that I was as cranky as I’ve ever been so they haven’t seen a change.

I looked like this on Thursday morning, the evening before we had session, and then at 11am had a funeral, the son of the deceased during the service thanked me publicly for visiting his dad and then added, but I guess you’re a little worse for wear, I said, yeah, but you should see the other guy. Rachel my oldest was helpful when I sent her this picture, she said at least you don’t have to think of a costume for Trunk or Treat.

And while this looks like it is painful, for our topic today when we talk about being distressed, this is not what we are talking about. We are talking about a son who in a span of two days lost his wife and his father. We are talking about events in our life that leave us without words and at times with very, very little hope and shakes our faith to the core.

Both of our Scriptures speak about our protagonists being distressed. David because of the sin which he committed and knew that there were going to be serious repercussions as a result of that sin and Paul who is distressed over the sin of others and springs into action as a result of that distress.

But it is actually David, the serial sinner as I like to call him, who gives us an answer to our question today: What to do when you are deeply distressed. Just in case you missed it, go back to vs.14 in II Samuel and you will read: Let us fall into the hands of the Lord.” That’s the answer which produces a mature follower of Jesus Christ.

### **READ SCRIPTURE**

So David is a serial sinner. His experience that we read today is his disobedience of the Lord in taking a census which the Lord forbade him to do. This takes place after his sin with Bathsheba which is pretty well known. Remember when David is confront after his sin with Bathsheba by Nathan who calls him the man and David says I am deeply distressed by my sin. Well, not enough to today once again be confronted by his sin by another one of his prophets,

Gad, who lays out his options on what his punishment will be for his sin and David once again says: I am deeply distressed by my sin.

Our sin in our lives will lead us to great distress. So for the answer of what do you do when you are distressed because you have committed sin which has complicated your life and even created tragedies that now you cannot control? It has to be to stop sinning and to completely fall back into the hands of the Lord because we can do nothing on our own. Sin results in a life that is deeply distressing, without a doubt.

But that is low hanging fruit, isn't it? When we can draw a straight line between our sin and our distress the answer is stop sinning. But our distress isn't always, I would even say not even close to most of the time, a result of our sin. Gordon Lutz and his losses over this past week are not the result of his sin. Gordon has every right to be distressed as he lost his wife and his father over the span of two days, his wife tragically which is on a completely different level from his father after 90 long years, but still crushing none the less.

We all find ourselves distressed at different moments and events and seasons in our lives where we can't draw a straight even line from our sin to the distress. Ryan and Tobias' cancer. The loss of a child, a spouse, a sibling, all things that according to our world views God should not permit and when it does happen it shakes us to the core, at times even shakes our faith. What do we do when we are shook to the core for causes we can't identify? We know what has happened but we can't draw that straight line.

Jesus found himself in that position. In Matthew 27:46 we read, "and about..." Our Savior whose distress was not caused by his sin, still cried out for he felt the separation, the distance of His Father at that point. If Jesus feels that pain, that void and responds with a sense of abandonment do not think that when you face the valley you are disallowed from the same expression, the same anger, the same isolation that our Savior did. It is part of all of our journeys.

But in all distress, sin created or life created, does David's answer ring true. "I am in great distress, let us fall into the hands of the Lord." What a great answer to both of these realities in our lives that we will face.

With Paul, his distress was completely different. We find today in a new city, Athens of Greece. He is there because in the verses preceding these which we did not read, he gets run out of Thessalonica and Beroea and had to go to Athens where he expects to be safe.

What was Athens like back then? Athens has been continuously inhabited since 1,400BC. That's over 3,500 years since the European invaders landed in the DR. It was the

center of the world in many ways, not to take anything away from Rome. People from all over the world flocked there so people had to be able to live and let live with others who had different thoughts and ideas.

It was considered the center of the earth for intellectual thought with people like Socrates and Plato and Aristotle stopping by and spending some time there. Paul would be safe there because his message of Jesus and the resurrection wouldn't be threatening at all because it was just one of many ideas floating around Athens and the people of Athens weren't threatened by new ideas.

In Athens there were two primary areas of thought. There were the Epicureans and the Stoics who had opposing viewpoints. Epicureans believed that all life was random and a result of shifts and movements of atoms that created and managed what we did. So life is a random series of events that take place because of what happens around us. Stoics believed in life being purposeful and emphasized moral conduct. According to Stoicism everyone was connected to the universe by a force called Logos. We are all brothers and sisters united by this Logos who predestined what would happen. John 1, in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God would be very, very Stoic. So this is where Paul found himself.

We read that Paul becomes distressed in Athens because he saw that the city was full of idols. So for us picking out the sin or the faults of others is also pretty low hanging fruit. Just look at the culture in which we live and see how people almost see it as a sport in criticizing others and wanting others to join in on that criticism. That's what powers social media. You know, that is probably why Jesus said to be careful to point out the splinter or the faults in other people when you yourself have a log, or a serial sinner like David. Best to keep quiet and try to live your life according to what God would want you to do no matter who you are.

So we are not going with Paul tells us to point out the faults in others. But look at vs.17 that as a result of this distress he decided to do what he always did, to go to the synagogues, but also, and we don't read about him doing this before this Scripture, and the marketplaces every single day.

Aristotle was known for teaching in the markets, that was his brand. So Paul's distress motivated him to reach out to others with the love of Christ. You know the Gospel in the New Testament has the power to connect with the rich and the poor, with the sick and the healthy, with men and women, with slave and free. But what about the culturally astute or the intellectually advanced? Are they open to hearing the Gospel? Paul's distress motivates him to

believe so, especially since he was in that erudite class that went to all the best schools and studied under the best professors as a Pharisee himself.

So what do you do when you find yourself in deep distress? David leans back into the arms of God for security and safety and purpose. It leads Paul to action to let people know about God. Next week we will see what he says, we call it Christian apologetics as he leads them to an understanding of Jesus and the resurrection.

When we face distress we have to be able to somehow categorize it as being in God's plan but not in a superficial way. Remember Joseph who had been sold into slavery by his brothers when he is reunited with them he realizes how his hell resulted in the salvation of Israel. Jesus on the cross knew that his hell would result in the salvation of all humankind.

We, in the midst of our distress, may not be able to see the hand of god at work. But David tells us to lean back into them. Lean back and know that your distress has not gone unnoticed by God, then kick forward, as Paul did, into action by seeing how you can be a part of this work that we call the kingdom of God. Amen.