



Message of Father Lexson Maku
on behalf of Afro-Canadian Evangelical Mission
www.acemission.org

Psalm 90

A prayer of Moses the man of God.

¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling place
throughout all generations.

² Before the mountains were born
or you brought forth the whole world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

³ You turn people back to dust,
saying, "Return to dust, you mortals."

⁴ A thousand years in your sight
are like a day that has just gone by,
or like a watch in the night.

Psalm 90 is a prayer by Moses - yes, Moses - not all the Psalms were by David, look it up! - and his prayer tells us that every life belongs to God. God is our "dwelling place" - our refuge, our only hope.

I want to talk to you about life in Sudan.

When you see the photos of those kids you might wonder what they are thinking. What is it like to be inside their life, not just seeing it as a photo? Do they think their life is normal, or what do they think? They are far away from here, and in a very different place. Today I want to tell you what they are thinking, what they are feeling, what their hope is.

I understand those kids because I was one of them. I was a kid in Juba in Sudan, and when I was young I was a very lucky one - very blessed. You see, my younger brothers and sisters and I had a good life in our home. We were doing well. My mother Josephine was a housewife, taking care of the whole family. My father's name was Samson - yes, like the strong guy from the Bible - and he was a big man in my life. My dad was a very good guy. He was a trader. Very good at it. He traded so well that he had a good business, and because he was very kind he also helped very many people. Because he had a good business and knew everybody, he was an important person in our town.

Also I had a very good uncle, the brother of my mother. He was a pastor and he taught us Bible and to love God.

I had a better life than most of the kids. Because we had more money than most people, I could go to a good school. Many kids could not go to school because their parents did not have the money. But I could have lessons in English, and I already spoke the Moro language and local Arabic. So I went to the

boarding school a few miles from my parents home. I was the oldest child and someday I would join my father in his business.

But there was trouble. There was fighting in the Sudan, between the government and rebels. It was bad. There were killings, and sometimes those killings were in our town. When I was 12 years old - it was 1965 - I was at the boarding school. While I was there, someone was killed in the town. In those days in Sudan we did not have a funeral in a special place, the people just went to the person's house, and that was where the funeral was. Many people went to this funeral, and while they were there, the government forces came. They came around the house, and they killed the people at the funeral. 150 people were there, and the soldiers killed them all properly.

At the school we heard that something very bad had happened. And I got a message from my mother. It said that my father, Samson Maku - that beautiful kind man - he was dead. He was one of the 150.

I was 12 years old and my dad was dead. I would never work with him.

Then it got worse. There was a teacher at my school. Somehow it was discovered that he was telling the government forces about the activities of rebels. The rebels came to our school one night, and they went to his room, and they killed him. The next morning, we woke up, and learned that our teacher had been murdered. We were very scared, because then we also heard that the government forces were going to come. They were coming because their man was murdered. We knew what they would do.

What could we do? The adults had already run away. But where would we go? Back to the town where they were killing people too? We were just young boys. We held a meeting in the yard of the school. It was just a minute or two. What would we do? We ran. We ran away.

We ran without anything. Some boys tried to take some books or some of their things. But no, it was too heavy to carry. It was all dropped, because we had to run - we had to be faster than the trucks of the government forces. We ran for seven days and in those seven days we had no food. With our hand we reached into the ditch for water. We ran in the forest because we were scared to be on the open road. It was the jungle. At night we were so terrified of the wild animals that we would climb a tree and try to sleep. Have you ever tried to sleep up in the air, holding on to the tree so you will not fall?

After seven days we were so tired but we made it to the Congo. We went into the town and went to the police. We became the first refugees in that area. There were 30 of us. They gave us some rough tents and some grain. We took the grain and it was raw. So we had to look around and get some rocks, and we crushed the grain between the rocks. Then we got water from the river and we made a paste, and we ate it or if we had a fire we tried to cook it. We were not good cooks.

I remember sitting there with my friends in that camp. There were four boys in each tent. I can see the faces of the boys. Joseph. David. George. And we asked ourselves - what are we to do? We have nothing. Zero. We have only our lives, and we knew that many others did not have even that. But we had one other thing - we had hope.

We looked at how it went with some of the other boys. They were going wild. We said to each other - everything has been taken from us, but if we turn away from God now, it will only be worse for us. So our hope was in God.

There was a church close to the refugee camp. I praise God for that church. The church people were Congolese, but when we came, they had compassion on us. The women gave us food. The pastor was a very kind man. His name was Bizmongo, Pastor Bizmongo. He would visit us in our camp, and talk with us and pray for us. He said we could come to the Bible studies, to the meetings. All the meetings were in the Lingala language. So that was the fourth language I learned, listening to the stories of the Bible and hearing those people pray for us, those boys from Sudan. I had nothing to wear on my feet, but I could say "I have no shoes" in four languages.

The people in the church said it was not good for us to not be in school. They gave us clothes and they put us in the school with their own kids. We had no family to help us, but the church acted as our family. I completed my school in the Congo. I was there for seven years.

Then I decided to go back. Things were better in Sudan. I went back to my town, and I found my mother and brothers and sisters. They were all alive. So I worked then, first as Plant Protection Officer - watching over the crops. Later I began to work for Oxfam. I was a logistics officer, helping people who were displaced to receive food and shelter. So God could use me, too. He would save me again.

I was married then, and we had two children. One night there was a knock on our door. A man was standing outside in the dark. He told me I was to go see a government security man at his office, first thing in the morning. I did not sleep well. The next morning I got in my Oxfam vehicle and drove to his office. He told me to sit down. I sat down.

He said to me "so why are you working with the rebels against your own government?"

I said, "This is not true. I do no such thing."

"Someone says it is so. You must leave, and within the week." He did not have to tell me more. I knew what it meant. But then, he said something else.

"God is going to save you. He is going to use me to save you. Write your wife's name and your children's names in your passport." A man could travel with his family that way across borders.

But how would I get papers? When I left his office I was afraid. It would take a very long time to get travel papers. They could only come from the capital Khartoum, at the far north of Sudan, and they might not come. But that day I heard of someone going to Khartoum and I gave him my passport and some money to get the papers.

There was a Lutheran relief agency from Switzerland who were flying supplies into Sudan. They flew in from Nairobi. I went straight to the Oxfam office and I typed a letter to a man named Bob. Sometimes in an emergency they would allow someone to fly out on the empty relief plane. I asked him please will you take my family - we are in danger.

After several days the papers had not arrived. We could not leave or be accepted in another country without these papers. And then God was merciful to me - a package arrived. It was the papers.

There was one more problem. The airport was controlled by the security forces. They controlled who went out. I needed to have permission from someone with authority over them to get on the field and get on the plane. The word was that no exit visas were being issued. I went to a man in the government. Can I have a letter to get on the plane, I asked.

"I will give you no letter," he said. "But I will be your letter."

And he came with me and my family to the air field. And he walked with us and because he was with us no one questioned us. When we got to the plane, he shook my hand and he said "God go with you."

So on May 28, 1991, with no airline tickets and no exit visas, my family was saved. The glory is God's.

A year later, after we were gone, there was another massacre in Sudan. But we were safe in Kenya. When we heard this, I had to say again - why are we alive? But I knew the answer. I was alive for a purpose. I worked with the refugees in Kenya, and became a priest in the Episcopal church. We started a church in the camp there - St. Paul's Mission. It is a church doing good work up to today.

We had two more children in our time in Kenya. I learned another language. This time I had shoes, so I could say "I have shoes" in five languages. Then we came to Canada.

I got a job to support my family, and I had to pay back the Canadian government the cost to come here, which was \$10,000. I was very grateful to be here, but it is also a lot of money for someone new to Canada. I did not want to forget the people of Sudan once I came to Canada. No, it was very much on my heart to do something to help them. But it is hard. To pay the fee to register our charity, I used money I got from collecting bottles at the side of the road.

So life in Canada is good, but it is not always easy. You know that for yourselves. But also think about the Sudanese who have come to Canada. They have come from a place where there is a lot of killing. They have seen many things and have heard of many bad things that affect their families. When you cannot trust your neighbour, your government, your future, it is hard. Even where they are safe, do they feel safe in their hearts? It is very hard on them.

And sometimes it feels easier to forget, to pretend it never happened. But this is not really true. And if God is not our dwelling place, if God is not our refuge, then we have a lot of problems. We have problems in our families. We have problems in our life, in our thinking. We can hurt one another and ourselves very badly. So pray for the Sudanese people here in Canada, that they would ask themselves - why are we alive? Why did we make it?

I tell them - Listen, guys, we are here for a purpose. It was not an accident that we got to Canada. We are not here to forget. We are here because God wants us here. He will work with us here.

One time, a man phoned me from Vancouver. He said that there was a man and his wife in Vancouver who had come from the Sudan, and they were at the hospital with their new baby. The man asked,

would I come, this man and woman would like a pastor. I said yes, and my wife came with me. This baby was very sick. She was very, very small and there was almost nothing left of her. The doctors said there was nothing they could do, and they should remove all support. And I looked at this little child and I said "I do not believe we should give up. We should not stop hoping for this child."

So I told them, "Let's pray for this baby. And the father and the mother stood beside the baby, and then there was my wife with me. And I said to the nurse and the doctor - You must come here also and pray with us. We must have a positive attitude toward God about this baby, and we will ask him for help."

And so we stood around the little baby and we prayed. That little girl is now ten years old - beautiful - a beautiful child. God has a reason for her to live.

Another time my wife called me at my work. She told me that her doctor wanted me to come. I thought - what is this about? I went home, had a quick shower, and went to the doctor's office with my wife. He said, "Your wife is pregnant. At this age there could be many problems with the child and for your wife." Then he told me all the problems that could happen. He said that it would be better to not have this child. I was very quiet. I listened to all he said for a long time and said nothing. Then do you know what I said? I quoted to him the prayer of Moses from Psalm 90:

¹*Lord, you have been our dwelling place
throughout all generations.*

²*Before the mountains were born
or you brought forth the whole world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*

³*You turn people back to dust,
saying, "Return to dust, you mortals."*

It is God who gives life, I told him. And only God who has the right to take it back. If something happens to my wife or my child, then it will be on God's hands, and even so I will say "All glory to God." But I will not take a life.

That was eight years ago, and today my wife and I have a healthy youngest child, born here in Canada. He is a good boy, a healthy kid, loved by God. And you know why we named him Moses.

I have a vision. God has given me a vision to help people. This is part of the legacy of my own father, Samson Maku, who blessed and cared for people. I want to follow in this work. And I have waited on God patiently and prayerfully for the chance to help the people of Sudan.

Today we are here to do the work of the Afro-Canadian Evangelical Mission. In Sudan today, the people still suffer from years of war. There is less fighting now, but many things have been destroyed. If you go into Mundri and look at the school you can see that it is in very bad shape. It has been shot up and destroyed. No windows. Inside, there are no desks. No supplies. Zero - it is all taken down to zero.

We are working there to re-establish a school. We have raised some money for a concrete foundation. We need more support. We want to give kids an education, and we want to help them get skills. If they

can read and write, if they have good skills to work as carpenters, or as plumbers, they can help to rebuild their towns and have jobs. These are kids who can have a future. What do you see when you look at their picture? What do you see?

I will tell you what God sees. He sees someone who has a purpose. And he says to them - your school may be knocked down to zero, the desks zero, supplies zero, papers zero, your money zero, your shoes zero - but you are not a zero. You are not a zero. You are a child who is very precious to me. You are not a zero. You are my child.

Could you be that child? Can you imagine what it is to be that child? Because God looks at you and me, and he is saying to us - you are not a zero. You are never a zero to me. You are my child.

So many times I have to ask myself - why am I alive? And I ask you - why are you alive? Why are you here, now, and alive? I ask you that.

My friends, we learn from what we touch. If want to know if electricity can hurt you, let a little bit go through your hand. Then you know! If you want to know how God loves and cares for you, let some of his love go through your hands. Then you begin to know! Do you feel the compassion of God in your heart? Do you feel it right now for these children? That is why we are here. That is our purpose, my purpose, your purpose. Our purpose is to know and share the love of God. To receive the love of God into our own hands, and to share it with someone else. That is why I am alive. That is why you are alive. That is the work given to us, the work that our hands must do. It will take all of us. The compassion of God is so great, his mercy so rich, and his love is so deep, it will take the whole church to show it. Brothers and sisters, I ask you to help us. Put your hands to work with our hands, as we share the love of God.

These are the last words of Psalm 90, spoken by Moses to God:

¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,
 that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

¹⁵ Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,
 for as many years as we have seen trouble.

¹⁶ May your deeds be shown to your servants,
 your splendor to their children.

¹⁷ May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us;
 establish the work of our hands for us—
yes, establish the work of our hands.

Support the work of Afro-Canadian Evangelical Mission at www.acemission.org.

As told to Tim Anderson. Scripture quotations from the New International Version.