

Psalm 77

Remembering God in Despair

One thing you have to love about the Psalms is that they tell it like it is.

There's no churchy cover up – “How's it going?” ... “FINE”....unless we're talking about the meaning of

F-I-N-E

Frustrated

Irritated

Neurotic

Exhausted

As you read the Psalms, there are verses that just seem to jump out at you, even in passages you've read before. I had that experience a while back as I read Ps 77 :3

“when I remember God, then I am disturbed.” NSAB

“I remembered God and I was troubled” – NKJV

“When I remember God, I moan” ESV

“I remembered you O God, and I groaned” - NIV

This just seemed so out of place to me. In my theology, and usually in my experience, “remembering God” is a good thing; it is a comforting thing. One of my favorite verses is Ps 94:19 – “when my anxious thoughts multiply within me, Thy consolations delight my soul.”

The Psalms are a place where many turn for comfort – The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want – but here in 77:3 the writer is disturbed, troubled, moaning and groaning when he remembers God.

HOW CAN THIS BE AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

But first, aren't you glad these verses are there? If we were to poll the audience my bet would be that most of us have felt this way at times, and quite a few feel this way TODAY.

Reading the verse made me want to know more about how he handled his dilemma and it has led to this sermon.

PSALM 77

To the choirmaster: according to Jeduthun.

A Psalm of Asaph.

I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me.

2 In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted.

3 When I remember God, I moan; when I meditate, my spirit faints. Selah

4 You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak. 5 I consider the days of old, the years long ago. 6 I said, “Let me remember my song in the night; let me meditate in my heart.” Then my spirit made a diligent search: 7 “Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? 8 Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his

promises at an end for all time? 9 Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?" Selah

10 Then I said, "I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High."

11 I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. 12 I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. 13 Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God? 14 You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples. 15 You with your arm redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph. Selah

16 When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled. 17 The clouds poured out water; the skies gave forth thunder; your arrows flashed on every side. 18 The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook. 19 Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen. 20 You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. (Psalm 77 ESV)

"What a friend we have in Jesus"- comforting words, right?

Have we trials and temptations
Is there trouble anywhere
Our precious Savior
He is still our refuge
Take it to the Lord in prayer

"Take it to the Lord in prayer" is a short summary of the collection of all the Psalms.

This Psalm, and perhaps your experience, says, "I tried that, and it didn't work.... OR at least it didn't seem to workat first."

The good news is that eventually the God option did put the Psalmist on the path of faith. The way of faith may seem like a simple answer, but it's not an EASY process. The Bible never says that holding on in the path of faith is easy.

QUESTION:

**Do you know how to take your soul that refuses to be comforted and put it on the path of faith to God?
DO YOU ACTUALLY DO IT?**

No one can do that for you – it is the vital sign of Christian growth. It is the movement from fear to faith; it is not automatic. We spend so much time seeking to avoid the need to live by faith that we get wiped out when those moments come.

LET'S LOOK AT THE PSALM in three sections

- Verse 1-9 you have the problem or situation
- Verses 10-13 give the strategy
- Verses 14-20 give the result

VERSES 1-9 THE PROBLEM OR SITUATION

The bottom has fallen out and he cries to God, seeks God, stretches out his hands to God, but he finds no comfort. Even remembering God is disturbing.

** The Day of trouble should be a day of prayer in our lives.

He is so troubled that he asks a rapid fire series of questions, v 7-9

These questions reflect the heart of a man who feels like God has abandoned him.

THIS IS REAL LIFE. Have you been there? If not, you will

People that God loves will have trials; they will suffer tragedy.

**Darkness of the soul can last a long time –
EXTERNAL & INTERNAL DARKNESS.**

- “How can this be? Isn’t God loving? Doesn’t He work all things together for good to those who love Him? Doesn’t the Bible tell us that?”
- YES
- God works for good, but you may go all your life without ever knowing what it is.
- This psalm keeps us from naïve expectations of life.

He is crushed. While that is a bad thing from a human perspective, biblically that can be a good place. WHY? Because God is there Isaiah 57:15ff

In a particular way God dwells with a particular person – contrite = crushed with problems

A qualification for God to infuse grace into your life is being humbled – “opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble

Lowly spirit - humble

THERE ARE TWO WAYS TO GO

v. 2 – my soul refused to be comforted

“hang it up, God can’t be trusted, I’m cursed, all is hopeless, my life is over, God just doesn’t care anymore, if he ever did.”

Spurgeon suffered from neuralgia, gout, painful headaches, and physical ills which came with bouts of depression leading almost to despair. He wrote about this Psalm and saw that Asaph’s soul was familiar with the way of grief, as was his own. “Deep glens and lonely caves of soul depressions, my spirit knows full well your awful glooms!” – Spurgeon

You can sink into this as the psalmist does for a while – this is all too normal. Troubles seem to bring out our own self-pity. Being hurt often makes us self-absorbed. Being crushed can lead to cynicism.

The first approach is a self-centered pity party – note how many times the words “I” and “me” and “my” are used in the first 9 verses. Even when he is saying “I remember God” he is really focused on self i.e. “I remember how good God was TO ME”. Now it seems that God has been hard with him and he is feeling sorry for himself.

It is all too easy to become self-referential and self-reverential

It’s ok to be honest with God and with others, but we must not stop in our distress and rehearse our hurt endlessly. Follow the Psalmist and move on toward God.

THE OTHER ROAD...he begins to focus on God for who He is, not just what he does (though he doesn’t ignore what He does)

He practices a type of ‘meditation’. V. 3 I remember, I meditate; v 5 I consider, v 6 let me remember, let me meditate in my heart

Another aspect of this ‘meditation’ is asking questions v.6 my spirit asked. God is not afraid of our HONEST questions, and they help us process what is going on at the heart level.

v. 8 “Has his steadfast love forever ceased?”

by referring to the “chesed” of God, the question contains the seeds of its own solution

VERSES 10-13 GIVE THE STRATEGY

Flee self-centered reflection and press into God.

v. 10 - Then I said, “I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High

The main thing is that here **the author begins to remember what God has done in the past as a foundation for growth and comfort.**

"He considers the love of God in the past to combat his fears in the present". (Keller) The path of faith is not something we see laid out in one quick glimpse; it is a lifelong journey of remembering.

He considers the character and Ways of God and reveals three things:

GOD IS HOLY – that is to say that what he does is upright - it has been true in the past and it is true for his present situation.

Though things may seem confusing to him, he knows that God is upright, holy and true.

This enables him and us to cope in times of being crushed.

It is a biblical principle that success is not always good and being crushed is not always bad – it doesn't make sense to us, but it is how God works.– on the cross Jesus was bruised, forsaken and crushed, but out of that came the resurrection, the ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Out of his being crushed we are made new, so that now when we are crushed, Christ might be formed in us and reflected to others.

GOD IS GREAT V. 10

The Appeal: What God Has Done in the Past for His People. This psalm directs attention to what God has done for his people in the past, especially in the exodus and in the wilderness, as grounds for confidence that God will not abandon his purpose for his people: God's "right hand" is the expression of his power for the sake of his people (e.g., Ex. 15:6, 12). God's wonders, work, and mighty deeds (Ps. 77:11–12) are likewise great things he has done to save and preserve his people.

GOD IS CARING

The colorful recollection of the exodus (vv. 16–19) comes to a soft landing with the simple statement that God led his people like a flock through the wilderness, by the hand of Moses and Aaron (v. 20). The psalm singing congregation is left to draw the conclusion for themselves: the God who has done these great things certainly has the power to do them again if need be. So, this song helps God's people to refresh their hope and renew their commitment to be a holy people and an attractive advertisement of the true God to the rest of the world – echoes of Ps 67

If the Exodus was to have that effect on the people of God in the OT, then how much more should we be impacted by the life, cross and resurrection of Christ? The cross and resurrection are the NT equivalent of the Exodus Luke 9:28ff V. 31

The great saving event of the OT, the exodus, is just a foreshadowing of THE EXODUS accomplished by Jesus. Does it have an impact in your soul or are the truths of the gospel like the wallpaper – you just get used to it.

If Jesus is alive then we experience it, we practice it by applying it to our own hearts – to our fears, doubts, disappointments, our hurts. HE CARRIED OUR GRIEFS AND SORROWS TO THE CROSS ; for by his wounds we are healed. This is so much more than physical healing – that is ultimately guaranteed by the resurrection – new glorified bodies – a new heaven where all is made new Rev 21:5 "Behold I make all things new"

EX: Our daughter, BEKA wants that verse tattooed on her wrist because her wrist is fused from arthritis.

We practice The Presence of Christ when we avoid the pat answers of the moralist and the secular cynic

"If I obey then God owes me a good life. If bad stuff happens it's because I've sinned"

"There's no hope; there is no God, life is meaningless"

The experience of the Presence of Christ is the movement of FAITH – we don't see it all in this world.

THIS IS THE CRY OF FAITH even when it is a dark cry; it shows the invincible steadfastness of faith that is centered on God

No one is saying that we won't feel like the Psalmist in verses 1-9. The question is WHAT DO YOU DO WITH IT?

David Powlison – “There may be mixed motives, but over time it always becomes clear whether we are processing our anguish through faith or through pride and unbelief.”

The issues of health, wealth, relationships, and politics are often good indicators of how deeply we are hoping for the life we want here on earth.

VERSES 14-20 GIVE THE RESULT

Worship and confidence; the soul of one resting in the care of a Shepherd – Ps 23

APPLY:

We practice the PRESENCE by praying scripture soaked God centered prayers to our Heavenly Father. If Jesus is alive and we believe in Him then we access him through His Word and prayer.

- we need to know God and his character well enough to where we can do this to our own souls
- we need to know other believers well enough to where they can do this to our souls when we are struggling.

This is an intentional approach of engaging the heart and mind in the fight of faith.

To love the lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, marinate your heart in His LOVE FOR YOU. That is not something we stumble into or just sort of drift or wander into it. It is an intentional pursuing of the grace and power of Christ through the Holy Spirit so that he produces something supernatural in your life.

What habits and disciplines of grace are you building into your life that enable you to read and meditate on the Word of God?

We don't process despair through a system of theology, but through a PERSON.

Jesus is the key to our theology- “God talk, or God study”

Jesus understands despair. HE was truly forsaken so that you won't be, even though you pass through times of darkness. If He didn't forsake you on the cross, He won't abandon you during your darkness.