

What Might Have Been

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[0:00] You can be seated. And as you're seated, let me ask you, are you standing in the power of Christ? We can deal with our own problems.

We can deal with our own difficulties. You know, we're so often brought up thinking you need to be strong enough to handle it, to deal with life. But the reality is that we are faced with so many situations and circumstances in our life where we are reminded that we cannot do it alone.

We don't have the strength. We don't have the wisdom. But God's Word gives us the wisdom. It says we need to stand in His power, in His might, in His wisdom, not our own.

And think about it in your life. How many times have you been faced with a situation that is hard, that is difficult, that you don't have all the answers for? If you've faced a situation like that, raise your hand.

That's all of us. As we go through life, that is something that we all have in common, that we don't have all the answers and that we don't have enough strength. But we have a Savior that we can look to, and I praise God for that.

[1:24] And this morning, we are going to be in Psalms again. We were in Psalms last week, and we're going to be in Psalms again this morning. Psalms chapter 81 is where we're going to be this morning.

And hopefully you're in Psalms now, chapter 81. And we're going to begin in verse 8. And I'm going to ask, if you're able, if you would stand this morning as we read God's Word. Psalms 81, beginning in verse 8.

And this is what God's Word shares. Hear, O my people, and I will testify to you, O Israel, if you will hearken to me. There shall no strange God be in you, neither shall you worship any strange God. I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. But my people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me.

So I gave them up to their own heart's lust, and they walked in their own counsels. Oh, that my people had hearkened to me, and Israel had walked in my ways.

[2:26] I should soon have subdued their enemies and turned my hand against their adversaries. The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves to Him, but their time should have endured forever.

He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat and with honey. Out of the rock should I have satisfied you. Let's bow our heads as we pray this morning.

Lord God, we do thank You that we can come together, that we can come together as Your family. That we can come together in Your house on this day. And Lord, as we look outside, we know that it's cold and snowy, so we thank You that we have a nice, warm place to come into.

A nice, warm place to be in Your presence, and to hear Your Word, and to sing songs of praise to You, and to bring our requests to You. Lord, we thank You simply for Your presence here this day. And now I pray, Lord, that You would just speak to our hearts. I know we've got a lot of activities. I know we have a lot of thoughts that run through our minds, but help us to set those aside. Help us to realize that the single most important thing right now that we can focus on is You and our relationship with You and what You have to share with us.

[3:33] So, Lord, help our hearts and our minds to be focused on You. Speak to us through Your Word. And we ask and pray this in the name of Jesus Christ and all God's family said, Amen.

You can be seated this morning. So as we get into Psalms chapter 81, I know as we read through Psalms that often we immediately associate David with the book of Psalms.

And that makes sense. David wrote the majority of Psalms, and a lot of it is about David. Psalms 81 was not written by David, though. It was written by a man by the name of Asaph.

Asaph was a Levite. He was a man that David had anointed to lead worship, that David had selected him and chosen him to lead worship, and that's what Asaph did.

And he was a prophet, and he spoke for God many times, and that's what we find in chapter 81. Asaph is speaking, that God is speaking through him.

[4:31] And I want to look at some of the things that God had to say to His people, beginning in verse 8 where we started. He says, Hear, O my people. So he was talking to his people, and he asked them to hear.

That means to listen. That means to pay attention. Do we ever need reminded to pay attention? Yeah, and I know that we have several, along with my wife, several teachers that are in our presence.

Do we have to, when you're a teacher, do you ever have to tell your students to pay attention? Why are you laughing? Were you the students that they needed to say pay attention?

Yeah, I sure. I often was, and I remember teachers saying, Mr. Baker, pay attention. And I sometimes responded, and sometimes, guess what?

You didn't hear them. Yeah, I didn't hear them. Right. Because I was busy doing my own thing. And really, that's when God is speaking to His people.

[5:30] That's the challenge here. He says, listen to me. But did they always? When God asks us to listen today, do we always? No, because sometimes we're busy doing our own thing.

You know, when you're in school, you might have been like writing a love letter to your sweetheart, or passing notes in class, or today might be on your phone or doing whatever. You start getting busy in your own activity.

And you're not paying attention to what you should be. That's us. That's not just us when we're students. That's us in life. And God was telling His people, He says, hear me.

Hear what I have to say. And I will testify to you. I have a message for you. It's never a question if God has a message. It's a question of whether we'll listen. And He says, in the middle of this verse, though, there's that one word that's often in God's Word, if.

If. If you will hearken to Me. If you will listen. If you will pay attention.

[6:36] And for you and I, that can be a big if. But God wants our attention. And then as He goes on, He tells them in verse 9, there shall be no other strange gods among you.

He tells them His expectation for them. And He says in verse 10, I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt. He was reminding them that He had done some amazing things for them.

That God had performed miracles for them. They had been in bondage in Egypt for 400 years. That is a really long time, isn't it? I mean, we have a hard time picturing, or I do, 400 years, because that's multiple generations that they had been in captivity.

And God did miracles to release them. You know, Moses went before Pharaoh, the most powerful man in Egypt. And he said, let my people go. And Pharaoh said what? No, because I have all the power.

I don't have to let them go. God showed him otherwise, didn't He? And we know all the plagues that God brought on Egypt to the point where Pharaoh finally said, all right, go.

[7:42] Get out of here. But God had done that for His people. And they left. And the Egyptians pursued them. And God parted the Red Sea. We know the stories. And then God led them in the wilderness.

A cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God led them where they needed to go. And as He led them, He provided their needs too, didn't He? He gave them food. He gave them manna.

He gave them water. He gave them clothing. He gave them whatever they needed. Would you call that blessings? God reminds them of that. I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.

And because of His faithfulness, I really like, I like all God's Word, but this next phrase. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.

Do you know what that means? God is saying, I have blessed you so much in the past. I have shown myself to be a faithful God and to meet your needs.

[8:44] And now He's saying, open your mouth and I will fill it. Expect me to do great things in your life. Open your mouth and I will fill it.

I will give you what you need. You know, for me anyway, so many visual things come to my mind all the time. And this part of the verse, open your mouth wide and I will fill it. Any guesses what comes to my mind?

Food, cookies. All right. Those things are always on my mind. You know, I think of a baby bird. You ever looked into a nest with baby birds? You have. We all have at one time or another, right? Unless those birds are, baby birds are sleeping, what are they doing if they're awake?

It's no different with human babies actually. But for baby birds, what do they do? Yeah, they're chirping, they're hollering for food. And what do they do? Isn't that what they do?

[9:48] Open their mouths. Why? Are they just doing it because it's a fun thing to do? Because they expect the mama bird, she'll go out and get the worms or bugs or whatever.

And I know the whole, she'll chew them up, you know, and then she'll spit them out into their mouth. And you can think that's gross or whatever, but those baby birds think it's the best thing ever, right? But they open their mouth, and when they open their mouth, they have an expectation.

They have an expectation that they're going to be fed when they open their mouth, that something good is going to be coming. And folks, God is saying to His people, I have been faithful to you.

I have given you so much. Open your mouth. I have a desire to work in your lives. I have a desire to bless you. I have a desire to give you good things.

Do you know that's God's desire for us? To give us good things? Did you know that? And I'm not talking about God having a desire to make your bank account go up or to give you a new car.

[10:50] I know those are things that we think of. God wants to give us better things than that. Because those things come and go. He has a desire to give us, first of all, eternal life through His Son, Jesus Christ.

He has a desire to give us hope. He has a desire to give us peace. He has a desire to give us joy. God wants to give us those good things. Isn't that great to know that we have a Father that wants to give us those good things?

Do we expect it? What did God say? Do you think this is for us too? He says this is for His people. Are we His people? Yes.

Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. Folks, we are to expect good things from God. Does that mean we won't have challenges? Absolutely not. Challenges come.

Sicknesses come. Financial difficulties come. Relationship difficulties come. But God is saying in the midst of those things that life brings, open your mouth, I will continue to give you good things in the midst of it.

[11:50] I will continue to bless you in the midst of difficulties so you still have joy. All through the Bible, it's full of stories of people that had difficulty, isn't it? Yes. Isn't it? I mean, we think of those great miracles.

We think of Daniel thrown into the lion's den. We think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. We think of Peter when he was thrown in prison multiple times, or Paul and all the things that he suffered.

And you know what? They still had joy in the midst of those things. They still had peace in the midst of those things. God didn't take away all the challenges, did He? But God gave them what they needed.

And He's telling us, open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. God desires to give us good things.

Now, we also have to understand there's another part of it. Satan is also real. We know that, right? I mean, he's not necessarily the red guy with pointy horns and a pitchfork that we see all the time.

[12:54] But Satan is real. He's a fallen angel that rebelled against God. He also has a desire for us. Do we understand that? And his desire is not to give us something good.

The Bible says his desire is to steal, to kill, and to destroy. He wants to destroy your hope. He wants to take away your joy. He wants to take all those things from you.

But it's God that wants to give you these good things. Isn't that a good position to be in? So why does verse 11 start with, but, but?

But here's the problem. But my people would not hearken to my voice. God had this great desire to do something good in their life, but they wouldn't listen.

They wouldn't pay attention to the God that had done all this good in their lives. But Israel would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me.

[14:01] They wanted no part of Him. They wanted to go instead of listening to God. You know what they wanted to do? And this is a temptation for all of us. We are the same as Israelites. Sometimes you look at the Old Testament, you think, what foolish people.

God did all this, and then they don't follow Him. But how often is that us? It says that they didn't listen to God. And it says in verse 12, so I gave them up to their own heart's lusts, and they walked in, whose counsel?

Their own. So what was the decision they chose to make? To live for themselves. Well, they made the choice to say, I don't want to do it God's way.

I want to do it, finish the phrase, I want to do it my way. I don't care if there's a better way. I'm going to do it my way, because I think my way is best, and my way is right.

Do we ever get that attitude? How many of you think your way of doing things is right? You know, so often we can be stubborn.

[15:11] We can think that our way is the right way of doing things. And we understand that in relationships. Tammy and I talk about this all the time. We love each other. We've been married going on 35 years.

But guess what? Sometimes we have a different idea how things should be done, don't we? She has her way of doing things, and then I have the right way of doing things. Oh, she would turn that around, that I have my way of doing things, and then she has the right way of doing things.

So who's right? Yeah, that's the thing. When it comes to Tammy and I, the reality is sometimes she's right.

That's painful. No. The reality is sometimes she's right, and sometimes I'm right. Sometimes her ways are better, and sometimes my ways are better. That's where it's different with us and God. Because when we have our own way of doing things, but God says, no, do it this way, there is never a time when our way is better. Ever. It does not happen. That does not exist.

[16:14] Our way is not better than God's way. But He said His people here, they chose to do it their own way instead of God's. And folks, there is a lesson in that for us. Because sometimes we want to come up with our own way of doing things.

We want to come up with our own definition of right and wrong. We want to come up with our own solutions. But God wants us to do things His way.

And you know, as it goes down into verse 13, it brings about a question in my mind that I think about once in a while is, does God ever sorrow?

Does God ever experience sorrow? You know, as I read this next verse, I believe that He does. Look at what He says. Oh, that my people had hearkened unto me.

Oh, that my people had hearkened unto me and Israel had walked in my ways. I hear a longing in that. That God was saying, oh, how I wish my people would have listened to me.

[17:20] Oh, how I wish they would have done it the way that I laid out for them. Because if they had done it the way that I laid out for them, guess what the results would have been? Blessings.

Blessings. It would have been blessings. But instead, they chose to do it their own way. God had a sorrow in His heart for what might have been, for how much better things could have been.

And I guess I find myself thinking about my life and our lives today. How many of you have made mistakes in your life as you look back on your life?

Be honest. How many of you have made mistakes? What might have been if you had done it God's way then? Would it have been better? Would it have turned out better?

Do you think God has any sorrow that you chose not to do it His way? Missed opportunities. Times that we do fall short as we talked about earlier.

[18:26] And I think it is sad when sometimes we think about the blessings that we may have missed because we did it our way instead of God's way. And God was looking at His people and thinking the same thing.

Oh, that my people had done it my way. If they had listened, how much better they would have been. And then God goes on to share what should have happened.

Look in verse 15. The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves to Him. But their time should have endured forever. He should have fed them with the finest of the wheat and honey. And out of the rock I should have satisfied you. But God was saying all these things didn't happen. Why? Why? Because they did it their way and not God's way.

They missed out on some blessings in their lives because they didn't follow their God. You know, we can look back on our lives, like I just said.

[19:28] I think we can all identify times when we've fallen short and done it our own way and there have been consequences for that. Can you change that? Can you go back and change it? No.

No, that's water under the bridge. We cannot go back in time and change any of that. And you can be sorry that you made the wrong decision and what you may have missed out on. But you know, that's the past.

God knows we cannot change that. But what can we do? We can think about now. We can think about what decisions am I making right now in my life.

Not in the past, but from this day on. Am I making decisions that please God? Am I walking in His ways? Am I not following my own thoughts but following God's?

That is what God desires from us. Am I following God and then expecting His blessings? Because again, God is saying, open your mouth and I will fill it.

[20:28] Folks, God has so much good for us in life. Sin often messes that up, doesn't it?

We can go all the way back to the beginning, and I'm not going through the whole Bible, but you think back in the beginning when God created Adam, and then He created Eve.

Where did He put them? Where did He put them? We know the answer. The Garden of Eden. What was that like? I mean, we can't imagine.

I mean, He said it was a place where it was far more perfect than the world we live in today. Do you know what wasn't in the Garden of Eden? Sin. Do you know what that means wasn't in the Garden of Eden?

Pain, sorrow, suffering. Because where do all those things come from? Sin. God made Adam and Eve, and then He surrounded them with all this goodness.

[21:29] But what happened? Did they do things God's way? No, and you can't blame Satan. I mean, Satan came along and he tempted them, but they made a choice, didn't they?

They chose to not do things God's way, and they did things their own way. Did they miss out on blessings because of that? That sin had some pretty big ramifications, didn't it?

And yet, God still blesses, doesn't He? In our lives, I know we've all sinned. I know we've all made mistakes. I know that there are times when we have not done it the way God wants us to.

And we can't go back and change it. But you know what? God is a forgiving God. And He loves us enough that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins so that we can look at our lives and say, yeah, I know I didn't follow God then.

I'm so sorry. Please forgive me. And because of Jesus Christ, when we ask for that forgiveness, what happens? We're forgiven. That's what the Bible says. Our sins are separated from us as far as the east is from the west.

[22:37] They're blotted out. They're gone. And we get a fresh start. Aren't you glad for fresh starts? And from that moment on, then it comes back to the same thing, the same question.

Are we going to follow ourselves or follow God? And I pray in our lives that we make the decisions to follow God, to do things His way. Because, folks, He wants good things for us.

That's what God desires. Like any parent for their children, when you have a child, do you want what's best for them? Absolutely. You want what's best and you encourage them to make decisions that are going to lead to those good things.

Do they always listen? Do they always listen? But do you still love them? Folks, God wants to bless us.

He wants good things for us. But it's our choice. It's our choice to follow Him and do things His way or to do things our own way.

[23:41] God says, oh, that my people had followed me. Oh, that they had listened to my voice. God says the same thing for each one of us. God knows every one of us by name.

And I believe He looks at us like, oh, I want them to follow me. Oh, I pray this week that put your name in there that they make decisions that are pleasing to me. Because I want to bless them. I want them to have good things in their life. The love and the peace and the joy that they can only find in me. That is God's desire for every one of us. I don't know about you, but I am so grateful that I serve a God that loves me that much.

We can't change the past. No matter how much sometimes we wish we could, we cannot change the past.

But what we can do is to make sure from this moment on that we resolve in our hearts to please the God that created us. That we can resolve in our hearts to do things God's way and not our own way.

[24:46] And folks, when we do that, when we do listen or hearken unto His voice is what it says here. God says, open your mouth wide and I will fill it. I will give you good things.

I will give you that hope and peace and joy that can only come from the Father. I pray that that is our true desire. Let's bow our heads as we pray.

Lord God, we thank you again for this day that you've given us. And we thank you so very much for your word. And Lord, we thank you for what you've shared here in Psalm. And it is a reminder that even though this was written thousands of years ago, that we haven't changed as people.

And that we still have a choice just as they did then. And our choice is whether to do things our own way or whether to do things your way. You have been a faithful God that loves us. You are a God that desires good things in our lives.

So Lord, I pray that we would resolve in our hearts to do things your way. That we would pray and ask for strength to be faithful. And Lord, we know that you are a faithful God.

[25:51] And Lord, I pray that we would open our mouths wide and know that you will bless us and take care of our needs when we follow you. Thank you again for this scripture on this day, Lord.

And it's in the name of Jesus Christ that we pray. And all God's people said, Amen.