

Psalm 77

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[0 : 00] Psalm 77 reads, I cry aloud to God, aloud to God and he will hear me.

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

You hold my eyelids open, and I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I consider the days of old, the years long ago. I said, let me remember my song in the night.

Let me meditate in my heart. Then my spirit made a diligent search. Will the Lord spurn forever and never again be favorable? Has his steadfast love forever ceased?

Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion? Then I said, I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High.

[1 : 09] I will remember the deeds of the Lord. Yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work and meditate on your mighty deeds. Your way, O God, is holy.

What God is great like our God? You are the God who works wonders. You have made known your might among the peoples. You, with your arms, redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph.

When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid. Indeed, the deep trembled. The clouds poured out water. The skies gave forth thunder.

Your arrows flashed on every side. The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind. Your lightnings lightened up the world. The earth trembled and shook. Your way was through the sea.

Your path through the great waters. Yet your footprints were unseen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. This is the word of the Lord.

[2 : 12] You may be seated. Well, good morning, and may I add my word of welcome this morning to Christ Church Chicago.

We're glad you're here. This last day of the year, 2020, 2023.

There is a medical condition called amnesia.

Or clinically known as amnesic syndrome. That is a general term that describes memory loss. This loss can be temporary or permanent, but it refers to one losing memories, including facts, information, experiences.

[3 : 25] This could be caused by things including head and brain injuries, certain drugs, alcohol, or traumatic events, or other conditions, or debilitating diseases like Alzheimer's.

It is indeed a horrible and scary thing to experience. There is, however, another definition for amnesia.

It is the selective overlooking or ignoring of events or acts that are not favorable or useful to one's purpose or position.

Yeah, this is the type of amnesia my dad would talk about when he would say, boy, you must have bumped your head and forgotten who you were talking to.

It's that selective amnesia that remembers every wrong done to you and somehow forgets every right done for you.

[4 : 42] It's that selective amnesia that remembers what others owe you yet forgets how much debt you've racked up. It's that selective amnesia that sometimes forgets just how good God has been.

Let me quickly illustrate. Dave, I grew up with my mom playing this Shirley Caesar gospel song called No Charge.

She played it every Sunday morning. The song is about a young teenager who comes to his mother and hands her an itemized invoice for all the things she's asked him to do around the house.

Mowing the yard, making up my bed, taking out the trash, getting a good report card. Here's what you owe me. The mother then turns the paper over and begins to write her own list.

For the nine months I carried you, no charge. For the nights I sat up with you, doctored you, prayed for you, no charge.

[6 : 02] For the toys, food, clothes, and for wiping your nose, no charge. For the advice and the knowledge and the pending cost of your college, no charge.

When you add it all up, the real cost of my love is no charge. Now I know for a fact there's a whole different message we could go to here, but please let me just pull over just for a moment to say those of you in this room who might be searching for love, searching for answers, let me tell you that what you're looking for is Jesus.

And today you can find him. No charge. My mother would play that song each and every week much to our dismay because she never wanted us to develop amnesia.

she never wanted us to forget that so much more has already been done for us than whatever hardship we feel is now happening to us.

My challenge and encouragement to you this morning as we briefly walk through this psalm and stand on the threshold of a brand new year is that you brothers and sisters don't forget to remember.

[7 : 43] Yeah, that's it. That's the title of this morning's message. Whatever you've been through this past year, good or bad, whatever you're going through right now and whatever might lie ahead in 2024, don't forget to remember.

Psalms 77 is nestled in the middle of the third of five divisions of psalms and opens with a lament from the pen of one of David's musicians and songwriters, Asaph.

Perhaps that's one reason I'm so drawn to this, but what I love most about the psalms in general, this passage in particular, aside from the beauty of the poetry and it being the inspired word of God, is its ability to so poignantly reflect the human experience.

These opening stanzas of lament, verses one through nine, have been me. me. And if you're honest, at some point, they've been you too.

We've all gone through, might be going through, some dark times and valley moments in our lives.

[9 : 14] Times of memory loss, where we've wondered where God was, does God care, and why doesn't he seem to be moving fast enough, if at all?

This is where the writer finds himself in the opening of today's passage. And just like the stages of grief, he walks through a progression of emotions that not only we all can relate to, but I hope will also serve as a blueprint for each of us as we too navigate life's trying times.

We navigate the times and look to a new year. First, the psalmist seeks God in the time of trouble. Secondly, he questions God in the time of trouble. And then lastly, he remembers God in the time of trouble.

You will notice in this passage what doesn't change, the time of trouble. You will also notice what does change.

[10 : 37] It's the writer's attitude in the time of trouble. Life is not all a bed of roses by the end of this psalm, but the writer's outlook on life is different at the end of this psalm.

This year may or may not be ending the way you want it to, but your perspective on this past year and what is to come in the new year can change if you don't forget.

to remember. We begin here in verses 1 through 3. I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me. 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. When I remember God, I moan. When I meditate, my spirits faint.

what do you do when you're crying out to God? You believe he hears you, but he doesn't seem to be responding.

[11 : 55] Has this just been me or is this anybody else in this room? In the time of distress, you turn to God in urgent, persistent, prolonged prayer, seeking help and answers from the right source.

but feeling your prayers are falling on deaf ears. No response, no relief, no deliverance.

This is what he describes in these first three verses. You know things are bad when the very knowledge of who God is, verse three, brings more pain than comfort.

how is this even possible, Pastor Joe? Let me see if I can help. The writer knows full well that God is all-powerful, has all-authority, and that there's nothing impossible for him to do, yet he hasn't moved for him.

That causes even more anguish. I know he can do it, but for some reason, he hasn't done it for me.

[13:12] Do you see yourself yet? The psalmist continues to describe his plight, verses four through six, his eyelids are open, so troubled he can't speak.

He considers the days of old. Let me remember even my song in the night. Let me meditate in my heart. The intensity of the pain and struggle was so strong that he couldn't get any sleep. He couldn't get any rest. He couldn't even close his eyes. He couldn't sing his way through, pray his way through. He tried to use some selective memory of the good old days. That didn't work. So overwhelmed he no longer had the words to even describe his situation. I've had nights like this.

I've had years like this. Have you? Times where it seemed like you couldn't find any relief. no matter what you did.

[14:17] You will celebrate the new year with everyone else. You will make resolutions like everyone else. But underneath all the joy and laughter, there's a gnawing feeling that somehow the tentacles of past years are still at work and nothing has really changed.

you then move like the writer here at the end of verse 6 going through verse 9 transitioning from seeking God to questioning God.

Then my spirit made a diligent search. Will the Lord spurned forever and never again be favorable? Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time?

Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion? Six heart wrenching, heart breaking, and totally rhetorical questions that all of us have been prone to ask when we find ourselves in difficult situations.

Our writer just had the nerve to put it in writing. But in doing so, he's also given us all additional cover to humbly and earnestly come to God with our doubts and fears and questions.

[15:51] God isn't scared of your questions. He indeed welcomes them. It at least shows that you're leaning in the right direction.

Asaph knew the answers to these questions. He knew God. He knew God's word. But in the dark place he was in, all he could see was his circumstance.

And these questions were an outflow of the frustration he was experiencing, causing perhaps temporary amnesia.

God's kindness is big enough to absorb them in his vast ocean of grace and mercy.

But if I can, can I give you just a little advice? When you ask your questions, and it seems that God is silent, maybe he really isn't.

[17:00] For the fact of the matter is, maybe he's already spoken. Spoken through his word. And when scripture speaks, God speaks.

So, here's the tip. When what you see doesn't seem to match up with what God has already said, go with what God has already said.

Using that tip, let's quickly review Asaph's questions. You may feel like God is going to spurn you forever, but he's already said the Lord will not forsake his people.

You may feel that he will never again be favorable to you, but the Lord has already said, God is a sun and a shield and bestows favor and honor. No good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly.

You may feel that God's steadfast love has forever ceased. He's already said the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. You may feel like his promises are at an end, but he's already said, if you are in Christ, you are already heirs according to the promise.

[18:21] You may feel God has forgotten to be gracious, but he's already said the Lord, the Lord, a great God, merciful and gracious, abounding in steadfast love.

You may feel his compassion has already been shut up, but he's already said the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. great is his faithfulness.

Go with what God has already said. Though your circumstances may cause you temporary amnesia, I'm encouraging you this morning not to forget, to remember what he's already said.

God. Then something incredible happens at verse 10. The psalmist moves from seeking God to questioning God to then remembering God.

God then I said I will appeal to this to the years of the right hand of the most high. Call it an epiphany.

[19:42] Call it an aha moment. Call it what the medical profession calls transient global amnesia, which is temporary memory loss that just clears up on its own.

Call it just sick and tired of being sick and tired. Asaph stops himself, checks himself, and begins to remember you should do the same.

In the midst of his disorientation, despair, disillusionment, he takes hold of his thoughts and deliberately directs them to verse 11.

Remember the deeds of the Lord. Yes, I will remember your wonders of old. There it is. There it is. Here is your New Year's resolution.

I will remember. I will remember. Spurgeon says, if no good is found in the present, memory goes back and ransacks the past to find consolation for today.

[20 : 57] remembering who God is and what he's done will help change your perspective on what you're currently going through.

Remembering who God is and what he's done will change your outlook on 2024. for. In the finance world, I'm sure Elder Rothschild would verify there is a saying, particularly when it comes to investment, that past performance is not indicative of future results.

Not so with God. past performance is completely indicative of future results.

Why? Because he's the same yesterday, today, and forever. Because what he did before, he can do again. It's no secret what God can do.

What he's done for others, he'll do for you. He had the power then, he's got the power now. He carried you then, he'll carry you now. He brought you through then, he'll bring you through now.

[22 : 18] All you've got to do is remember. The problem is, our problem is, our memories are too short and too selective.

We forget too quickly. I have a son who, while enjoying a bowl of crunch berries at breakfast, which, by the way, is absolutely the best cereal ever created, while he's enjoying these crunch berries, he's concerned about why no one is currently working on the menu for lunch.

He has moved on to the next concern, the next crisis, without stopping to reflect on all the goodness currently going on, and then let that memory provide peace of mind as to what will happen in the future.

Don't forget to remember. Now, there is one thing about remembering that's important to note.

To remember technically means you have at one point known something and forgotten it.

[23 : 59] It does no good to be in school and ask God to help you remember the answers to a test that you've never studied for. What I'm saying is if you've never known Jesus as your personal savior, then a lot of this remembering stuff may not make much sense to you.

But today, New Year's Eve, you can know him. begin to create your own memories.

Let me also take a moment to talk to those of you who perhaps have had a fantastic year, a great year, and you think most of this doesn't apply to you.

My dad used to say that every person is in one of three positions in life. You're either coming out of a storm, you're currently in a storm, or you're about to go through a storm, and you just don't know it yet.

It's those who feel they have it all together that are some of the most susceptible to developing amnesia. They tend to forget how they got where they are and what they have.

[25 : 20] They lose a sense of humility and dependence on God, feeling now that they can do it on their own. But the reality is that all of us are just one phone call, layoff, car accident, or medical diagnosis from our own time of trouble.

Church, we must never forget to remember. Starting now at verse 13, you can hear Dr.

Meeks' brother Asaph almost begin to tune up with the cadence of an old Baptist preacher as the memories now just begin to flow.

Let me read. Your way, O God, is holy. What God is great like our God. You are the God who works wonders.

You have made known your might among the peoples. You with your arm redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph. Starting here at verse 16, the psalmist recalls one of the greatest acts of God's delivering power known to Israel, the parting of the Red Sea.

[26 : 45] When the water saw you, O God, when the water saw you, they were afraid. Indeed, they trembled, the clouds poured out water, the skies gave forth thunder.

See, the memories start to come back, the arrows flashed on every side, the crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind, your lightnings lighted up the world.

The earth trembled and shook. Your way was through the sea, your path was through great waters, yet your footprints were unseen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. What a mighty God. What a God to remember. For all you English majors in the room who were paying attention to the pronouns in this psalm, you saw how in the first half, during the lament portion, when things were not going well, that there are actually 18 occurrences of the first person's singular pronoun I or me, and only six references to God.

However, starting in verse 13 through verse 20, there are 21 mentions of God and zero personal references.

[28 : 13] This is how you change your perspective. Take the focus off of you and put the focus on him, who he is, what he's done, and remember.

Now, tucked away in the middle of all of this is verse 19, kind of a strange verse that I don't want you to miss. Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters, yet your footprints were unseen.

here's what he's saying. God, we had no idea what you were doing at the time, because we couldn't see you.

Your footprints were unseen. You were silent, yet you were there. Therefore, even in your silence, I'm going to remember that it doesn't mean you're absent.

I'm going to be confident because I remember who you are. I remember what you've done. I remember how you rescued your people.

[29 : 28] God, even when I can't trace you or track you, I can still trust you. Some of you might be thinking that Asaph started really believing God in the second half of this psalm because God probably came through for him and things got better.

But that's not what the text says. As I mentioned at the beginning of this message, Asaph is still sitting in darkness just like some of us.

So what's changed? He's changed. His mindset has changed. And so can yours.

God has changed. You've got to learn to talk to your own self and remind yourself just how good God is and has been despite your circumstances.

You've got to remember that you didn't wake yourself up this morning, but God gave you life today. You've got to remember that you didn't stay up all night watching over yourself.

[30 : 43] God watched over you, kept you, and sustained you. You've got to remember that you didn't put money in your bank account, but God was the one that provided the resource and made that deposit.

You've got to remember that more has already been done for you than what might be happening to you right now. You've got to remember that circumstances change, but God doesn't.

You've got to remember that trouble is temporary, but God isn't. Church, we must remember that our faith is not based on what we see or want or feel.

Our faith is based on the goodness, character, and nature of God. These are the memories that will sustain us and enable us, even in tough times, to have hope and yet bless the Lord.

That's what we need to remember. listen, whatever you're going through today, and I know some are going through, some are hurting.

[31 : 59] However long you've been going through it, God may seem silent, but God is not absent. God loves you, and he's already proven that love to you once and for all by sending his son, Jesus Christ, whose birth we just celebrated to die for you, for all of us on the cross.

So tonight, when the clock strikes 12, and thoughts begin to rush to your head about how you're going to make it through another year, just stop yourself, check yourself, and recall how God brought you through last year, and if he did it then, he can do it again.

Yes, seek God in the time of trouble. Even question God in the time of trouble. God, we're going to But please, please, don't forget to remember God.

Let's pray. Father, we bless your name, and we give you praise and thanks for who you are. Thank you for being the same yesterday, today, and forever.

God, we know your credit is good with us. If you've done it before, you can do it again. We pray for those who've had a rough year, gone through trying times, still suffering, still hurting.

[33 : 49] God, wrap your arms around them, and bring to their memory, who you are, what you're capable of, and what you still will do through them.

God, we thank you as we embark upon a brand new year. Thank you for bringing us through 2023. God, we look forward to what you have in store in 2024. 2024. And when the days are dark and the times get hard, we will remember. In your son's name we pray.
Amen.