

Psalm 102

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[0 : 00] Again, the scripture text is Psalm 102 on page 556 of the White Bibles. Please stand for the reading of God's Word. Hear my prayer, O Lord. Let my cry come to you.

Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress. Incline your ear to me. Answer me speedily in the day when I call. For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace. My heart is struck down like grass and has withered. I forget to eat my bread. Because of my loud groaning, my bones cling to my flesh.

I am like a desert owl of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places. I lie awake. I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop. All the day my enemies taunt me.

Those who deride me use my name for a curse. For I eat ashes like bread and mingle tears with my drink. Because of your indignation and anger. For you have taken me up and thrown me down.

[1 : 13] My days are like an evening shadow. I wither away like grass. But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever. You are remembered throughout all generations.

You will arise and have pity on Zion. It is the time to favor her. The appointed time has come. For your servants hold her stones dear and have pity on her dust.

Nations will fear the name of the Lord. And all the kings of the earth will fear your glory. For the Lord builds up Zion. He appears in his glory. He regards the prayer of the destitute.

And does not despise their prayer. Let this be recorded for a generation to come. So that a people yet to be... May praise the Lord.

That he looked down from his holy height. From heaven the Lord looked at the earth. To hear the groans of the prisoners. To set free those who were doomed to die.

[2 : 14] That they may declare in Zion the name of the Lord. And in Jerusalem his praise. When peoples gather together. And kingdoms to worship the Lord.

He has broken my strength in mid-course. He has shortened my days. Oh my God, I say. Take me not away in the midst of my days. You whose years endure throughout all generations.

Of old you laid the foundation of the earth. And the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish. But you will remain. They will all wear out like a garment.

You will change them like a robe. And they will pass away. But you are the same. And your years have no end. The children of your servants shall dwell secure.

Their offspring shall be established before you. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Father, we come to you this morning.

[3 : 30] And for some of us. Our souls are bereft of peace. We have forgotten what happiness is.

So we say our endurance has perished. And so has our hope from the Lord. And Father, we come to you this morning.

Some of us mourning. We ask for your help. To learn what it might mean. To live wisely.

When the days are dark. And life is hopeless. Would you renew your mercies once again this morning.

For Jesus' sake. Make Jesus beautiful. Through your word. By your spirit. Amen. I was just entering pastoral ministry.

[4 : 34] Having emerged from a season in engineering. There were many lessons that I had to learn along the way. But this was definitely one of the most vivid.

Indelible. In my mind. At the age of 24. It would be my first visit to the renowned Cleveland Clinic. To see a 12-year-old patient.

Steven. He was one of my students. Diagnosed with spinal cancer. Preparing for a surgery.

That had little promise of success. And from my understanding. The tumor had thoroughly wrapped itself. Around his spine. Making removal impossible.

And treatment immensely difficult. I sat in my car for what seemed like an eternity. I had my Bible in one hand. A necktie around my neck.

[5 : 39] And my heart was racing. I was a novice. A rookie. Thrust into the weight of pastoral care. What do I say to such a boy?

What do I say to his mother and father? His siblings? The surgery would come at great risk and great cost. Life was not promised.

Healing was doubtful. Hope was dismal. Much of what transpired I'll leave unmentioned. But I had a chance to see him before the surgery. And I'll never forget it.

I won't forget it. I can't forget it. And there he was. And he recites. Truly, my soul finds rest in God alone.

My salvation comes from him. Truly, he is my rock and my salvation. He is my fortress. I will never be shaken. 12 years old.

[6 : 41] Lifted directly from the 62nd Psalm. And that day I learned a deep and significant lesson. The Psalms give individuals words to say.

When pain is deep and life is dark. The Psalms give lyrics to the church.

To sing. When pain is deep. And life is dark. Stephen survived the surgery. Only to be brought to his eternal refuge six years later.

This morning we come to such a psalm. Psalm 102. Lyrics for when pain is deep and life is dark. And this is reiterated by the superscription.

It's the earliest commentary on the psalm. You see it there. It's a prayer of one afflicted when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the Lord.

[7 : 50] And so when pain is deep. And life is dark. Whether it be for you presently. Or it has something you've emerged from.

And for many of us it's a season we don't want to enter. The psalm gives us three things to cling to. To remember. Three things.

Firstly. He remains God. In our pain. God remains God. In our pain. Secondly. God is remembered. He must be remembered. As a God of promise. And thirdly. He is forever God. In permanence. God is God in our pain.

God is remembered as a God of promise. And God is God forever. Permanently. He is God in our pain. Verses 1-11.

[8 : 50] The psalmist is in pain. It is difficult to actually overstate how thorough and complete his pain is. His anguish is. He is trying to find words to communicate how bleak life has become.

And he can only do this through similes. You see how great his despair. They reveal his condition. My bones burn like a furnace.

My heart is struck down like grass. And has withered. I am like a desert owl. I am like a lonely sparrow.

He uses all these similes to depict his reality. And it has various facets. Most people have said this is surely physical affliction.

Which is likely so. You see there is a pain in his bones. They are burning like a furnace. He is unable to eat. He is unable to sleep.

[9 : 59] He is crying out with a loud groaning associated with his pain. He perceives himself to be emaciated. His bones are clinging to his flesh.

I have no idea what that means. But I can only imagine. If your skin is infused onto your bones. What must the condition be?

He is being undone. Unwound physically. And if his physical condition is not enough. He is psychologically in despair. He is socially isolated.

You see that. He is like a desert owl. One who flies alone. A bird with no flock. A lonely sparrow with no song.

He is not only socially isolated. He is actually socially outcast. His enemies taunted him. His name has become a curse.

[10 : 59] Unlike Job, who had companions, though questionable how great they were. This man had none. He sat alone.

And if physical and psychological pain are not enough, he adds to all of this the anguish of the soul. The psalmist acknowledges to some extent that he is receiving the consequences of the anger of God himself in verse 10.

The image is one depicted of one who is lifted high and exalted and then cast down. The word picture there is this glorious ship. This beautiful grand sea vessel that is constructed to conquer a lake or the sea.

Only when it sets out, it's lifted up by the waves and dashed down and destroyed. Whether it be physical, psychological, or spiritual.

The weight of verses 3 to 11 show how deep his anguish is. One writer puts it this way. The insides and the outsides.

[12:13] The whole person is being consumed. This is a picture of the frailty of human life when it's crushed by affliction.

Don't you see the fleeting nature of life? You observe it. My days pass away like smoke.

In verse 3. My days are like an evening shadow. There is a heavy sense that life is drawing to an end, to a close. Life for the psalmist is literally smoke and shadows.

Two observable things known for their disappearing effects. His significance is equated to grass that is pulled out and then scorched by the sun.

It's no surprise that if you stand by a graveside and there is a minister or a reverend or a pastor or a priest.

[13:16] And they say those words. We commit this body to the ground. Earth to earth. Ashes to ashes.

Dust to dust. Dust to dust. They embody the finality of a life given up. And here the psalmist is lamenting the totality of life.

And to you I ask the question. When all of life is darkness, where does one turn? Where does one direct their plea? Where does one go to seek comfort?

Where does one go for justice? To whom does one direct their anger? What's interesting is the psalmist does not become irreligious.

To the surprise of the modern reader, the psalmist does not abandon childhood faith. He does not profess atheism. Instead, he affirms the reality that God is still God in all the pain.

[14:26] The God of the Bible remains God in spite of the pain. And verse 1 confirms this reality, does it not? He's directing his prayer, his cries, his lament, his plea to the Lord, the God of Israel.

The psalmist is pleading in the words of a 19th century pastor, Charles Spurgeon. And God, would you bow your greatness to my weakness?

Bend low. That my cries may ascend to high. And he prays to a hidden God, a seemingly hidden God, a silent God, an apparent distant God.

But for the psalmist, there's an element that even though this God is mysterious in his dealings with him, he is a God who has pity on the desolate, according to verse 13.

He regards the prayer of the destitute in verse 17. He hears the groans of the prisoner in verse 20. This God is not a deaf God.

[15:36] And I pause here to say a few things. Because as the psalmist experiences these things, it is important to note that he is not less Christian.

Or somehow less faithful. And I want to say this with great care, because you and I will go through seasons, maybe episodes, and bouts with physical infirmity, psychological trauma, darkness, isolation, depression.

And what may feel like God-forsakenness is not a sign that somehow you've been unfaithful to God. You see, these are not signs of God's abandonment.

The psalms, like I've mentioned before, give you a language of protest. They legitimize the agony of our human experience. One writer puts it so strikingly, the psalmist is pleading with God against God.

That those who are afflicted should pray and cry out. But perhaps it's more appropriate to say that those who are afflicted may pray.

[16:58] You're given permission to cry out. Crying out to God is not a sign of illegitimacy. It is a sign of faithfulness to God.

Whether it be physical, mental, or relational, the psalmist shows us that God bends his ear to the cry of pain-filled people. In this past week, while sitting with someone, sharing about their current struggles, they made such an insightful comment as we read this psalm together.

The psalmist goes on to do what is possibly the most difficult thing to do when dark days settle. The psalmist moves from reflections on oneself and one's own condition to start looking outwards,

outside oneself.

From language that is centered upon personal experience, the psalmist does what is seemingly impossible for people in dark days to do. Consider what God is doing out there, or what God will do. You see this, don't you? You see the first person pronouns. My days pass. My bones burn. My heart is struck.

[18:13] I forget to eat. I am like a desert owl. I lie awake. I eat ashes like bread. My days, verse 11, are like an evening shadow.

I wither away like grass. But you, oh Lord, are enthroned forever.

You are remembered throughout all generations. He moves from the first person pronouns to all of a sudden, the second person pronouns. From I to you, from my days to your years, Lord.

And all of a sudden, he starts to remember God as a God of promise. The psalmist looks ahead to a future day.

He begins to speak in future tense. He moves away from his own personal condition. And he begins to lament the state of Zion, which is the Bible's way of denoting the city of God.

[19:19] In this passage, the physical place where God would meet with his people, namely Jerusalem in verse 21. His personal concern now becomes a broader concern for other people.

And the transition in this text has drawn a lot of attention in biblical scholarship. Some believe that this is now, it gives light that this is a post-exilic psalm.

It's a song that the people sang after they had been deported or exiled. And for those of us who might be unfamiliar with Bible history, there were certain events in the history of God's people that were not only formative, but foundational.

The exile is probably second to Exodus, the Exodus. See, they were victims of a great, the people of God were victims of a great deportation from their homeland at the hands of the Babylonians. Their homes were demolished. Their families were divided. Their cities were decimated. Their way of life was diluted. And on top of that, their worship, the temple where they met God, had been destroyed.

[20:31] And all the people held on to was a collective memory. That was all that they had to keep their shared identity. And it is this memory that the psalmist begins to recall or to summon.

And he begs God to have pity and to act. You are enthroned, God, forever. And you are remembered throughout all generations.

Why are you remembered, God? Because you are a God who's always acted on behalf of His people. You are the God who remains after many have fallen by the wayside.

You are the God who heard His people's cries in Egypt under the heavy hand of Pharaoh. You are the God who heard the desperation as the people of God came to the shore of the Red Sea and Pharaoh's armies were coming down the hill.

And as the army pressed in upon us, you are the God who delivered. And as we wandered in the wilderness, without food and without water, you are the God who provided for us.

[21:39] When there was no one else, you were the God who delivered. You were the God who provided. You were the God who has never abandoned us. Therefore, we remember, we recall, we recount those days.

This is why collective memory is so important for the people of God. this is why when you sit in your, in local homes in the middle of the week, you have an opportunity to not only share the struggles, but share how the Lord has delivered and preserved and kept you.

you have an opportunity to testify how the Lord brought you from darkness to light, from how the Lord delivered you from, from episodes that were so overbearing and crushing.

And here you are today sitting around a coffee table recounting the Lord's faithfulness and goodness. And this is what the psalmist is doing. Remember, recount, retell over and over and over and over because in so doing, you will find it may be your very preservation in this life.

Wow. And as they do, it's getting hot, as they do, the prayer of the psalmist says in the same way, God, you did that in the past.

[23:08] I am confident you will do all this in the future. His prayer is incredible. It's staggering.

Verse 18, let this be recorded for generations to come so that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord.

the psalmist is so confident that he prays not only for his current generation, for them to somehow rebuild the city of God so that the people could assemble, but he prays for future generations, for

kids yet conceived that they will praise the Lord.

The prayer is astounding. Do you see the logic of the psalmist? You've done great things in the past. You will do great things in the future. Why? Because he has always been a promise keeping God.

He has never broken a promise. I mean, growing up, you hear these things, you break a promise once and it's over. Your integrity is done. And yet God, every promise he's made, he's kept.

[24 : 36] And every promise is unfulfilled, he will bring to pass. I'm confident of what God will do in the future because I've seen what God has done in the past.

Therefore, future generations will praise the Lord. And the scope of this worship is astounding. It proceeds from Jerusalem and her people to people from unspecified kingdoms in verse 22.

It encompasses nations, verse 15. And boldly asserts that all the kings of the earth will bear this worship to God, verse 15.

It spans both time and place. Better put, it includes all people from all places for all time. What the Lord has done for Israel, he will do for the entirety of the world.

Why? Because he made promises and when God makes promises, he keeps them. So we see the move.

[25 : 43] He is God in our pain. He is a God remembered for his promises. And lastly, he is forever God in permanence.

The psalmist makes one last gasp or plea in verse 23. It's as if he's saying, let me see the fruit of your promises, God. Let me live a little bit longer.

Grant me a few more years. In my most vibrant and vigorous days, I am actually being taken away. It is this he laments. And we have already seen that the psalmist's finitude has been brought to the fore.

Interestingly, he measures his life by days. Verse 23, God has shortened my days. They are passing away, according to verse 3.

They are an evening shadow, according to verse 11. In the words of the New Testament, they are fleeting, expiring. They are a morning mist that rises and falls and disappears. And then the psalmist does something staggering.

[26 : 49] He recalls creation in light of the God who is bending his ear down to hear. He says this, God, my days are expiring, but your years, Lord, never expire.

They have no end. You who laid the groundwork of creation. And we're there from the beginning. We'll be standing there when it all ends. In the same way that you and I change and replace worn out clothes, God changes creation.

It's a baffling metaphor. Earth and heaven will perish, but God remains. Creation will wear out like a garment, like an outfit that needs to be replaced. But God, you are the same and your years have no end.

In other words, listen to what the psalmist is saying. Creation will pass away and perish before God leaves.

God will never exit the stage of this created order. You and I will exit. The props and the costumes of the entire cosmos will long before depart, before God does, is baffling to consider.

[28 : 14] The sun, moon, and stars and earth, all the inhabitants of earth will leave you before God does. Think of that.

Think of that. The psalmist is actually reassuring himself. In a time and day, season or episode of what appears to be divine abandonment and absence, he is reminding himself, don't be ridiculous. It is more certain that the sun will cease burning before God leaves you. It is more certain that the moon will disappear before God leaves you.

It is more certain that the stars will fall from heaven before God retracts his hand from the psalmist. Dare I say it, your loved ones will abandon you long before the God of heaven will.

Why? Because he is forever God in permanence. His kingdom has no successors. In the scheme of God's kingdom, there are none who will inherit his office.

[29 : 30] There are no elections held in heaven. There are no ballots cast. As countries like Venezuela dispute their election results today, as our mayoral candidates in our city vie for your votes, as we lament political regimes, presidents, and prime ministers, there is no such thing in the Bible.

Why not? Because God is God forever in permanence. Wow. And here we are, lamenting people, longing for better days, leaning on a forever king.

It sounds like wishful thinking on the psalmist's part, you might say. It's clouded by unfulfilled hope. How can this even be true, babe?

God. It's kind of absurd, don't you think? He's a promise-keeping God. He's a covenant-fulfilling God.

And it's all bound up in who we talked about last week, the Son, a man named Jesus, because he is God's means and mechanism to bring all this into fulfillment.

[30 : 48] How do I know that? Well, in one New Testament letter, at least, the writer of the Hebrews comes in the first chapter of his letter as he's arguing about the superiority of all these historical figures.

And then he says, oh yeah, he's actually better than angels. How do I know? Because of the Son, of Jesus, the writer to the Hebrews says this. He actually quotes this psalm, particularly verses 25 and 26 and 27.

He says, you were there, you laid the foundation in the beginning, Jesus. And the heavens are the work of your hands, Jesus. They will perish, but you will remain. They will all wear out like a garment, like a robe, you will roll them up, like a garment, they will be changed.

But you, Jesus, are the same. And your years have no end. And Jesus becomes this figure. He is the instrument that God uses to fulfill the longing of the psalmist.

He is the voice that declares from heaven, that even though heaven and earth, remember when Jesus comes on the scene, even though heaven and earth pass away, my words will never pass away.

[31 : 59] And this is what we find, right, when the Bible closes. As the psalmist laments, as he cries out, as he has already stated, at the end, the first heaven, the earth, first earth have passed away.

They've actually perished. And here comes a new heaven and a new earth. And there is that man, the Lord Jesus Christ, again. And he emerges.

And the tears that once flowed for the psalmist are wiped away. And the groans that once bellowed in agony are replaced by song. And the pain that once befell him is now lifted.

The taunts of enemies that were pervasive have fallen silent. The evil that burned him is now being burned. burned. And the apparent divine abandonment and silence have now become the intimate and ever present companionship of bride and groom.

The passing days of the psalmist have now been exchanged for unending years. And so I hold before you the promise of Christianity bound up in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[33 : 22] This is the outcome of every lamenting person who is longing for better days and leaning on a forever king.

This will be the outcome of every lamenting person longing for better days leaning on a forever king.

Father, we come before you and for some of us, those days seem so distant and so far and yet we ask Lord, we believe, help our unbelief.

We have so little faith, increase our faith, we are so short sighted, give us a long term vision, enlarge the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives, help us to fasten ourselves to him and as we cry, we may find that the cries of this song are the cries of your son and not only lamenting his earthly state, longing for better days and leaning upon his own work to bring it all to pass.

We thank you for him. And Father, as we sing, may these words resound as truth for not only today, for all the days ahead.

[35 : 10] We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.