

Psalm 102 - Afflictions

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Bo. I'm one of the elders in the church.

Today we will be talking on Psalm 102. I hope I will do justice to this great psalm. Before we start, shall we pray? May I pray?

Lord, help us to pressure all the pressure that we have in Christ. Help us through this psalm to get to know you and worship you aright.

Thank you, Father. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So for today I've got three M's.

First of all, I'd like to share with you how to read psalms. That's from my own experience. Hopefully that will help. Some of you to appreciate the psalms.

[1 : 30] And then we'll go to Psalm 102 in particular, how we can read it. And then we'll talk about afflictions or suffering.

All right? So for me, I learned, I mean, psalms usually is quite hard in terms of reading psalms for many years until I learned how to read psalms.

First of all, psalms are prayers. And so sometimes it's shocking to see the expression in the psalms. But they are prayers, and God wants us to pray to Him truthfully.

And so they are very raw feelings. And there's no makeup in the expression. There's no fancy dressing. And so we need to understand that it's deep feeling of people who pray to God through psalms.

And there's psalms, the prayers, or psalms are the words that God has given to us to speak to Him. Okay, that's one thing. Second one is that we need to understand Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 very well to know the psalms.

[2 : 37] Because the other psalms usually refer back to Psalm 1 and Psalm 2. If we do not understand Psalm 1 and Psalm 2, it's very hard to understand the other psalms. So that is the second tip.

The third one is psalms are written in the structure of like climbing a mountain. Okay, so there's an ascend, and then there's a summit, and there's a descent.

So we will see that the summit, as it climbs up the mountain, it will come up with a different sort of emotion. And then in the summit, it will immerse in the glory of the summit, like someone climbing a mountain.

And then he descends, there's a different emotion. And the summit is usually roughly in the middle of the psalm. So if you want to know what is the most important part of the psalm, usually you go to the middle part, okay, or somewhere there.

And so these are the three things that help me to read the psalms. So Psalm 102, we can go through that structure. To start with the ascend, the ascending part, so the part one, we can see that the psalmist is ascending with a lot of emotion in the suffering that is affecting him, and also his people.

[3 : 55] Okay, it's not only him. He talks about his people, the city of Zion. And there are three parts of suffering that we can see that he's expressing. One is the physical one, so it could be due to illnesses, or famine, or enemy invasion.

We don't know exactly what the psalmist was suffering, but at least we know that the city of Zion was destroyed, and that would be the enemy taunting him and invading him.

So the psalmist himself may be sick as well. We are not sure. There's a mental affliction. So he said all days his enemies teased him and used his name as curse. And the third part is relational afflictions.

So he was suffering alone. His friends and God seemed to have abandoned him. So the psalmist, Peter with God to rescue him, but it seems that God has hidden his faith from him.

So that's how he was ascending to the mountain. And then he gets to the psalmist in verse 12. So the psalmist said, But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever.

[5 : 03] So there is a psalmist for the psalm. So he said that God is in control and in charge forever. God is there for all generations. And because of that, there's three things also change to the perception of the psalmist, to his suffering.

First of all, in terms of time, he said that God is forever. So he's comparing his suffering, his life, with God's eternity.

So suddenly, his suffering becomes less of an issue in the sense that his suffering is only transient. And there's eternity with God.

So it changes perception in there. So first one is time. Secondly, it's to do with weight. Weight has been heavy. So when we are suffering, we think that it's so hard to bear, so difficult to go through this.

It's weighing on us. But when we see God's glory, as he saw that, the glory of God transformed his perception of affliction and shame. Because the glory of God is such a big thing that it just overwhelms him, his own suffering becomes insignificant.

[6 : 20] And so the second thing is weight. The third thing is purpose. He sees God's sovereignty, and so that reassures him that God knows about his suffering and cares about that.

And so the perception of suffering is changed as he went up to the summit. So the three things, time, weight, and purpose.

And then he descends the mountain. And as he descends, you can see the change in his focus of things. He was praying for the restoration of Zion, the restoration of the nations, the restoration of worship towards God.

Okay, so there's a three part of Psalm 102. Now how do we apply to us and how does it affect our life? Then there are three ways for us to read the Psalms or anything, at least three ways.

Think of, as we approach life, we can approach it with three different sort of mindsets or mixture of it. I'll call them devotional, rational, and emotional.

[7 : 32] You can read that in the Buridding Kawa about those three mindsets that we use to approach life. Let us try to read the Psalm mainly with just an emotional mindset.

If we just use it, read it from the point of emotion and feelings. So the first half of the Psalm is full of feelings. So with this mindset, we could feel the desperation, the fear, the pain, and the loneliness of the Psalmist.

In the first two verses alone, the Psalmist pleaded with God five times to listen and respond to him, to do something about his suffering. The Psalmist is describing his afflictions as if he is living in hell. He's being burned, and his life is passing away like smoke. His heart is so depressed that he does not enjoy his food anymore. He's eating ashes, possibly as a sign of deep grieving.

He feels that nobody is standing with him. He thinks he's suffering alone, and God does not seem to have done anything to help him. God seems to have led his enemies to triumph over him.

[8 : 49] He thinks that God has conspired against him, as God has taken him up and thrown him down. And he wants to enjoy good health and respect from others. Now he's sick.

And his name is used for a curse. It's quite easy for us to think like this in life. I have a patient come in and said, she's a Christian, she said, in the past, I don't have any illness.

I was too well. God was good to me. I said, isn't God good to you now? He was taken aback when I asked him this, asked her these questions. She couldn't answer me. So this is how, if you just use emotional mindset to assess or approach things in our life.

So even if we look at this psalmist as he approached the mountain top, if we use the emotional mindset alone to understand the psalm, we can sense that the psalmist may be resentful to God.

He was maybe saying that, oh God, you are enthroned forever up there and I am suffering down here. It's not fair. I mean, why is this one happening? Why is this happening to me?

[10 : 03] If he just uses this mindset to read the psalm, it will be very difficult for us to understand the second half of the psalm. It doesn't make sense except verses 23, 24 when the psalmist complains again about God shortening his life.

So I would like to add a rational mindset to the reading of the psalm. So we are now reading it with both emotion and logic. So I said, I feel sick. I feel depressed.

I feel persecuted by others. So besides feeling sorry and sad for myself, I start to think about my afflictions. Are my afflictions caused by my own doing, other people's doing, or God's doing?

The psalmist has concluded that it was all God's doing because in verse 10, it said, because of your indignation and anger, for you have taken me up and thrown me down.

And verse 23, he has broken my strength in mid-course. He has shortened my days. The psalmist does not explain why God was doing such a thing to him.

[11:10] Maybe he does not understand either. However, the psalmist understands that his afflictions are tied with the destruction of Zion. He suffers more intensely as he thinks about Zion, as he holds on to the dust, the broken stones of Zion in his hands.

So to the Old Testament people, Zion was such an important place. So if you don't understand it, it will have to understand this psalm.

So Zion was a place of God's temple and God's king. It was the only place on earth where a person could meet God without being consumed by God's holiness.

Now the city of Zion had been destroyed. Where could the psalmist meet God? His only hope was if God would restore Zion. Only then would the prayer of the destitute be heard by God.

So the rational mindset helps us to understand the psalm better. But still, not enough for us to understand it fully and well. For what purpose would God break the psalmist's strength in midcourse and shorten his days?

[12:20] While his suffering is most likely related to the collective rebellion of his nation against God, how is his suffering related to the hope of having a people yet to be created to praise the Lord?

And the kingdoms gather to worship the Lord? And the children of the Lord's servant having a secure dwelling? So it doesn't explain all this just by reasoning or logic.

So from my interactions with patience, I realize that many people approach life mostly with an emotional mindset. We do the same when we say, I feel comfortable or I do not feel comfortable about something.

The criterion for approving or disapproving something has become how we feel. Even in ministries, we focus more on making people happy than helping people to be holy.

We pray more for comfort than for confirmation to the image of Jesus. Patients with chronic illness, especially chronic pain, find it very difficult to cope with the persistent affliction.

[13:29] They tend to blame others, including the doctors for their persisting pain. Some patients try to understand the afflictions. Do I inherit this from my parents? Is my affliction caused by my choices of activities and diet during my younger days?

Is my affliction caused by the environment I live in? So understanding the cost helps a bit. But the affliction remains difficult to live with. It is only when they have something bigger than themselves to live for.

They could start to be free from the torment of the affliction. Now let's add devotional mindset to the psalm. This is a radical change in mindset because the focus is no longer on the author's feeling or reasons.

The focus is now shifted to God. So God is enthroned forever. The psalmist has seen history and his own experience with God being center of the universe.

His main concern is God's will and God's glory. So to understand the psalm better we refer to Psalm 2. So Psalm 2 verse 6 God says As for me I have set my king on Zion my holy hill.

[14:45] By the time Psalm 102 was written the city of Zion had been destroyed. The temple had been destroyed and her king was suffering. The writer of Psalm 102 could be the king then or at least the leader of God's people.

With a devotional mindset we can see that while the psalmist was in pain and shame by his enemies his main concern was not so much of his own pain and shame his concern was with God's honor.

What happened to God's promise in Psalm 2 that his king would be in Zion? How could a good a great God let his anointed king suffer? his anointed city be captured?

His temple be destroyed? How do we know that? This was the writer's concern. So that's from the second half of the psalm. So as a psalmist descended the mountain he was longing for something. He did not pray for his own comfort. He prayed for one, nations who fear the name of the Lord. Two, Zion to be rebuilt. Three, a people to be created to worship the Lord and for the prayers of the destitute and the prisoners will be heard and their afflictions will be transformed to God's praises.

[16:05] So at this point we can appreciate that this psalm is actually written by Jesus Christ. It's a prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ because he is the only one who will fit in this picture because he is the only person who can rightfully expect God not to hide his faith from him.

So when we look at Psalms, many times the psalm has asked God not to hide his faith from them. In actual fact, if we pray the same way on our own, we could not expect God not to hide his faith from us, from our sinful nature.

And it would be illogical just to pray like that, except if the person is without sin. And so Jesus Christ is the only one who can rightfully expect God not to hide his faith from him.

But God did hide his faith from him. And Jesus Christ is the only person who does not deserve any suffering because he never sinned.

But he was afflicted and shamed unjustly. He was not only afflicted, he was afflicted so severely that his bones cling to his flesh, as the son said. And also he was afflicted alone with all his allies leaving him.

[17:33] And thirdly, Jesus Christ is the only person who can expect to live forever because of his obedience and relationship to God. But he was condemned by God and his life was shortened in God's wrath.

So we can refer this to Isaiah 53 verses 3 to 6. It says that he was despised and rejected by man, a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief.

And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteem him not. Surely he has borne our grief and carried our sorrow, yet we esteem him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement of that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one of us to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. So, through these Isaiah verses, we can understand what Psalm 1 or 2 is primarily about.

[18:53] We are thankful that the Psalm does not just end there. In verse 22 and 23, Jesus was saying that his days have been cut short.

He's appearing to the fact that God is eternal, and it's unthinkable that as the Son of God there's an ending to his days. So, how do we know this Psalm is about God's Son, about Jesus Christ?

Because Hebrews 1:8 tells us that if we go to the book, Hebrews chapter 1 verse 8, it has got the exact code from verses 25 to 21 in that book, and it says that it's applying to Jesus Christ.

These verses tell us that Jesus' days will never come to an end. In fact, they tell us that Jesus is the one who decides the days of all creation. These verses also foretold the resurrection of Jesus because his days would never come to an end.

So, when he stays the end in order to take away our condemnation, he needs to be resurrected because otherwise his days would come to an end. So, he foretold us about his resurrection, and he was raised again to prove that he is a rightful king who will secure and establish his kingdom.

[20:10] Jesus was condemned so that those of us who are in Christ are no longer condemned. Jesus was afflicted. Does that mean that those of us who are in Christ will no longer be afflicted?

I think there are two different issues here when we think about affliction. Jesus' affliction was for our justification. Our affliction is for our sanctification.

Jesus was afflicted when he bore our condemnation. We, as Christians, are afflicted because we live in the world, and God is also changing us through affliction.

So, in John 16:33, Jesus told his disciples, in the world, you will have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world. In Romans 8:17, we are told that provided we suffer with Christ, in order that we might also be glorified with him.

Whether we are Christians or not, suffering is part of life. The question is not if we can avoid suffering, the question is if we suffer with Christ or suffer without Christ.

[21:25] I have seen many patients suffering without Christ. They usually suffer not only physically but mentally as well. They become depressed and irritable.

They are difficult to live with. They often complain to me how rude their families and friends were towards them. Suffering without Christ has changed them into someone who constantly craves for sympathy from others but who is unable to consider the need of others.

Among my patients mostly are elderly and retired. I only have very few people who are working. But even among those very few working people, I've got four patients who have been in dispute with their workplaces for unfair treatment.

They feel being discriminated, regulated, persecuted by their supervisors. Cases like this are very hard to resolve because the employers want to side with the supervisors.

It's very difficult to resolve. They want justice. They want fairness. One of the patients have been in dispute with her employer for about five years.

[22 : 39] She's not been working for five years. She just wanted her supervisor to be punished by the employer. When she saw me recently, she said that particular supervisor has left the company, no longer working there.

She was at loss as how she could be vindicated now. She's just so depressed. She could not get out of that. She wants to be vindicated, but now the person is not even there in the company anymore.

What do you do? So she's just become her own prisoner in terms of wanting to get justice and fairness. And this is the mental torment that is going through.

So some of us here are struggling with physical afflictions. I think some of us have migraine headaches quite often, arthritis or other disabilities.

Some of us are suffering from mental afflictions or being infertile or being lonely. I think the most common afflictions are relational in terms of how we feel that people are treating us.

[23 : 53] Have you ever been misunderstood and you could not explain yourself? Have you ever been falsely accused and you could not defend yourself? There are times that you might wish those who are close to you would understand your aspirations and actions but they keep giving you negative remarks.

The afflictions of being bullied or misunderstood are difficult to bear. We appear to many venues to vindicate ourselves. Sometimes it's just not possible to get justice.

It could be that our opponent is simply too powerful or there is not enough evidence or we cannot fully explain ourselves. Sometimes when we are in an argument with someone we know that we will create more conflict when we try to win an argument so we buy our tongues and feel the resentment inside.

And if you are a leader in any capacity in the church or at home you tend to get a lot more criticism when you try to do something new. And that's life and that's what we will go through.

So how should we cope with all these afflictions? Firstly we need to examine our hearts to make sure that we are not the ones who are afflicting others. So Paul in 1 Corinthians 6 7 8 says to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you.

[25 : 23] Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourself wrong and defraud even your own brothers. Paul was dismayed that the Corinthian Christians were not only not willing to suffer wrong, they were afflicting others.

We are called to suffer with Christ. Secondly, we trust that God is always in control and he cares. The writer of Psalm 102 was suffering alone and his enemies were making fun of him.

His only venue of appeal was to God. God turned his face away from the psalmist because his affliction anticipates the affliction of Christ. When we are suffering with Christ, we know that God will never turn his face away from us again.

Thirdly, we suffer with Christ. What does suffering with Christ mean? When Christ suffered, he did not focus on vindicating himself. He appealed to God and prayed for the restoration of God's kingdom.

He trusted that God is eternal forever. He knew that nothing would happen outside God's control. He thought of others who were suffering as well.

[26 : 38] He looked forward to a people who would be created to praise the Lord. He longed for the gathering of people to worship the Lord. So that's how Christ suffered.

Fourthly, we know that our affliction is good for our sanctification. Psalm 119, verse 71, it is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.

Through affliction, God is changing us. Affliction helps us to grow in our trust in God and His promises. Affliction helps us to learn to forget ourselves and hope in God's kingdom.

Affliction helps us not to love this world and long for the city that is to come. One of the reasons why the church in our generation is so weak is because it focuses too much on our individual afflictions.

We spend a lot of resources to vindicate ourselves, to keep ourselves comfortable or to collect sympathy from other people. Paradoxically, when we learn to suffer with Christ, we start to care for the church of Christ, and our own afflictions become bearable.

[27 : 52] More than that, as Romans 5 tells us, we rejoice in our suffering. The writer of Psalm 102 knows that unless Zion is restored, his own affliction could not be resolved.

When we are afflicted, we can pray Psalm 102. We know that God will hear our prayer because of the blood of Jesus. God may not remove the afflictions, but he will give us peace that will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

We do not suffer alone because Jesus has suffered alone, and Jesus is now with us until the end of the age. our days on earth may be cut short, but we know that we are secure in Christ and we will never perish.

With such an assurance, we can turn the focus of our afflictions to greater things. We might then pray that God's church may be established. We might pray for the destitute and those who are suffering, and we might ask God's kingdom to come.

I will end with Hebrews 11 verses 24 to 26. By faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, chosen rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

[29 : 17] He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasure of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. Moses had the opportunity to live an affliction-free life.

He gave it up because he was looking for something much greater than the feeding pleasures of this world. He chose to suffer with Christ in order that he might be glorified with him.

Let us pray. O Father God, we want to look to our Lord Jesus Christ, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that is set before him, enjoy the cross, despising the shame.

O Father, help us to live for the Lord Jesus Christ, to live for something greater, and help us to turn our afflictions to your glory and honour.

Thank you, Lord. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.