

Psalm 102

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 September 2017

[0:00] Amen. Amen.

When you are preparing to preach, oftentimes you're meditating on a text. Something will happen during your week. Will you become aware that the Spirit's really trying to speak to you about something?

I'm sure, Father Caleb, you probably have this experience on a regular basis. As a matter of fact, I find one of the clearest paths to communication with the Holy Spirit is to involve yourself in preparing to teach a Sunday school lesson or a sermon.

Something happened to me earlier this week that I did not even include in my sermon notes, but I've been thinking about it more and more on the drive-in this morning. My son Trevor was with me on Monday at my place of work.

So you guys know I work around the corner from my house about half a mile. Corleen had to run an errand and dropped him off. He worked with me for a couple hours.

[1:38] I live in, I actually was telling Jim Fuller in the Sunday school class, so we kind of have a steel compound going out in the middle of the country.

And halfway between in this half a mile, three-quarter of a mile walk, we just walk back from the office, it burns off energy for him. There's a cemetery in between there, and my grandparents are buried within that cemetery.

Trevor's our youngest. He's the first of our children to not have one of my grandparents living since he's been with our family. And he wanted to know a little bit about where we came from.

So we figured this is as good a time as any to stop in and visit the gravestone and talk to him about my grandmother, who, other than my parents, was probably the single most important aspect of spiritual formation for me during some troubled teenage years.

And as I spoke to Trevor about how much she would have loved him and would have loved to teach him about Jesus, we had to talk about the fact that he would see her again, that from this grave spot, to where we were staying now, when Jesus comes again, she would be made alive again with a new body.

[3:06] And where I'm feeling all mopey and emotional and trying to choke back tears, for Trevor, with the faith he has, it is a very matter-of-fact thing.

Trevor can look past the fact, whereas I'm carrying the griefs of today with me and struggling and thinking about how sad it is that this woman of God would never get to know my son, I'm forgetting the fact that there's a resurrection and he has plenty of time to get caught up.

There's something there. It takes a faith to look through the troubles of this age to the glory of the age to come. We come today to the 102nd Psalm, and that's on page 593 in your pew Bibles, if you want to take them out and look at it.

I would recommend that. This is one of the Psalms whose author remains anonymous.

Scholars are split between it. Some think David wrote it. Others think an anonymous Hebrew exile in Babylon. The fact that we don't know who wrote it doesn't really matter to us.

[4:32] I think that this is one of the passages of Scripture where the author is hidden from us almost for a theological purpose, because I can hear different voices within this psalm.

Somehow we hear the cry of every disappointed, cast-down believer in these verses. I can definitely see the depression of David, who entered into his reign, as Scripture tells us, ruddy-cheeked and bright-eyed, with plans of a temple and a country united in worship to the one true God.

But instead, he finishes his race, clouded by a storm of betrayal, which was mostly caused by his own sin, and also the death of three sons, Bathsheba's unnamed child, Amnon, and perhaps his favorite son, the traitor, Absalom.

But this was a man that Scripture tells us was after God's own heart. We could hear the cries of the exiled father sitting by the rivers of Babylon in slavery, thinking about the inheritance of Abraham, which had been lost, both to him, to his children, and to his grandchildren, because of the idolatry of Israel.

Yet, we also hear the anguish of others, maybe those closer to us. Maybe we can hear the cries of the early church in Jerusalem, driven out by Roman oppression.

[6:10] Maybe we can hear the prayers of Archbishop Cranmer as he's waiting his turn to burn at the stake. Maybe we hear the families of the 28 Coptic Christians who were murdered for their faith in Egypt this past May.

Can you hear their cries within this psalm? Verse 1, Hear my prayer, O Lord. Let my cry come to you.

Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress. And listen, it's reasonable to ask God to hear our cry during our time of trouble.

Because let's face it, many of us make our cry during our time of troubled command and do not even have our cries heard or listened to.

In the past 10 years, reformed preachers and teachers, of whom I consider myself to be the very least, have made a living kicking around those who put forth the prosperity gospel.

[7:28] You agree, Cal? Now, we've, it's almost become, this is, I think, a dirty little trade secret. If you've run out of time to prepare a sermon, now, I know Cal's never done this.

I haven't done this, but it's easy to turn in to the website of a prosperity teacher, such as Joel Osteen or Creflo Dollar, find out the latest false truth that they've preached and kind of write out a sermon that refutes it.

I've sat through a few of those sermons. I've read through many others. It's a, it's a quick shortcut to get there. For those of you that don't know the term prosperity gospel, it's okay.

I think, I think reformed preachers and teachers actually are the ones that maybe invented the terminology. But it's the idea that one's faith in God gives a person access to material goods and happiness now.

I wonder, though, if our, and our, I mean those who seek to preach and teach the word faithfully, I wonder if our aim has been off over this past decade.

[8:44] We often tear down a false system, which is a good thing, without providing an alternative. It's really easy for us to attack these false teachers without even having to engage a single critical brain cell and feel like our job for the week is done.

But if we do not offer the true measure of hope, what good has been done? If you set the Bible aside, and you must do this to support the other team's view, the prosperity gospel makes a little sense.

Pain is bad, pain is real, yet God is good. How do we make sense of this contrast? We too often ignore the reality of pain.

It fundamentally changes every aspect of a person, mind, body, and soul. As we turn to the psalmist, we can see this.

Look at verse 3. For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace. My heart is struck down like grass and is withered.

[10:05] I forget even to eat my bread. This man is in real suffering. His reaction to his pain is beyond his control.

His body betrays him. I have stood in this place and I have watched many others suffer it. The light leaves the eye. Food is not touched.

One's body is so weak that even pulling the body out of bed takes every measure of strength.

Consider these things I have seen happen to men and women who are dedicated Christians.

A list that is the smallest part of the massive collection of suffering I have seen. Young couple with plans to start a family experiencing their third miscarriage in four years to realize that this dream would never take place.

Faithful parents who raise their son consistently in the discipline and admonition of the Lord who then watched him walk away from the faith and into a lifestyle of sexual immorality.

[11:17] Ten-year-old son of a believer dies of leukemia. Fifty-year-old man bright and intelligent has an unexpected stroke and is no longer able to communicate.

I've seen three men close to me that I looked up to who worked their lives faithfully in their career to prepare for a retirement focused on ministry to have a heart attack and die within months of retirement.

I've seen parents realize that their children were abused by someone that was close to the family. pain. This is real pain that elicits a real response on every part of a person's being.

I could add your list of suffering here. We could continue on for years and years speaking about what we've realized. but looking at verse 5 can we all agree that we have known or known someone and we can just hear the loud groaning of a person's being that makes the bones cling to the flesh. And then the psalmist continues consider these desert birds. The owls of the waste the sparrows on the housetop the living beings that have no place within the land of the living.

[13:01] The reality is the one whose whole world has been torn up around him feels like there is no place for him in the land of the living. When these bad things happen to me the first thing I want to do is withdraw.

I don't even want people to talk to me. And if you don't believe this you can ask my wife. You know that within crises the first thing that happens is she has to proactively pull me out of my office or my room and get me talking again.

Look at verse 7. Our author lays awake even the comforts of sleep are not there to comfort him. He eats ashes like bread and mingles tears with his drink, a sign of intense funeral mourning, and his enemies mock his suffering adding to his agony.

This would be a really terrible place to stop this sermon. How does a person in a condition like this even put one foot in front of the other?

We have to find the answer. There are those in this room who are old enough and experienced enough to realize that there's two key words here, this life.

[14:37] You're old enough to realize that this life is simply a collection of disappointments. Those of you who are younger are probably naive enough to think that you will find a way to make your plans work out exactly the way you wanted them to.

And not a single one will. No plan or dream of any man or woman has gone according to how he planned it within this life.

But as the Apostle Paul writes to the church in Corinth, if in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

That's because if the message of the gospel is the immediate release from pain, then God is doing a pretty terrible job. And this is why the enemies of the cross mock us in our pain.

yet Jesus said that he came that we might have life and life more abundantly. So what is he talking about?

[15:53] Our psalmist does not try to avoid the tough questions. Within the hardest tasks of life come the greatest revelations. He places the credit for his suffering on God.

God. Look here at verses 23 and 24. He, God, has broken my strength in mid-course. He has shortened my days.

Oh my God, I say, take me not in the midst of my days. You, who years endure throughout all generations. Very careful when I was writing this in my wording here, I was careful to say he places the credit on God.

God. He's not blaming God or accusing God because this would mean that God had sinned or transgressed, which is an impossibility. We should take note here, and I hope that we will all be so honest but careful in our prayer life.

But the suffering ordained by God here comes right between prophecies of his glory and his deliverance. Verses 12 through 13.

[17:09] 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. Or verses 16 and 17. For the Lord builds up Zion.

He appears in his glory. He regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise their prayer.

The concluding verses have a very similar thought, and we'll look at them in a minute.

Let's think about this. verse, we've considered the suffering of the psalmist, and we briefly just read the foretold deliverance.

But there is no indication that this foretold deliverance will happen in this life. And this contrast between the suffering of the psalmist and the glorious deliverance of God seems so unfair.

[18 : 21] How can two aspects of God's relationship to man be so different? Why is life so hard for the saints of God? God. So here's where I came down on this.

This is a perspective issue. Our psalmist is a fallen man, a created being. As humans, our understanding and experience of a situation is limited.

We've seen his concern is the cutting down of his days in the middle of his life. Our understanding is limited by what we perceive, by what we taste, touch, hear, smell.

Even our imagination is limited. But the psalmist contrasts this. He looks past the limited condition of man and looks forward to the internal, unchangeable nature of God.

Verses 25 through 27, 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.

[19 : 39] 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.

God is able to fulfill his promises of good towards us because he alone is eternal.

His vision is not hidden, and he sees the complete story of our lives. His plans for us exceed the years we have in these bodies. promise. Our sufferings point to a future deliverance which are as good as completed in the eyes of God.

Our troubles will not end until we stand in the presence of Christ, which is a far greater reward than health, wealth, and happiness in the present age.

Therefore, our psalmist rightly concludes and takes comfort in the promise, the children of your servants shall dwell secure.

[20 : 48] Their offspring shall be established before you. The author could not have reached this conclusion by reasoning his way through his problems.

God had to sovereignly intervene in his life, and the character and ministry of the God had lifted him out of his troubles and restored his hope. Let me ask you this.

How can one walk through the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil unless the shepherd's rod and staff are there to comfort him? The goodness and mercy which follow us all the days of our lives, quite frankly, hurt and cripple us at times.

But we know that we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Our five senses and experiences do not give us the answer to our suffering, but the Holy Spirit does.

He points us to Christ and gives us the gift of faith. We are told that in Jesus' death, death, that in Jesus, death has had its victory and sting removed.

[22 : 08] And the apostle Paul informs us that the suffering of this present age is not even worthy to be compared with the glory that is yet to be revealed to us.

And Paul places a strong emphasis on that word yet. Even the apostle Paul did not fully understand the glory that we are yet to realize.

Yesterday was the anniversary of the death of, and I always get his name wrong when I have to say it in the prayers of the people, St.

John Chrysostom. I almost got it right, but not quite again. And last night, as I was actually wrapping it up, I was curious what, he had to say on this issue, and I found a sermon by him.

As we close, I just wanted to share this with you. He was a much better preacher than anyone you will probably ever experience in your lifetime.

[23 : 19] He was, his name means golden throated. But he had some really profound things to say about this issue. he spoke in Antioch and said, death is rest, a deliverance from the exhausting labors and cares of this world.

When then you see a relative departing, do not yield to despondency. Give yourself to reflection and examine your conscience. Cherish the thought that after a little while, this end awaits you also. Be more considerate. Let another's death excite you to salutary fear. Shake off all indolence.

Examine your past deeds.

Quit your sins and commence a happy change. We differ from unbelievers in our measurement of things. The unbeliever surveys the heavens and worships it because he thinks it a divinity.

He looks to the earth and makes himself a servant to it and longs for the things of sense.

Remember those five things that we perceive with. Then he writes, but not so with us.

[24:42] We survey the heaven and admire him that made it for we believe it not to be a God but a work of God. I look on the whole creation and led by it to the creator. The unbeliever looks on wealth and longs for it with earnest desire.

I look on wealth and condemn it. He sees poverty and laments. I see poverty and rejoice. I see things in one light, he in another.

Just so in regard to death. He sees a corpse and thinks of it as a corpse. I see a corpse and behold sleep rather than death. And as in regard to books, both learned persons and unlearned see them with the same eyes but not with the same understanding.

For to the unlearned the mere shapes of letters appear while the learned discover the sense lies within those letters. So in respect to affairs in general, we all see what takes place with the same eyes but not with the same understanding and judgment.

Since therefore in all other things we differ from unbelievers, shall we agree with them in our sentiments respecting death? Consider to whom the departed is gone and take comfort.

[26:03] He is gone where Paul is and Peter and the whole company of the saints. Consider how he shall arise and with what glory and splendor. Let's pray.

Father, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be honor and glory throughout all ages. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.