

The Works of the Lord

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[0 : 00] Morning all, please have a seat. Now if you've been reading through the Psalms, or this section of the Psalms anyway, I'm sure you've noticed that all of the Psalms, actually, all of these Psalms actually seem to start in pretty much the same way.

Praise God, give thanks to God, bless God. Now it starts this way because the end of Book 4, this section that we're in, gives us all sorts of ways to praise God.

Now this section in particular is something that I think I need to warn you, could be quite confronting today. This is a Psalm that was used during times that were very hard in Israel's history.

And so I think today it's good to start with the question. And the question is, how can we praise God during hard times?

What do you think of the events in history? Do you think God had a part in those? The good ones as well as the ones that just don't quite seem to make sense.

[1 : 20] Now what do you think of God's hand in your life history as well? Now I've shared this with some from the men's group before, but some of you may not believe it, but early on in life I would have told you that I had a very promising sporting career, in particular in triathlon.

So triathlon is when you swim, bike, and run, and that's all in one race. I think it's relatively popular now. But for those who don't know, just in case. Now for triathlon, I really loved it.

I breathed it. I dreamt about it. I studied it and I read up about it. Everything that I did was aiming towards being the best that I could be. Now I was the under 14 champion and things were going really well, but then I hit a rough patch as well.

And as an athlete, I know my body well, and I can tell you that it just felt really wrong. I was sore all over, all the time, and no matter how much I rested, I just couldn't seem to recover.

So I got to the stage I could barely stay awake in school. So I went to the doctor, and after a few tests, the provisional diagnosis was chronic fatigue syndrome.

[2 : 38] Now there's so many other things that could have happened that are far worse, but at that time, for me, I struggled. And I struggled to understand why God would let that happen to me.

Now for me, it was particularly hard because I couldn't do what I wanted to do. And I think some of those who have gone through chronic illnesses or things that hold them back, you'll understand where I'm coming from there.

Now my identity and my reason for being, this was all before I was a Christian, everything that I'd put my life into up to that stage was gone.

Now there have been many other struggles in life since then that have added to my testimony. Numerous hardships, be they professionally or financially, personally.

Some of the harder ones, losing a fiancé, losing a child, watching family slowly die from cancer. Now, again, I know many of you have witnessed far harder and more painful things than those.

[3 : 51] But I think the same question comes to our mind when things like this happen. And that question is, God, what are you doing?

Are you really a good God? Why is all this happening? Can I really praise you now through all of these things? So this is some of the questions that we'll be looking at.

So let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you for your promises. Lord, please help us to understand your promises that we may praise you.

And we put ourselves in this time in your hands now. Amen. Now, this psalm is actually quite special for what it tells us, but it's also special for what it doesn't tell us.

So as we're reading through the text, I want you to see if you can pick up some of the things that are missing from this account of Israel's history. So the first six verses, that lays down the foundation for us.

[4 : 54] And it does this in three ways. So firstly, we know who the psalmist is addressing. If you look at verse six there in your Bibles, it's the God's people, the descendants of Abraham or his offspring, his chosen people.

Now, specifically, parts of this psalm, they're from 1 Chronicles 6, Isaiah 12, and Isaiah 65 as well. You can look all those up later. But what that's telling us is that this psalm was used in particular during Israel's exile.

So after their victories, after conquering nations, Canaan, present-day Gaza, those were the nations that they conquered to set up their land and their people. They set up their king and kingdoms.

But then, of course, you know they were invaded and they were defeated. And their children were dragged away. Their homes were destroyed and they were sent into exile.

And when they returned, they returned to a broken land, a broken temple. They were a broken people. And they had little more than the clothes on their backs.

[6 : 04] So these are the people that we're trying to keep in mind here as we look at this psalm. Now, secondly, the psalmist is very clear on how he wants God's people, the people that have been through all these things.

He's very clear on how he wants them to respond. So just looking at verses 1 to 3 there, it's repeated in many different ways. So give thanks to God. Call on him.

Sing to him. Praise him. Why? Because he's kept his promises. Because we should remember his good works. And we should seek him out and we should praise him.

And usually we'd expect the psalm to finish in the same way that it started. So if you can look at verses 43 to 45 with me for just a second. When you're comparing the two, they do look kind of the same.

There's rejoicing there in both of them. There's singing there in both of them. But there is something that is a little bit different. And that's our third point. The third thing that the psalmist is quite clear on.

[7 : 00] So looking at verse 4, that tells us that our purpose in all of this is to seek God. And verse 45, though, it tells us that our purpose is to keep statutes and laws.

Now for God's people, they're actually one and the same thing. So because you see, if you're seeking God, you're looking to understand him. If you understand God, then you know him.

And if you know God, then of course you're going to obey his laws. So this is the response that the psalmist is looking for from the people who are in exile. So to remember his good works, to praise him, and to tell others about him as well.

And the third thing there, to seek him and to obey him. Now verses 7 to 11, this next section gives us a focus of what we're looking at through those three things.

So have a look, verse 7. Yahweh, the Lord our God, the God of all the earth. So you remember from Psalm 104 what the God of all the earth means. God being at the center of all creation.

[8 : 03] The awesome God. This God is the God who has made a promise. And he's made that solemn vow to just one man, Abraham. And he was confirmed to his sons, Isaac and Jacob.

But when we mention Abraham and covenant, you can be sure God's people know exactly what he's talking about. For us, we look at Genesis 12 and Genesis 15 as well.

So it's the promise that Abraham gets for his offspring so that they would be a whole nation, that they would have a land, and that they would have blessings. So those three things. And we know in Genesis 17, it tells us that that land that he was talking about was Canaan.

So that's verse 11. And it would be great if you read through Genesis later on in this week just to have a look at those again and refresh your memory. But the main point, though, is that when Israel hears those words of Abraham and covenant, those three promises come to their mind immediately.

They know exactly what he's talking about. So that's our foundation, remembering God's good works, telling other people about it and praising him for that, and seeking him and obeying him.

[9 : 13] And the covenant is just that lens that we look through all these three things. Now, the rest of the psalm gives us three examples. So they're in three different sections. And each of those tells us how God fulfills his promise to Abraham.

He does that, though, in a very specific way. So the first thing is that there is a threat to God's covenant. And each time, God's promise prevails. So have a look at the first section there, verses 12 to 15.

There's the initial threat, and it applies to all of the three forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. They're wandering from nation to nation. And it's the exact opposite of what God has promised, isn't it?

They're not a whole nation, but they're just a small family. And they don't have any land to go to. Let alone a home to rest their heads on or a whole kingdom. So they're dodging pharaohs and kings.

And it puts God's covenant. It puts God's words in jeopardy before they've even began. But, verse 14, God allowed no one to oppress them. God continues to look after them.

[10 : 20] And if you look at verse 15 there, the words, the names that he gives those fathers, it's amazing. He says that they're anointed ones. They're his chosen ones.

He says that they're prophets. And they're carrying his words. And that gives us a great anticipation for the things to come. Because these are the people that God is going to work through.

So God sustained them, and his promise prevails. Now, the second section, we see the same thing. The covenant is under threat. The very land itself that God's little family is wandering through is in trouble.

There's a famine. And one of the sons is enslaved. He's taken away in shackles. Again, a bad situation. But, verse 20, God's plan prevails.

Joseph is the one who paves the way for the whole of the nation of Israel. And we see, verse 23, that's the first time that the name Israel is used there for Jacob. Because this is actually the fulfillment of that second part of God's promise.

[11 : 24] That they are a nation. They are the Israel. Now, it took 400 years to get there. But they got there eventually. So those are the first two threats. Now, the third threat is even bigger than the first two.

So looking at that third section, 25 to 36. So the Egyptians in the land of Ham, their hearts, they're turned against Israel. They despise them. They cheat them, and they enslave them.

So Israel is now a nation. But they're a nation who are being oppressed. And we can see that it's actually in this time of Israel's greatest need that God performs his greatest miracles.

And we're familiar with them. They're the ten plagues. So here, though, we have the bloody water, frogs, flies, gnats, hail, locusts, and death of the firstborn.

So that's seven. If you're really familiar with the plagues, you know that we're missing the boils. And we're also missing the death of the livestock. Now, the plague of darkness is in there somewhere.

[12 : 29] But it's a little bit out of order. But knowing that there are seven of the main ones that he's mentioned there, seven of the plagues that he's mentioned, you can be pretty sure that as a psalmist, as a person of God, that's not a mistake.

And I think what he's saying is that he's trying to make a point. That God will bring his holy, complete, and righteous judgment on anything that stands in the way of his covenant with his people.

And we can see the results are spectacular as well. Verse 37, Israel is free, but not just free. They're rich. There's silver and gold. God protects them, verse 39, with a whole cloud of fire.

Verse 40 and 41, they don't just have food, but they have fresh food, fresh quail daily, and food in abundance from heaven itself. Water's overflowing.

So in each of these three situations, the greater the threat to God's covenant, the greater his deliverance. And we can see verse 42.

[13 : 40] He did all of this because of his holy promise to Abraham, his servant. And in return, again, there are those three things that God's people should do.

Remember his good works. Praise him and tell others about him. And to seek him and obey him. Now that's our purpose as well, of course.

We remember Galatians 3, 6, as well as the Romans 8 passage that we looked at. We are the descendants of Abraham. We are God's people. And we are part of his promise to Abraham. He's done all those things for us as well.

Now even though we might know that up here, though, in our minds, sometimes I know for myself in our hearts that might not be the case.

Because the things that we see every day, they're threats to our faith. Every act of violence, every natural disaster, from tsunamis, bushfires, floods.

[14 : 44] Every time you turn on the news, there's accidents and murder and death, rapes. And if something happens to someone that we love, God seems far away.

And that bitterness and temptation to just be angry or to be helpless. These are the threats that we face.

And I'm sure the people of Israel, when they were in exile, they had very similar thoughts going through their minds as well. Having lost everything.

Their families, their possessions, their livelihood. And even when they did manage to get back home, what were they returning to? What were they trying to rebuild?

What's the point of turning back to God when it doesn't look like there's anything left? But friends, I don't know if you noticed it, but that's exactly what is missing from this psalm.

[15 : 47] 70 years for Abram and Sarah, they were waiting for just one son. Generations of people just like us, waiting for God to deliver his people from imprisonment, from enslavement.

In 40 years, wandering around aimlessly through the desert, wondering if God would keep his promise. But he did keep his promise.

And we go through all of those sufferings that they did go through in the next psalm, Psalm 106. But right here in this psalm, we remember that God kept his promises.

And they remember it too, and they praise him for it. From their exile, from their helplessness. Because for the sake of his promise, God has saved them before. And if he saved them before, he will save them again.

Now for us, for us, we can be even more sure. Because we know what happens next.

[16 : 52] See, for them, they had 400 years or so of silence. But we know how that silence ends. With the voice of one calling in the desert.

God's kingdom is here. Jesus, the Holy One of the God Most High, is here. Repent and believe.

This is God keeping his promise to Abraham. These are the words that they were waiting for thousands of years. And we know it's true. We know it's true because he died for us.

And he was raised again. And he's seated at God's right hand in heaven. And for the threats that we face, our struggles, our fears, the threats of this age.

This is God's promise to us. Justice. Peace.

[17 : 51] Peace. A place in heaven for everyone who calls on his name. And a promise that he will come back. And when he does come back, everything will be as it should be.

There will be no more crying, no more tears, no more pain. And for us, if we truly believe God's promises, if we truly believe that we are the descendants of Abraham and all of the good works that we have heard, if we really believe everything that's in here, there's only one thing left for us to do.

Remember his promise. Remember his promises. And praise him for it. And if we believe those promises, we can say truly in our hearts, that great passage, 2 Corinthians 4.

I'll read it for us. Therefore, we do not lose heart. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

So we fix our eyes, not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. Now, it's not that Paul is saying that the troubles that we face aren't hard.

[19 : 23] But compared to the promises we have in God, compared to that, there is nothing in this world, nothing, that compares to God's eternal promise.

So remember God's works. And not just his plan to conquer sin and evil over the past 3,000 years and him fulfilling all of those things, but what his promises mean for you.

Now, for me, those promises mean that no matter what I put this body through, that one day there will be a time when there is no more pain.

No matter how much Samuel cries, there will be a day when there are no more tears for him or for Bex. And there will be a reward for all of the sacrifices and the time and the money and the energy that we put into things.

And there is a great joy in serving him now. There is. But knowing that we're under God's promise and trusting in his return, that we'll enter his rest, that's what I hope for.

[20 : 40] And what do God's promises mean to you? Now, we should always be prepared in season and out of season to give an answer to that. Now, if you've forgotten, I'd like to recommend if you can take some time out this week, take that time out, remember what God has done through your life.

Now, if you've got quite a few years behind you, that just means you've got a whole lot more to reflect on. But, see how God has been faithful to his promises to you.

Now, it's not always a perfect picture right now, though. Actually, most of the time, it isn't a perfect picture right now. But it is a picture of hope. And it's this picture of hope that the people of God need to share with other people.

So, remember what God has done for you and pray that you'd be able to share that with someone as well. It's something, it's a hope that we all need reminding of, a hope that nobody can take away.

Now, there's a big difference between those who know God's promise and those who don't.

[21 : 57] Now, those who know God's promises, when life gets hard, they remember that he is good. Those who don't know God's promises, they're always wondering whether God is good at all.

Now, over time, those who don't believe God's promises, you'll see it, they'll slowly stop struggling, they'll stop seeking, and they'll wander just a little bit further and further away from God's people, from God himself.

Those who do believe in his promises, though, the harder things get, the closer they get to God. The more they cry out to him, the more they seek him, the more they cling to his words.

And they will keep serving him until death takes them or until he returns. But either way, they'll have peace. We'll have peace because we know the truth that God keeps his word.

That God keeps his word. Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank you so much for showing us your promises, showing us how you fulfilled them over so many years, Lord, through so many trials.

[23 : 29] and Lord, please help us to remember them. Please help us to see them, especially when times are hard. Lord, please help us to praise you, to see your work in this world and in our lives.

It is a great thing, Lord, that you have done for us. Please help us, Lord, to tell others about that and to keep on seeking you through everything. We put these things in your hands.

Amen.