

Remember

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[0 : 00] I'm well. Thank you. It would be helpful if you could take out your sheet, Psalm 77.

Before I start, how about I pray? Thank you, Heavenly Father, for your word. Thank you for revealing yourself to us. As we look at your word now, please help us to understand it.

Please help us to think clearly. Please soften our hearts so that we will hear you speak and that we will respond in repentance and faith. And we pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Let me read to you a lament. It's from a Christian blog I've been reading. It's dated the 10th of April, 1990. And this person says, they're a Christian.

And they say, I see others who live and prosper. And yet, here am I, stuck in this dark prison cell. Jesus, where are you? Please see my circumstances.

[1 : 09] Please hear my prayer. Why have you abandoned me? Why do you remain silent? I've waited and waited, yet I'm met with silence. Just a small excerpt from this Christian blog.

It's a person suffering with depression. And they often put how they're feeling on the internet. And it's a lament. Can you hear how this person is feeling? Can you identify with how they're feeling? It's important to keep that in mind because as we look at Psalm 77 tonight, it begins with a lament. So the psalm begins with a lament in verses 1 to 4.

And just think about the emotion of these verses and how the psalmist is feeling. It says, The question is, Why?

Why is he lamenting? Why is he in such distress? Verses 5 to 6 have to do with remembering the past. And his music is probably a hymn of praise or one of the psalms sung by the Old Testament people of God.

[2 : 53] But what's going on? Well, it seems that God has forgotten or has failed his people. That's the idea behind verses 7 through 10. But let's explore the background for a little bit.

There's two things going on here. One is historical and the other is theological. The background to this is probably the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by the Babylonians in the 6th century BC. I say probably because the language isn't explicit in this psalm. But Psalm 74 describes the destruction of the sanctuary in the temple and the enemies of God burning it to the ground. So Psalm 77 is probably reflecting on that. But why is it a big deal? You know, it's just a temple. It's just a building, isn't it? Not really. The temple in Jerusalem is hugely significant for the Old Testament people of God.

The temple is a symbol of God dwelling with his people. Dwelling with them. Protecting them. Ruling as their king. That's what the temple symbolizes.

[3 : 56] But like all humans, Israel rejects God and rebels against him. And in response, God brought the Babylonians, a pagan foreign power, into Judah in 586 BC.

And they destroyed the Jerusalem temple. Took the Israelites into captivity into Babylon. Which is probably when Psalm 77 is written. Or if it's not written then, at least it's being sung by the people of God in exile.

So the first thing going on is the historical thing. The destruction of God's dwelling place and the exile into Babylon. The second thing is theological.

It's about who the God of Israel is. One of God's key descriptions of himself in the Old Testament is in Exodus 34. Verse 6.

God reveals himself to Moses as the Lord, the Lord. A God merciful and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Now if you've been around Holy Trinity for the last few months, you'll know that that phrase, steadfast love, is a Hebrew word that our senior minister Andrew Reid has been teaching us.

[5 : 04] Anyone want to have a go at saying that word? Chesed. Beautiful. That's right. So the word chesed. It's a very important word. And it occurs right throughout the Old Testament. It means God's steadfast love.

So just thinking about those verses in Exodus, can you hear how God describes himself to Moses? He is a God who is merciful.

He is compassionate. He is slow to anger, abounding in chesed or steadfast love. He is the God who forgives sins. This is what God is like.

This is his nature to be this. And this is the framework for God dealing with his people for the rest of the Bible. This is who he has pledged himself to be.

Now with this in mind, with the historical and the kind of theological background, listen to the questions that the psalmist asks in verses 7 to 9 of Psalm 77.

[6 : 05] Will the Lord reject forever and never again show favor? Has his faithful love, there's that same word from Exodus, chesed, has his faithful love ceased forever?

Is his promise at an end for all generations? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in his anger withheld his compassion? Can you hear what he's asking?

In light of the exile to Babylon, the destruction of the temple, and considering how God has revealed himself to Moses as a God full of mercy and compassion, he asks the obvious question in this situation, has God changed?

He asks, are you no longer gracious and merciful? Are you no longer full of compassion? Are you no longer a God of steadfast love and faithfulness? Because from his perspective, that's what it looks like.

What's his conclusion about all this? It's there in verse 10. The right hand of the Most High has changed. Now right hand is a symbol for power. So in other words, he's saying God's power has changed.

[7 : 11] God has changed. His unending love has ended. His unceasing faithfulness has ceased. His power has become powerlessness. He isn't the God of steadfast love and faithfulness that he has promised to be.

Now friends, these are serious questions, aren't they? They are real. They are emotive. They come from a place of deep emotional anguish. And I don't think the psalmist is alone in feeling these feelings.

I think even Christians sometimes feel how he feels. I think sometimes his questions are our questions too. So let's take a step back from the psalm for a moment and just think about what makes you feel how the psalmist feels?

What makes you lament? Is it loneliness and isolation? Is it perhaps a long period of failing health? Is it a non-Christian friend you've been praying for for years who's just not yet become a Christian? Is it depression?

[8 : 18] I know lots of Christians with depression and it causes them to doubt God's love for them, to doubt that God is with them. It makes them feel without God or hope at all.

And many of these Christians are in full-time ministry. So what is it for you? What makes you lament? Well, then the psalmist begins his psalm with a lament, but then something changes. Look at verses 11 to 14. I'll remember the Lord's works. Yes, I will remember your ancient wonders. I'll reflect on all you've done and meditate on all your actions.

God, your way is holy. What God is great like our God? You are the God who works wonders. You revealed your strength among the peoples. With power you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.

Now this is very different to verses 2 and 3, isn't it? What's changed? Well, the psalmist calls to mind what God has done in the past.

[9 : 22] Notice his language. All you have done, your actions, your wonders, your works. And in particular, of all God's actions, he remembers the Exodus. In verses 16 to 20.

Do you remember the story? Do you remember what happened back in Exodus? The story at the beginning of the Bible? How the people of Israel were slaves in Egypt, under oppression, enslaved to a foreign pagan power.

They cried out to God and he raised up Moses. Moses and Aaron were to speak and act on behalf of God, telling the king of Egypt, the Pharaoh, to let God's people go.

Do you remember how the king of Egypt refused to listen to God, refused to acknowledge what Moses was saying? And in his judgment, God brought the death of the firstborn sons of Egypt. But for the Israelites, how he provided a sacrifice of a lamb and the blood on the door meant that God passed over them. And God brought them out of Egypt through the Red Sea.

[10:27] Do you remember the story in Exodus? Well, chapters 1 to 14 anyway. It's the great salvation story of the Old Testament. And it's what the psalmist remembers here.

So thinking on that, because of what God's done, look at what he says in verse 13. Reflecting on God's actions, reflecting on the Exodus, he says, What God is great like God.

God is powerful. God is holy. And he saves his people. What have we looked at so far in this psalm tonight? Well, firstly, we've seen that he begins with a lament.

He laments that God has changed his mind and forgotten his people. That he no longer seems to be full of mercy and compassion and power and steadfast love. But then he thinks back to the Exodus and what God did for his people and how God demonstrated his character in rescuing them.

God showed his love for them, his power, his faithfulness. And it proves that God can be trusted. Well, that's Psalm 77.

[11:39] But what do we do with the psalm? We're not in exile in Babylon. So what do we do with it? Well, two things. First thing is remember. Do you notice how many times the words think, remember, reflect, consider occur throughout the passage?

Have a look there in verse 3. Twice there in verse 3, verse 5, verse 6. Four times in verses 11 and 12.

It's repeated again and again. These phrases of thinking, remembering, recalling, consider. The psalm is a call to remember. To continually remember what God has done for his people.

One other thing to note is that this psalm occurs before Psalm 78. And just listen to how Israel responds to God after he's rescued them out of Egypt.

You don't need to look this up. You can just listen. To Psalm 78, verse 10. They did not keep God's covenant but refused to walk according to his law. They forgot what he had done and the miracles he had shown them.

[12:42] Verse 17. They rebelled against him in the desert. They tested God. Verse 32. They did not believe his wonders. And verse 42. They did not keep in mind his power or the day when he redeemed them from the foe.

Do you hear the contrast? Psalm 77. Remember, remember, remember. Psalm 78. Forget. Do not keep in mind. Do not believe.

They forget. What's he saying? The psalmist in 77 is saying, remember. He's saying over and over again. Don't forget what God has done.

Don't be like Israel in the wilderness. Be like the psalmist. And remember, don't get spiritual Alzheimer's. Reflect. Call to mind. Meditate. Remind yourself and each other what God has done for his people.

This is a call to know what God has done. To know God's actions. And they're recorded for us in his word. It's a call to meditate on God's word.

[13:49] The word meditate doesn't mean what our culture takes it to mean. That is generally to empty our mind. Christian meditation means to fill our minds. Fill our minds with God's word.

The word meditate is in Psalm 1 where God says, Blessed are those who meditate. That is, continually think upon and remember God's word. So now, whether that's through joining a small group or coming to church, practicing memorizing scripture, downloading sermons to listen to into the car or on public transport, perhaps catching up with someone one-to-one to read the Bible.

However it is, there's lots of ways to remember what God has done by hearing his word. So that's the first thing, remember. And the second thing is to remember what God has done in Jesus.

See, the psalmist looks back at the Exodus where God powerfully delivers his people from an enemy. And that's the basis for the psalmist to trust God.

Now, we can look at Exodus and say the same thing. Although we have something far greater to look at, don't we? God rescuing his people out of Egypt was and is amazing.

[15:02] But as Christians, we know something even more amazing, don't we? So we live beyond the Exodus and we live beyond the exile to Babylon. We live after the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

We know God's salvation in him. What God did with ethnic Israel in Egypt, delivering them, well, that's just a glimpse of what God would do in the death and resurrection of Jesus for the nations, for all people who repent and believe the good news.

So what does the psalmist look at to know God's character? Well, he looks back at the Exodus. And he can say, God is good. God is holy. God is powerful.

God is trustworthy. Well, where do we look to know God's steadfast love and faithfulness? Well, it's the cross. And we heard about that when it was read for us in Romans 5, that God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us.

How did God demonstrate his love? He sent his son to die for us. Who did he die for? He died for sinners, for the ungodly, for us.

[16:17] He died in our place for our sins. So the cross is God's pledge and guarantee of his love and faithfulness. Love that we can't be separated from.

Love that we don't deserve. Love that we can't earn. Love that is demonstrated in costly action. God demonstrates his love. He doesn't just feel love. He demonstrates his love for us in the death of his son.

So knowing God's love shown for us in Jesus, how much more should we respond to him with our trust? We can trust God not only because of what he's done with Israel in the Exodus, but because of the death of his son for our sins.

So let's remember continually what God has done for us in Jesus. And that doesn't mean that the reality of grief and lament necessarily goes away, but enables us to trust God who has overwhelmingly shown his goodness and his kindness.

And we've seen it in the cross of his son. So let's pray. Thank you, Heavenly Father, for your goodness and kindness shown in how you have treated your people throughout history.

[17:35] Thank you for your great power delivering Israel out of Egypt in the Exodus. But Father, we especially thank you for the great salvation that we have in Jesus.

Thank you that you sent your son to die for us, that he rose again from the dead, and that he is at your right hand ruling as our king and our saviour. Father, thank you so much for your love.

Please help us to know your love by trusting your son. And please change our lives so that we live lives that honour and please you. In Jesus' name, Amen.