

When I'm in Trouble

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Preacher: Cedric Moss

[0 : 00] I'm sure that many of us have at one time or another heard someone say to us or to someone else, know thyself, or know yourself.

And generally what they're calling us to do is to know our limitations, to know our capabilities, to know our strengths and our weaknesses. And many times people, when they hear know thyself, they tend to look within themselves.

They believe that in looking within, they can get to know themselves better. Whenever we're called to know ourselves, the last place we want to look is within ourselves.

And the only trustworthy place to look is outside of ourselves and to our Creator who created us. And God has revealed who we are in His written Word. One of the first things we find in God's Word is that we have been created in the image of God.

[1 : 16] And as Brother Shambi mentioned a moment ago concerning this month's issue of Table Talk, that's not the whole story.

God created us in His image, but we fell. And so we are fallen and broken people because of sin. But Scripture has so much more to say to us about who we are.

Scripture teaches us that we are fragile people. And it uses words like mist and breath and shadow to describe how brief our lives are on this earth.

But I think one of the most telling descriptions of who we are as human beings, as we live life on this earth, is found in Job chapter 14, verse 1.

Job said these words, Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble.

[2 : 27] And that includes every one of us. Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble.

All of us, in one form or another, to one degree or another, we face trouble as we live our fleeting lives on this earth.

But there are people who don't believe that. There are people who believe that life is or can be a bed of roses if you just are positive enough.

If you just have enough faith, life for you will be a bed of roses. And it is so sad because they set themselves up for a double disappointment.

A disappointment that that's not true. And then to have to face the reality that Job gives us. That man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble.

[3 : 26] The good news is that God has not left us without hope as we navigate this life of trouble.

And the primary way that he has helped us, the primary means that God has given to us to navigate the troubles of life is his word. And this morning, as we conclude our sermon series, When Life Happens in the Books of Psalms, we come to a particularly helpful psalm that speaks to us about how we are to see and navigate the troubles of this life when they come our way.

And so if you've not yet done so, would you please turn in your Bible to Psalm 77. I'm going to read that for us and ask that you would follow along.

And I'm reading from the English Standard Version. Psalm 77. Did I say Psalm 78? Okay. For some reason, it felt like I said Psalm 78, but it's Psalm 77.

Psalm 77. I cry aloud to God. Aloud to God. And he will hear me.

[4 : 49] In the day of my trouble, I seek the Lord. In the night, my hand is stretched out without wearying. My soul refuses to be comforted.

When I remember God, I moan. When I meditate, my spirit faints. You hold my eyelids open.

I'm so troubled that I cannot speak. I consider the days of old, the years long ago. I said, Let me remember my song in the night.

Let me meditate in my heart. Then my spirit made a diligent search. Will the Lord spurn forever and never again be favorable?

Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious?

[5 : 51] Has he, in anger, shut up his compassion? Then I said, I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High.

I will remember the deeds of the Lord. Yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work and meditate on your mighty deeds.

Your way, O God, is holy. What God is great like our God. You are the God who works wonders. You have made known your might among the peoples. You with your arm redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph.

When the water saw you, O God, when the water saw you, they were afraid. Indeed, the deep trembled.

[6 : 50] The clouds poured out water. The skies gave forth thunder. Your arrows flashed on every side. The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind.

And your lightnings lighted up the world. The earth trembled and shook. Your way was through the sea. Your path through the great rivers, the great waters.

Your footprints, yet your footprints were unseen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Let's pray together. Father, we pray this morning, looking to you and asking that you would speak to us from your word and through your word.

Lord, even in this moment, the lives of many of us bear witness to the words of Job, that man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble.

[8 : 07] And Father, I pray that you would cause us to hear your voice in your word as we face trouble of various kinds in our lives.

And Lord, for those of us in this moment who may not be aware of trouble, would you help us to still hear your word? Because if we live long enough, we will once again face trouble.

I ask, Lord, that you would cause each of us to hear as we ought to hear and cause me to be faithful, to stand within the four corners of your word and to bring your word to your people.

We pray now that you would be glorified, that you would build your church for the glory of your great name. In Christ's name we pray.

Amen. If you followed along and you saw the words of Psalm 77, you will see that Psalm 77 was written as a personal psalm.

[9 : 11] And we see that because the psalmist is writing from the first person singular. He's talking about I. He starts out, I cry to the Lord, and he does that for the first 12 verses.

Asaph, the writer of this psalm, wrote it clearly at a time when he was in trouble. We don't know the circumstances or the sources of his trouble, but whatever they were, they were not a flat tire.

They were not something that just wasn't working that day. It was something deep and heavy and weighty, and it affected him greatly. And we see this in verses 1 and 2, the early verses of this psalm.

He's crying aloud to God day and night, but he says there's no comfort in his soul. In verses 3 and 4, he is moaning in his spirit, and his spirit is faint, and he says that he's unable to sleep.

What is clear is that what began as a personal psalm soon became a community psalm.

[10 : 32] And God inspired Asaph not only to write this psalm for himself, but to write it for the people of God because it is relevant to all of the people of God.

Because all of the people like God, as Job said, one of a woman, few of days, and full of trouble.

We all have troubles. We all face troubles. All of God's people face troubles. And so, God inspired Asaph to write these words, not just for himself, but for all of us, and we find them as a part of our Bible.

And I think one of the reasons that we have this in our Bibles is that the way Asaph approached his troubles, I think, is instructive for us.

And what we see from Asaph's experience in Psalm 77 is that in times of trouble, we attempted to question God's goodness. But instead, we need to remember his faithfulness.

[11 : 41] In times of trouble, all of us, the best of us, attempted to question God's goodness. But instead, we need to remember his faithfulness.

And so I want us to consider Psalm 77 this morning to see how true this really is. And for those who are taking notes, I've organized my thoughts under two points, and they are, number one, questioning God's goodness.

That's what we see Asaph doing in verses 4 through 9. He tells us in verse 4 that in the midst of his trouble, he's unable to sleep.

And I'm sure all the adults in the room can identify. I'm sure all of us in our life on this earth have faced trouble and trial that robbed us of sleep.

Where we would lay in bed and we would toss and turn and sleep will fail in our eyes. But we also see that Asaph's troubles robbed him of speech.

[13:00] He said he didn't feel like talking. He couldn't talk. He couldn't speak. He was not in a talkative mood. And again, I think all of us have been there.

And sometimes we've had a friend say to us, what's wrong? You're not talking like you normally do. And that's because something is weighing on us. Something is pressing us, robbing us from speech.

And naturally what happens to us when we are in that state of being pressed down by trouble, unable to sleep, not wanting to engage with others, one of the natural things we do is we reflect. We do a lot of thinking. We think deep and wide. About so many things. And that's what we see Asaph doing in verses 5 and 6.

Notice again what he says. He said, I consider the days of old, the years long ago. I said, let me remember my song of the night.

[14:08] Let me meditate in my heart. Then my spirit made a diligent search. Asaph begins to reflect on the past, on the old days.

and I would dare say the good old days. Probably reflecting on times when he didn't have troubles like he was facing at the time.

And he tries to encourage himself by remembering and singing a song in the night. And when Asaph refers to a song in the night, it's a...

He's actually referencing more the state of his soul than the time of the day. When he talks about a song in the night, he's talking about a song that he's able to sing that will carry him through what we often talk about the dark night of the soul.

When our soul is dark and heavy, when our soul is pressed down and downcast, we want to sing. We want to sing something that meets us in the difficulty.

[15:19] And Asaph is saying, I'm trying to remember one of those songs that might lift my spirit. And perhaps many of you can identify this morning where you are in difficulty, in trial, and you try to remember a song that just meets you.

As I thought about this, one of the songs that I would often go to when I experience dark nights in my soul is the hymn, Whatever My God Ordains Is Right.

And this is what the first verse says, Whatever My God Ordains Is Right, His holy will abideth. I will be still whatever He does and follow where He guided.

He is my God, though dark my road. He holds me that I shall not fall. And so to Him I leave it all and so to Him I leave it all. But you know the truth is that there have been times when I have faced the dark night of my soul and this song or any other song escaped me.

and sometimes finding that song in the night can be like trying to find an item in a dark room. Power's been lost and you're trying to find your phone and you're trying to find your keys and the room is dark.

[16:49] You aren't able to find it. Sometimes that's the way trouble meets us in this life. We aren't able to find that song in the night.

But Asaph doesn't just want to sing. His aim is not just to sing. He wants to meditate. He wants to reflect. Look at what he says in verse 6.

Let me meditate in my heart. He wants to think. He wants to turn his heart and mind to God and to His Word. and as he meditates his heart begins to both wander and wonder.

His heart begins to wander about many things and wonder about God. And what we see in verses 7 through 9 is he asks five questions.

Will the Lord spurn forever and never again be favorable? Has His steadfast love forever ceased? As promises at an end for all time.

[18 : 04] Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His compassion? And again we don't know Asaph's circumstances.

We don't know for sure the problems that he faced. But they seem to be related to his sin and God's judgment.

And we get this hint from verses 7 and 9 where Asaph questions whether the Lord will spurn forever, whether he'll reject forever, and whether he has shut up his compassion in anger. Or doesn't get angry because he woke up on the wrong side of the bed, so to speak. sin stirs up his anger. Injustice stirs up his anger. And so it appears that Asaph is mindful of sin and he's wondering, he's questioning, will God spurn forever?

Will he shut up compassion in his anger? And again, I'm sure all of us have served the Lord long enough, those of us who do serve the Lord, where we can identify with Asaph.

[19 : 24] We sin and God disciplines us and it seems like his discipline is so long that it will never end. Or maybe we're not even aware or conscious in the moment of sin, at least not current sin, but we still kind of wonder, is God punishing me?

Is God rejecting me, not hearing me because of some sin I committed some time ago? And the reality is that when we live in a fallen and broken world as we do, many times we're just facing the brokenness of this world.

But we tend to wonder, we tend to be suspicious, could God be punishing me for something that I did some time ago?

Even something I prayed and confessed and asked forgiveness concerning. one of the things I want us to see about these questions that Asaph asks is each one of them really, directly or indirectly, is a question about God's goodness.

He's wondering if God will reject his people forever and never again be favorable. He's wondering if God's steadfast love has possibly ceased forever.

[21 : 13] He's wondering if God's promises have finally and permanently come to an end. Whether God has somehow forgotten to be gracious.

Wondering whether God in this anger has shut up his compassion. God has been and we can only imagine the weight of what was resting on Asaph. Asaph would have been like one of the pastors of the community.

He would have been one of the leaders of the community. If there was one who would know about God and his attributes and his character, it would be Asaph. Asaph. And I think all of us have faced situations where perhaps someone questioned some aspect of our character.

I'm like, how could you even think that? Why would your mind go there? And it just seems like it's just so inappropriate, but Asaph was there. And Asaph is raising all these questions that directly or indirectly question the goodness of God.

When you think about it, how can any of these things be possibly true? How could God who was long suffering, who was steadfast love, will never come to an end?

[22 : 39] Forget how to be steadfast in his love. A God who tells us that his anger will never last for a lifetime and who gives grace to the undeserving and who has compassion upon us in our sin, how can that God possibly do otherwise?

But oftentimes this is our experience. In the midst of our troubles, we question God's goodness. We question whether the unchanging God has changed.

And perhaps this morning that's where you are, facing troubles and having many questions. Maybe your questions aren't Asaph's questions.

Maybe you have your own questions. Maybe you ask him, God, where are you? God, do you care? Maybe it goes even deeper.

Maybe you're wondering, God, did you really save me? Am I deceived? Am I deceived? But whatever your questions may be this morning, I want to say to you, don't stay there.

[24 : 13] Don't remain there with your questions. because your questions, they question the only certainty in life.

They question what we need and if that is removed from us, we absolutely have no hope in life because they question the very goodness of God. And so I say to you this morning, don't dwell there, don't stay there, but instead do what Asaph goes on to do.

And that brings you to my second and final point, remembering God's faithfulness. And this is what we see Asaph doing in verses 10 through 20. Look at what he says in verses 10 to 12.

Then I said, immediately after all the questions, then I said, I will appeal to this. Asaph, in a sense, catches himself.

He says, I can't continue to question the character and the goodness of God. Instead, this is what I'm going to do. Instead, I'm going to appeal to this.

[25 : 45] In the midst of my troubles, I will appeal to this. He says, he'll appeal to God's right hand. And that's shorthand for God's mighty acts of deliverance on behalf of his people.

Those times when God fought for his people, expressing his covenant love for them. Those were acts of God's covenant goodness towards his people.

So Asaph is saying, rather than wonder about your goodness, I'll instead focus on the times when you have acted in the past on behalf of your people, on the times when you showed your goodness to your people.

And so rather than look around in his life and question God's goodness, what Asaph decided to do was to look back on God's track record.

He didn't want to speculate anymore about God's goodness in his present circumstances. He wanted to look back to what God had already done in showing his faithfulness in the past.

[27 : 00] And notice where he begins in verse 13. Notice where he starts as he reflects back. He starts with the holiness of God.

God's holy. He says, your way, O God, is holy. It's almost as if Asaph, when he catches himself, he's saying, God, forgive me.

Forgive me for wondering about and questioning your goodness. Your way is holy. Asaph is saying, God, you're perfect.

You're without fault or sin or accusation. That's his admission in the midst of his troubles. He's saying, no fault can ever be found with you and your ways.

And the reason that no fault can be found with God and his ways is because he is perfect. He's without fault. He's without sin.

[28 : 06] He's altogether just. And so are his ways. And brothers and sisters, this must be our confession in the midst of our troubles.

This must be our conviction. It really needs to be our conviction in good times and in bad times, but especially in bad times. God's way is holy. His dealings with us are holy and just.

We must say like Pontius Pilate, when Jesus appeared before him, I find no fault in him. I find no fault in his dealings. All of his ways, brothers and sisters, are good and right.

For those of us who are walking through trouble this morning, that must be the confession of our hearts, that God's ways are holy and just, and we find no fault in him. How he deals with us are right.

His ways are right. But that's what all that Asaph says. In verse 13, he asks the question, what God is like our God?

[29 : 18] Asaph reminds himself that God has no equals. He has no rival who gives him competition. He is not like some great athlete or some good team that wins a lot, but loses every now and then.

Because God has no rivals, you can always be sure that his sovereign purposes and his sovereign purposes alone are always being worked out in our lives and it matters not what it looks like.

It matters not what it feels like. The sovereign purposes of God are unaffected, unchallenged, are being worked out in our lives at all times.

And that includes our troubles. In verse 14, Asaph reminds himself that God works wonders, he works miracles. He's shown his power among the people.

And here Asaph has in view the hostile nations that Israel would have faced throughout their turbulent history up to that point in time. And the point seems to be that when God doesn't act, it is not because he lacks the power to act, or there's some power that's greater than him.

[30 : 54] Asaph seems to be making the point that God is all powerful. God defeats the enemies of his people. There is no God like the Lord.

And so the last thing that should enter into our minds is whether God is able, whether he's able to do whatever we want him to do, we desire him to do.

No, God does as he pleases, when he pleases, and how he pleases, and he has no rivals. And Asaph is reminding himself of this.

And then in verses 15 to 20, Asaph uses poetic language to recount God's greatest act on behalf of his covenant people, their deliverance from Egyptian slavery.

And these six verses, Asaph poetically describes the parting of the Red Sea, giving the Red Sea life, says, when the Red Sea saw you, it was afraid.

[31 : 59] And he describes in poetic language the destruction of Pharaoh and his armies. The time of Israel's slavery in Egypt was one of great oppression and great trouble, but God was with them, and he brought them out of it.

Notice what Asaph says in verse 19. He says, your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters, yet your footprints were unseen.

Asaph seems to be saying that God's way was a way that seems less than ideal. Through the sea and through the great waters. And brothers and sisters, that's the way it is for us sometimes.

Sometimes God's way is a way that we would rather not choose. I'm sure when Israel was standing at the Red Sea, they were not thinking about crossing, they were thinking about drowning. They were thinking that their end had come.

And maybe as God is taking you His way, you're wondering if you're going to make it through. You're wondering if this is for life or for death.

[33 : 25] Sometimes God's way is through the sea. God's way is through the flood. Sometimes God's way is through that which doesn't seem ideal or preferable for us. But brothers and sisters, if God is making the way, if that's God's way, He will bring His people through.

He will bring you through. God was with them. But it wasn't visible that He was with them.

He was leading them by the hand of Moses and Aaron. And notice what Asaph says in verse 19. He says, but your footprints were unseen. In other words, God was with them. God was leading them. But it wasn't obvious to the eyes.

And the truth is that Asaph and the rest of Israel were only able to say these words that God was with them after they came through. Because they couldn't see Him when He was with them.

[34 : 35] They couldn't see Him when they were crossing through. They could not see His footprints in the wet mud of the Red Sea going before them. All that was in their mind was whether they were going to make it through, whether Pharaoh was going to overtake them.

But when they got to the other side, when they were able to reflect back, Asaph is able to say, God, You were with us. You led us through the sea, even though we couldn't see Your footprints.

You led us. He said, though we saw Moses and Aaron, You were leading us by their hands. You were leading us as a shepherd leads his flock.

God led them out of Egyptian bondage through the Red Sea into the promised land. Brothers and sisters, let Asaph's example be instructive for us.

When we look at this psalm, we see that Asaph remembered, when he reflected back, he remembered the mighty and the wondrous deeds of the Lord, all the things that God had done. He thought about them.

[35 : 49] But there was one that stood out above all the others. He recounts only one. He tells us that he remembered the wonders of God and the miracles that he performed among the nations.

But he recounts one wonder of God. The wonder of God that he recounts is his deliverance of his people out of Egyptian bondage.

And brothers and sisters, we must do the same. When we reflect back on the goodness of God, when we reflect back on how God has been kind to us in the past, yeah, it's wonderful to think about the door that he opened when you were unemployed for a long period of time.

It's wonderful to think about how he healed your body and how he restored a relationship that seemed hopelessly lost. But, brothers and sisters, above all else, our minds must reflect back to that one act and that one place where God demonstrated his goodness towards us.

that one act and that one place that one act is his redemption, that one place is on Calvary's cross where Jesus Christ hung on the cross as a substitute for sinners like you and me.

[37 : 14] That is the place where when we were without strength, Christ died for us. God demonstrated his love towards us when we were without strength, without merit, and he showed his goodness to us.

He was good towards us by sending Christ to die. And so when we want evidence of God's goodness, we don't look around in our lives.

We don't think about how we feel and what our circumstances look like. No, we do what Asaph did. Asaph looked back to the greatest act of redemption of God in his time.

And we must do that in our time. We must think back. You want to question God's goodness? Let's look at the cross. And brothers and sisters, when we look at the cross aright, when we reflect on the cross aright, we cannot walk away wondering about God's goodness towards us.

Paul says it this way. He says, if he, God, did not spare his only son, but gave him up for you, how much more will he not with him freely give you all things?

[38 : 36] It says that in Romans 8. I think you would agree with me that perhaps it is understandable that Asaph could have questioned the goodness of God based on the revelation, the experience that he had had.

The greatest act was their deliverance out of Egypt. God's love for you to be But brothers and sisters, we have a new and a better covenant. We have an everlasting covenant, a perfect covenant.

And we have no reason to doubt and question the goodness of God because he's been good to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so this morning, if you're walking through trouble, may I invite you to do what we did this morning as we partake of the Lord's Supper?

We look back. Look back and think and reflect and even ask, why would God sent his son to bear your sins, to take your place on the cross?

[39 : 55] Why would he do that? But he did that. And he did it to demonstrate his goodness and his mercy and his grace to undeserving sinners like us.

And so if we want to remedy any present doubt about God's goodness, let's look back, let's reflect, and let's think.

And if we do that right, we would walk away amazed. And we would see our troubles in the proper light.

Paul tells us the way we are to see them as light and momentary afflictions. and I don't want to make light of any trouble that anyone faces this morning or whenever you face them, but in the grand scheme of things, especially knowing that your sins have been forgiven, in the grand scheme of things, they are light and they are momentary.

And the reason they're momentary is because one day the Lord is going to return. the Lord is going to receive us who belong to him to himself. And trouble will be no more.

[41 : 18] And sickness and death and sin and all the brokenness that we know in this life will be no more. God demonstrates his goodness.

He has demonstrated his goodness to us on Calvary's cross. If you're here as an unbeliever this morning, and maybe you're facing trouble in your life or you're watching my live stream, I want to say to you that although your trouble, your difficulty may preoccupy your mind and long lodge in front of you, I want to say to you that that is not your greatest need.

That is not your greatest problem. The Bible tells us that all those who are away from God, all those who don't belong to God, that they're the objects of the wrath of God.

And such for all of us. All of us had our way and our pattern of walking rebellion against God, living under the power of Satan.

All of us live that way. And our greatest need, our greatest need is to be spared from the wrath to come. And the only way that we address that need is by finding ourselves in the Lord Jesus Christ, finding ourselves in his mercy and in his forgiveness.

[42 : 53] And so I say to you this morning, do not allow any present trouble in this life to obscure your need for the Lord Jesus Christ and to be spared from the wrath to come.

And I urge you this morning to turn from your sin. I urge you this morning to trust in Jesus Christ and what you will find is mercy and pardon and grace for all of your sins.

The Bible says that all those who come to Jesus, he will not turn any of them away. And so I say to you this morning, come to Jesus. Don't allow your troubles to obscure your greatest need, which is your need for Christ.

Let's pray together. Oh, Father, thank you that we who belong to Christ do not have to look back and look around in our lives and wonder about your goodness.

We can simply look back and think about the time and place that you demonstrated your goodness to us.

[44 : 15] Forgive us, Lord, when we have questioned your goodness. Forgive us when we have looked everywhere except back on Calvary's cross to remind ourselves that you are indeed good. And I pray this morning that you would help all of us, especially those of us who are facing troubles this morning. that you good to us. That you have been good to us and because you have been good to us in Christ, you will withhold no good thing for many of us. Lord, work in our hearts this morning, but Father, especially we pray for those who do not know Jesus. God, have mercy on them. Open their eyes. break their hearts in contrition and repentance? And would you bring them to yourself? We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. It's time for a closing song.