

Remember and Meditate on God's Mercies

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Date: 17 May 2020

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[0 : 00] Psalm 77. We're going to read the whole psalm. This is a psalm that was written by a man called Asaph.

So this is Asaph's psalm. I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me. 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.

Selah or pause for reflection. You hold my eyelids open. I'm so troubled that I cannot speak. I consider the days of old, the years long ago.

I say, let me remember my song in the night. Let me meditate in my heart. Then my spirit made a diligent search.

[1 : 07] 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? Has he in anger shut up his compassion? Selah. 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. Selah. The water saw you, O God.

[2 : 11] When the water saw you, they were afraid. Indeed, the deep trembled. 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. Your lightnings lighted up the world. The earth trembled and shook. Your way was through the sea.

Your path through the great waters. Yet your footprints were unseen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Psalm 77. Psalm 77. As this course of lockdown extends, there are many responses that we can make to this new normal that we've been given to live through, particularly to questions about how we are to relate to what's happening and how we exercise our faith and continue to exercise our faith and communion with God through these times.

Because this is a testing time. This is a time when the faith of each one of the Lord's people has been tested. We're being tried, even tried as to our patience with the Lord, waiting upon the Lord in these times.

[3 : 41] We're being examined as to our continued dependence upon God, depending upon Him for all our needs.

We're being called to maintain that trust in Him, to know that He is our very present help in time of trouble. Especially there will be times when we will ask, and I'm sure many of you have already asked in these times and through these times, where are you, Lord?

What are you saying to us, Lord? What are you saying to us through these times? What are you saying to us as individuals? In what way are we being tested and tried through these difficult times? In what way is the church being tested and tried through these particularly difficult times that God has given us to live through? Indeed, how do we approach God in asking Him, Lord, what are you doing?

What are you giving to us? How are you testing us? What are you testing us in in these difficult times? Well, when we need to find out as it were the Lord's will, if we seek to find out God's purposes for us, of course, we turn to His Word.

[4 : 59] It's the Lord's Word that we might say comes to our rescue, and particularly, of course, the whole of God's Word. But so often it's the book of Psalms that help us, the book that helps us to know God and to see Him and to see the various experiences that we are given to live through in life, to see what God is teaching us through these times.

And for our purposes and our evening service at this moment, pray that we will all find help in this particular psalm that we read, Psalm 77, that we'll find particular help for our troubled souls and in the experience that we're facing.

And indeed, as we see the experience of one man, this psalm writer, this man, Asa, what he experienced under the Lord's hand. How for Asa, he asked God particular questions.

For Asa, there was much that was troubling him, much that was troubling him in relation to his own life and indeed in relation to God's people.

And as we're going to look through this psalm, as we see what Asa is calling upon God in relation to his questions about God's dealing with him and the Lord's people, we'll see how Asa begins from a position of, we might say a position of doubt even, even a position of skepticism.

[6 : 28] And he moves in progression from that position to the point when he truly can confess that God is Lord, that God's purposes are true and right, and that God's ways with his people are sure and true and for God's glory.

And as we look through this psalm, we're going to see two particular disciplines that Asa brings forward, obviously through the Lord's inspiration, but two particular disciplines that Asa points to, that helped him and indeed have to be really essential to any believer's discipline, if you like, discipline in coming before God.

Two things that we see repeated in this psalm, the two disciplines of remembering and meditating. The two go together, remembering God's mercies, what God has done for you and for his people in the past, to remember them.

Then as a result of that remembering, meditating upon what God has done in the past, calling to mind what God has done for you and for his people.

And in response to that, remembering and meditating to act upon what you've remembered of God's mercies, what you've meditated upon, what you've contemplated on in relation to God's blessing upon you and upon his church, upon his people.

[8 : 02] And with that action, that response, to come before God, to follow him, to wait upon him, to live for him, for your good and for his glory.

So we're going to focus on these particular practices, remembering and meditating as the Lord's people are to engage in, not just in the present circumstances, of course, but at all times as we seek to draw near to God, as we seek to be his witnesses, to be his disciples, to be his followers, to be his children, who honor him and who glorify him.

Many fears at this time, many distresses, but if we're to live that life that's victorious in the Lord, to live that life to the glory of God, then there'll be times when we do call upon God with our fears, with our doubts, to call upon him.

And when we do, when we find in his word the direction that he gives us, then we truly will know that victorious living that is only done in his strength and for his glory.

So three things to look at then in the psalm. We're going to look at the earlier part of the psalm that tells of the real distress of Asa. And then, as we said, we're going to look at the remembrance of God's mercies, those mercies in the past, and then the required meditation on God and his greatness.

[9 : 37] So the real distress that we see in the earlier part of the psalm, in the remembering of God's mercies, and then the required meditation upon what God has done for us, for his people.

So what about the distress, the real distress that Asa tells of in the opening part of the psalm? We're not told specifically what caused his deep anguish, but there's no doubt that Asa was truly troubled by something so real and so appalling that he must call upon God in the urgency of his prayers.

In fact, if you have your Bibles open, you'll see in the first part of the psalm, twice he writes of having cried aloud to God, and then speaks of that loud cry, that loud pleading before God day and night.

It's not just a single prayer, there's a continuity in his prayer, coming before God, pleading before God day and night. But notice, he's in distress, he's in deep distress, but it's not the case that he's in

a hopeless position, a hopeless condition, because in his distress, and as we say, we don't know particularly what that distress was, but in his distress, he knows that he's not completely helpless. He knows because God is his help. And, you know, we can work out from the way that he's written the psalm, he's telling us that he cried to God, and we might say, wordless cries.

[11 : 20] And you see, he's directing these cries, these moans to God in prayer to the Lord. And it's to God whom he's making his appeal.

You see that again, verse one, because twice we see him crying to God. And then verse two, he speaks of seeking the Lord. So, yes, we can see he's in a dark place, he's in a dark place spiritually, but he's not lost communion with God.

He's not lost fellowship with the one true God. And in whatever circumstances God sends you in your life, and your response has been one of anguish, pain, grief, well, remember this, that the channel of prayer to the throne of grace is never blocked.

God hears the prayers of his people, even in the deepest and darkest of times. You, you have a true and real and eternal relationship with God.

You who know that through, through saving faith in the Lord Jesus, you still pray. You still wait on the Lord in prayer. Even in the current circumstances of the current pandemic at this, at this time, we see so much that truly does disturb us.

[12 : 50] many are really quite disturbed as to the present circumstances, the future beyond the lockdown, as it were. There are so many things that can be feared.

Personal health, physical health, mental health, spiritual health, employment, how our family members are coping and will cope at this time and beyond, how we're going to be provided for each day.

There may even be times in your own experience when the dark clouds of pain are so heavy, so overcast, and you can't but cry out to God repeatedly, Lord, have mercy upon me, because you know there's no other avenue of help.

So, be encouraged through the psalm and be encouraged as we see the bigger picture that this psalm directs us to because, as we said, the psalmist begins in deep distress but as we see the psalm progress, we'll see the psalmist emerge with renewed hope.

We're thinking of hope this morning, Jim was speaking about, of rejoicing and hope. Well, this psalm directs us to the Lord of hope and Asaph will himself be directed from a position of distress to a position of renewed hope in God and I pray that his experience will be your experience and you'll, with Asaph, rejoice in the Lord, rejoice in the God of hope.

[14 : 29] Remember that God longs for you to come to him that even in times of distress and difficulty, even God will be using these times to bring you to himself, to bring you to his throne of grace, to have that deeper fellowship with him, certainly that the psalm writer had.

And even think of the words of the Lord Jesus when he spoke to those who were in distress, come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Yeah, what do we see again in the first half of this psalm? You see, the psalm is searching his heart. The psalmist has got many questions to ask God because the psalmist wants to apply his heart to what's true of God.

In other words, even from the distress of the psalmist's heart, the distress of his heart, he's going to take a position of asking, searching questions, questions that demand a sincere answer of the heart, questions that, in fact, are going to be given in order to, as it were, wake him up to challenge his early doubts and fears and questions by their answers that will bring the psalmist to renewed confidence in God.

And so it's something we need to look at very closely, the process by which the psalmist comes from that position of doubt and fear to a position of confidence and true faith and hope in God.

[16 : 09] Let's look at the questions again. Let's read from verse 7 of Psalm 77. He writes this, 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? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?

Then you notice that little word, the little Hebrew word, which I think we can take to mean a time of reflection, a time of pause. So he's asked these questions and you can see that after asking these questions he's paused, he's reflected on what he's asked.

You see what's happening? I mean, Esther's concluded that there's only one way he's going to resolve his problem, only one way he's going to resolve that deep lament in his heart. He's actually going to assume the position of a sceptic, assume the position of someone who's in doubt and he's going to do that to realise how wrong his position has been in relation to doubt and to fear.

[17 : 24] You see the depths, these are the depths that he's in so that he really has to ask these questions of God. You see how deep his anguish is? I mean, he tells us he can't sleep, he can't even speak.

I mean, even as he's thinking within himself, he's thinking of times past when to relieve the stress he had before, he would sing songs to God in the night time.

But he's saying, this isn't helping me now. And so he asks these five questions, five questions about God that, well, have troubled him.

As we said, there's nothing to indicate what actually triggered his time of distress. He's got these deep questions. He's brought before God and brought within himself.

I say, not just apply to his own situation, but apply generally to God's people. Look at the five questions again. We can try and put them in our own words. I mean, he's asking, you know, if God, will God no longer show favour to his people?

[18 : 31] He's asking if God's steadfast love has run its course and no longer going to be shown to those who are his own. He's asking of the promises that God has made to his people, if these promises are now dried up and come to an end.

He's asking, has God forgotten to be gracious? He's asking if God's compassion towards his people, if that compassion has now come to an end.

So he's taken a position of somebody who doubts God's love in order to see how wrong that position is. Because when you look at these questions again, you'll see the answer.

The answer's implied within the question. The answer is no. Will the Lord spurn forever and never again be favourable? No. No again.

Has God's steadfast love forever ceased? No. Are his promises at an end for all time? No. Has God forgotten to be gracious?

[19 : 36] No, he hasn't. Has God in anger shut up his compassion? No, God hasn't. He hasn't shut up his compassion forever. Five times the questions are asked, five times the answer implied within the questions.

No. So here's Esau, the psalm writer. He's asked these questions, these questions that have come from his heart. He's asked them to arrive at an answer.

An answer that conforms to God's word, an answer that conforms to God's truth, that conforms to God's character, and conforms to God's actions in the past, God's actions towards his people in the past.

So the psalmist is going to explore these questions. God's actions. But let's just apply it to ourselves. Before we look at his answer, let's just apply that, this way of thinking to our own circumstances in particular times of need.

Which we'll find, you'll find in your life, you'll find there are circumstances in your life that are perplexing, puzzling even. You know, there are very many and varied circumstances which can, and maybe at times have, jolted your faith.

[20 : 55] Maybe have caused you even to stumble in following the Lord. There are many times when this happens. Bereavement, for example, a troubling bereavement can cause you even to question God's love, just as the psalmist expressed that in his fifth question, has he in anger shut up his compassion?

Or it may well be that even the volume of illness and death that we're seeing at this current time when we might even ask the same question. Or in particular circumstances where there just appears just one obstacle after another in your, what you perceive as your life's fulfillment.

And you might ask, will the Lord spurn forever and never again be favorable? Even when we look at the church and our own land and elsewhere and what do we see?

We see decline or we see compromise. We see that we're a tiny minority in relation to the size of the population. Or we see the impact of secular humanism in every part of our land, our islands, our highlands, our central belt, our lowlands.

And we might even be tempted to ask, has God forgotten to be gracious? And when we do pose these questions, we will, I pray as the psalmist did, we'll remember and we'll meditate.

[22 : 22] We'll remember God's mercies towards his people in the past and we'll meditate on what these mercies show us to increase your hope in God, to strengthen your faith in him, to strengthen your trust in him, and to realize that God does not abandon his people.

He hasn't abandoned his people in the past, doesn't abandon his people in the present and will not abandon his people in the future. So let's look at how Asaph here, how he remembers God's mercies.

He remembers the mercies of God towards his people that so encouraged him, encouraged him to continue to hope in God. So we're going to look at the remembrance of God's mercies in the past and combine that with the required meditation on God in his greatness.

So, questions that Asaph posed as we saw just a moment ago, he's going to answer them now and he's going to answer them as he says in verse 10, as he appeals to the years of the right hand of the Most High.

In other words, he's going to recount in his heart what God has done for his people as he says here, by his right hand of power, by God's power.

[23 : 48] The psalmist is going to take time to remember, to recall the history of God's people, the history of God's people under God's sovereign care.

Listen to how he's going to do this, verse 11 and 12. 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. This is where we see the two connected disciplines. The Lord's people we really must engage in remembering and meditating. Asaph is going to remember in order to meditate, to reflect, to ponder, to think deeply on God and his greatness as evidence and what God has showed of himself in the past.

He's going to remember, he's going to meditate with a view to action, with a view to having that renewed mind, to having that renewed heart, renewed will, a renewed resolve to take his eyes away from circumstances and to look to God whose faithfulness towards his people never fails.

So what will Asaph remember? He'll remember what God has done in the past, the past that revealed God's ways, God's works, his deeds, his mighty deeds, as Asaph says, his mighty deeds, his wonders in all that God has done already to his people.

[25 : 23] As we said, remembering, the act of remembering, it's not just thinking of what God has done and keep what God has done in the past. No, that act of remembering, really, well, Asaph is using that discipline, using that means to answer his questions about God.

The very remembering will prove that God is a God, the one true God who does show favour to his people, that God is a God whose steadfast love towards those who are his, the steadfast love is eternal, that God has already revealed what he's done for his people already, that God's promises never fail, they're never ending, God's not forgotten to be gracious, and that remembering of God's mighty deeds in the past actually point to the fact that God is utterly consistent, he's utterly consistent in his love towards his own.

The same God who acted with favour towards his people in the past is the same God who's going to continue to show that favour and steadfast love on all on whom his promises of faithfulness remain.

So, for the psalmist, the psalm writer, what he remembers of these acts of God, these works of God, these wonders of God, he's going to remember them and he's going to think deeply upon them because he's going to arrive at an answer to his question and to his questions that he's posed about God in relation to God in relation to his people.

So, that discipline or these disciplines of remembering and meditating, exercising them, use them. God's, what God has given to you to recall who he is in his great power, in his great wisdom.

[27 : 31] And, it's something, these are disciplines that I wonder if we've almost neglected in our Christian life. We tend to exercise these disciplines so infrequently that remembering of what God has done in the past that has an impact on the present and indeed on the future.

That's why, for example, you know, when we do, when we're in a physical building, when we, together, when we remember the Lord's death till he comes, when we partake of the Lord's supper, we remember Christ's death till he comes.

It's an act of remembering, remembering that work of salvation that was wrought by the Father in sending his Son, the Son in dying on the cross. We remember what God has done for us in Christ so that we might have that great salvation.

You remember, you remember in order to meditate upon, to think upon what's been done for you in saving you and in that act, these acts of remembering and meditating to act, to act upon what God has done for you through the death of the Lord Jesus.

us. And you know, you're not easily going to move from remembering to action without thinking, thinking deeply on what Christ paid for your salvation.

[29 : 05] So the mighty works, we can apply what the psalmist says of the mighty works of God, we can apply that even to the great work of salvation, the mighty works of the past under God's act of redemption for his own.

Remember them, meditate upon them, act upon them. As Asaph did in his seeking to grow in faith and in hope in God.

Well, what did he particularly remember? What did he particularly meditate on to, to come to that position, to come to that point where his soul was calm and his hope revived in the Lord?

He remembered the great work of God in freeing God's people from the oppression in Egypt. He remembered the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea. He remembered what he learned in God's Word.

He remembered that parting of the Red Sea in order that the Lord's people would escape from the pursuing Egyptians. As he remembered that great miracle of deliverance.

[30 : 16] He meditated on these acts that told him of God. As we see in verse 13, told him that God is holy, that God is separate from all others.

These actions of God in the past towards his people that spoke of God's holiness, these actions that, yes, happened many years before Asaph was remembering them, but still spoke to Asaph of God and his greatness, that God truly is the one true God.

God truly is the one who's mighty in power and God who made known his power to his people, that God saved his people by his great power.

And as he's meditated upon the character of God and the implications of God's actions in the past, he realizes this is the same God whom he's praying to, the same God of holiness, the same God of steadfast love towards his people, he's the same God who delivered his people from oppression, who delivers Asaph from his oppression, this is the same God who redeemed his people, who's the same God who can and will continue to bless those who are his own and does it in his time and for his glory and for the good of all who are his.

And that is an eternal truth. That's an abiding truth. The same God who rescued the children of Israel is the same God who's rescued you from the oppression of sin and Satan.

[31 : 53] He's the same God who showed his steadfast love towards the children of Israel. He's the same God who showed his steadfast love to you in sending his one and only son, the Lord Jesus.

the same God won't withhold his blessing upon you as he's not withheld his blessing upon all who are his times past, times present.

This is the same Lord who's promised never to leave you nor forsake you. It's the same Lord who promises and has promised and that promise is fulfilled in the indwelling of God by his Holy Spirit. He indwells you by his Spirit. He's ever interceding for you at his throne of grace. So in these trying and testing times that we're all going through, I pray that you'll know, that you'll know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, as Lord, and that you'll put your trust in him and as you do so, that you'll remember and that you'll meditate, that you'll remember the mercy of God towards you in your salvation, that you'll meditate upon that.

Take time away from all the circumstances and all the distractions of the world around us and bring to mind what God has done for you. you who know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, think back to the time when God entered your life in salvation.

[33 : 35] You think back to that time when you gave your life to the Lord Jesus. You think back to that time when you went down on your knees and asked the Lord to be your Saviour.

Remember that time. Some of you may have been fairly recent, but others some time ago. But remember and meditate upon that. Think deeply on that change, that transformation in your life. Think deeply on what God has done for you and continues to do for you. And in that remembering and meditating, act upon it. Act upon it in renewed love, in renewed faith, in renewed hope, in the

one true God.

Meditate upon all the implications that what God has done for you in changing your life. Meditate upon that truth how God truly is holding you in the palm of his hand.

Meditate upon the fact that you're safe in his steadfast love forever. Yes, practice the presence of God as you engage in that so often forgotten discipline that God gives to you to remember and meditate and act upon what you're pondering and contemplating in his great love and his great grace towards you.

[35 : 03] We've been given this time for many reasons for this time of lockdown. Surely one of the reasons is that the Lord's people are given this space, given this time even to exercise these disciplines remembering and meditating and acting upon the truth of God's mercies towards his people in the past that are his mercies towards his people in the present.

We have much to give thanks to God for. We have much to give him the glory for. And so with Asa may it be that we truly come to that position of confidence in God and to call upon his name and to rejoice that he is Lord, that he is God, that he is Saviour.

Amen. Let us pray. O Lord, our God, our loving Heavenly Father in whose presence we have come and in whose presence we worship.

We pray, Lord, that as you teach us by your word we will grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ that we will grow in knowledge of him who saved us, who came for us so that we might have life eternal.

And so, Lord, we pray your blessing upon all that has been already done this day. Forgive us, Lord, for our sins. Cleanse us, wash us, renew us, strengthen us, we pray, and we ask, Lord, all these things in Jesus' name.

[36 : 40] Amen. Let's close with the benediction now. And now may grace, mercy, and peace from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rest upon and remain with you, both now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.