

A Cry for Help from the Heart

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: 22 March 2020

Preacher: Nigel Anderson

[0 : 0 0] a sort of a device, a liturgical term, a mascal of David when he was in the cave, a prayer. With my voice, I cry out to the Lord. With my voice, I plead for mercy to the Lord.

I pour out my complaint before him. I tell of my trouble before him. When my spirit faints within me, you know my way, in the path where I walk. They've hidden a trap for me. Look to the right and see there is none who takes notice of me. No refuge remains to me. No one cares for my soul.

I cry to you, O Lord. I say you are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living. Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low. Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me. Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name. The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me. Amen.

You know, in our own sort of small world of expectations, you know, we wouldn't choose to be in a place of isolation. We wouldn't choose to be in a crisis of suffering as we're enduring now, as the world's enduring at this present time. You know, we long for self-satisfaction. We long for ease.

We long for the enjoyment of life. And we wouldn't, by our own choosing, be enduring this very real threat to life and liberty of movement. But God knows all things well. God does all things well.

[1 : 4 5] God orders the universe. He orders your life. He orders my life. And he orders the life of the nations. God permits times of war. He permits famines and earthquakes and pestilence. And he does it for his glory and for his greater purposes. And he will permit his children to endure these times of privation and illness and deprivation. And he will visit us in judgment. And it's a judgment that mercy is contained within to lead you to that closer walk with him. So that your faith is deepened and your trust in Almighty God is strengthened as you wait upon the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

And in these days that we find ourselves in, we are within the sovereign will of God. And we turn, where else can we turn? We turn to God's word. We turn to that word for comfort and security.

And it's in that comfort and security to know that God hasn't left us to somehow fumble in the darkness. He's given us the light of his word to direct us and to lead you to know that he hasn't forgotten us. He hasn't forgotten his people, that even through the darkness, his light shines.

And so we turn again and again to God's word for that light. And particularly as we're seeing a moment ago, we turn to the book of Psalms for particular comfort. And whether it's in time of war or peace, or whether it's in times of joy or distress, whether it's times when we confess our sin or praise God, then we firmly believe that the Psalms are God's gift to the church to use, to come before him with faith, with trust and with hope and with love. And really to allow God's precious word to enter our hearts, to know that this is God's inspired word. As someone once said of the Psalms, they're the prayer book of the Lord Jesus. And the Father through the Holy Spirit gives us that prayer book. So we're going to spend a little time looking at Psalm 142. You'll see from the introduction, that's a time when David himself was in isolation. He was enduring a time of great distress. It was distress for himself. It was distress in the life of the nation. And David wrote the Psalm in the midst of his troubles. But it's a

Psalm that, as we'll see, it's not a Psalm sort of filled with despair, but it's a Psalm that's filled with faith and hope and love. And faith, hope and love for the Lord. And I pray that as we, you know, consider the times that we're in, that your faith, your hope, your love for the Lord will be strengthened.

[4 : 56] We live in days that certainly from a human perspective are uncertain, but there's no uncertainty that when we have a Lord and Savior who promises to be with us always, even to the very end of the age.

So a few thoughts on the Psalm. We're not exactly told when the Psalm was written, but as we're told, it's certainly David was in this cave. And in all likelihood, it's the cave of Adullam when Saul was pursuing David. It's King Saul seeking to kill David. David, of his own choosing, of course, wouldn't have been in that isolated cave, hiding from a real danger to his life. Of his own choosing, David wouldn't have been there. He would have preferred to have had that life of liberty to serve God. But God's ways aren't our ways. David was in that cave for a purpose. In fact, he was there for many purposes, and one of which was to write this Psalm. It's a Psalm that has been a blessing, is a blessing, is an encouragement to the Lord's people through generations. And I pray that it's an encouragement to ourselves this afternoon. And that's why, you know, we're told that it's simply

David writing this in the cave. You know, there's nothing specific to direct us to the particular circumstances we can have. You know, we can compare scripture with scripture. But, you know, we're seeing an experience that David endured so that we can learn lessons for ourselves in how we are to be before God during a particular time of trouble and affliction and loneliness.

And anguish. And that we're reminded to call on God to meet us and to help us. And to remind us that God is sovereign, that he is on the throne. He's Lord. And he's allowing such a time as this to bring his people back to himself. You know, that we call upon him for mercy. And that we seek to follow him in full faith. And yes, know that we are weak. But that we know his strength through these times. Some of you have known personal grief even the last few months. Some of you, like myself, have lost a loved one. We've known particular disappointment in our lives even in recent months. Maybe some unexpected change has happened in your life that perhaps even has perplexed you.

You've known particular times of difficulty. And it was during these times that you were drawn the more to call on God for his help. And you've cried out, I believe, help my unbelief. And, you know, in the current world crisis that God has permitted to happen, this is such a time when we are in these times of trouble and difficulty. There are dangers. Of course there are. There are circumstances that we never could foresee, even a few days ago, times, events that we wouldn't have chosen.

[8 : 13] But God, in his perfect wisdom, has chosen. And he's chosen surely to bring us, and indeed to bring his people and bring those outside of even our own immediate circle to come back and to serve our Lord and Savior. And so we're going to, as I say, focus on the psalm for our help. But the psalm's in two parts, verses one to four, where we see the cry for help. And then verses five to seven, the cry from the heart.

And let's look at part one first of all. Look at the first two verses. With my voice, I cry out to the Lord. With my voice, I plead for mercy to the Lord. I pour out my complaint before him. I tell my trouble before him. David's prayer is a cry for help. I mean, he's in that cave because there's a particular crisis in his life. And yet, during that crisis, he's not going to remain silent. He's going to call upon God. And you'll see there are four expressions, even in the first two verses, that show David's earnestness in his cry. And the fact that he can't remain silent, even when there are those who are pursuing him for his life. Look at the four expressions he uses. He speaks of his crying out and pleading for mercy and pouring out my complaint and telling my trouble before him.

And notice that these expressions are all directed to God. The first two are directed to the Lord. The third and the fourth are directed before him, but all before God. So David's not going to be silent before God. And the very fact, you know, in the very first line of his prayer, he speaks about his voice.

That tells us, you know, he's going to be vocal in prayer. He's not going to remain silent. He's not somehow going to self-isolate in his thoughts. He's going to express his concerns before God. And he's going to do it in earnest. Because the very situation that he finds himself in, he knows that only God can deliver him. And these are strong words. These are words of action. These are, we might say, words of energy and prayer. This is a crying out, a pleading before God. And David knows that God's going to hear him. And God's going to answer him. And at such a time as this, when, you know, you're crying out to God. Well, are you? Am I? Are we pleading for God's mercy? You know, even this very epidemic that's happening throughout the world, isn't it not bringing you to your knees as you're crying out to the Lord that God be merciful to us? God be merciful, you can say to me as an individual, and to us as a church. God be merciful to us as a nation, and indeed to a world that's largely turned its back in God. And so we continue and keep on crying out and pleading before God.

You know, Jesus taught that the efficacy of that approach in prayer. Remember in the parable of the widow, the widow who persisted in pleading for justice before the unjust judge. And we read in Luke 18, verse 7, will not God give justice to his elect to cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? A call to plead continually before God for his mercy? Or think of Bartimaeus, blind Bartimaeus, when he was calling out to Jesus. He didn't just call out once. He persistently called out to the Savior, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. And we're told that Jesus heard his cry. He heard his plea for mercy. And surely we're to do the same. Bartimaeus cried out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.

[12:16] Well, surely we can cry out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us. Have mercy on us as a nation that's turned its back on God. Have mercy on us as a church that's wandered so far down a path of, well, we could say a lack of real true zeal for the gospel. Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us that the terrible afflictions that we're seeing around the world, that they will cease and that men and women will wake up and turn to the Lord. You know, one of the most, we may say, lacking practices in the church, certainly in recent years, we have to say is almost a total or a complete universal failure in coming before God in prayer. We can speak of that individually or indeed corporately. But surely God's using this time of crisis to draw us back to himself. Later this evening, there's a national day of prayer. This is not, of course, the first time that our nation's been involved in such a day of prayer. And this is, again, an opportunity that God has given us to join our hearts, to unite our hearts, one with another, and with Christians throughout the land, to engage with all our heart, to cry before the Lord, to plead before him, and to continue to do so, to have mercy upon us. And you see David doing that. He's pouring out his heart. He's pouring out, we're told, his complaints before God. Complaints that speak of his troubled thoughts. I mean, his mind's troubled. I mean, his mind is actually in pain.

I mean, he sees the confinement that he's in. He sees the danger to his life. But David's going to pour out, he's going to gush forth his cry to God from a troubled heart, because he knows that God will hear him and answer him. And God will answer him according to God's perfect timing. And we have many troubles that afflict us, certainly at this present time. But we know that we have a God to whom we can pour our hearts out to. And that pouring out means that we leave nothing within our hearts, as it were, that we give God all our burdens. And this psalm, in fact, the psalms themselves remind us of the reality of the God who hears our prayer, who calls us to cast our cares upon him.

Peter, for example, in his first letter, he echoed Psalm 118. He called on the church to humble itself before God, as we're told, so that at the right time, God would exalt his people, and that God would humble themselves. And we're told these words, casting all your anxieties on God, because God cares for you. And he does. God does care for you. So we're reminded to cast all our troubles on God.

Acknowledge what these troubles are. Admit them before God, and pour out all your concerns. In the First World War, there was a famous marching song, pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile, smile, smile. It was a very popular song. It was a song that certainly gave the troops and civilians back at home, a sort of morale booster during the horrors of that war. But we don't need to pack up our troubles and hide them away. No.

We have a greater call, not to pack them away, but to pour them out of the old kit bag of our hearts and know that comfort and knowing that God hears our anxious words, our anxious thoughts.

[16:08] That every time we utter or come before him with our troubles, that he knows them. We're told, cast, cast every care and burden upon him. And don't just agree with your mind. Do it. Practice that casting upon God. All our troubles. And make that cry for help. As David carries on in verse 3, when my spirit faints within me, you know my way. In the path where I walk, they've hidden a trap for me.

Look to the right and see there's none who takes notice of me. No refuge remains to me. No one cares for my soul. And David's really calling from the depths here. He certainly knows that he's got real enemies before him and against him. And when he cries out, you know, he says, my spirit faints within me.

In other words, he's saying that there are outward circumstances in my life that really are almost overwhelming me. And, you know, some 130, Lord, from the depths to you, I cry. And here, this is exactly what he's doing. The outward circumstances of his life, from a human perspective, they seem utterly overwhelming. And so he's calling on God from the depths of his heart. But he's not in utter despair. His situation isn't hopeless, because he knows that God knows. David knows that God knows every aspect of his life. God knows his ways. And that keeps him from total dejection.

And it's from the depth of our experience, certainly at this present time. You know, when outward circumstances appear to be almost overwhelming, then we know that God knows.

It was Job who said, he knows the way that I take. Job, saying these words, when Job was in the depth of his sorrows. And God knows the way that you're taking in these days of crisis. We know that God knows God as the all-knowing God seeing God. And we know that, as David knows, that these aren't days of utter despair for the Lord's people. And so we're not to sink in some sort of gloom in the midst of these circumstances. We have a knowledge of the holy, the knowledge of God, the God whose power is real and unsure. And he gives you that assurance that, yes, during these times, you are being tested. You are being tried by God, but for a great purpose, just as David was being tested and tried to strengthen his faith in Almighty God there in his isolation. And when he was in that isolation, as certainly verse four indicates, his enemies are surrounding him. They're ready to trap him. He's lonely. He feels that no one cares for him, but God cares as God cares for you. And, you know, that isolation that David experienced, certainly that isolation from human sympathy and encouragement, well, surely there's a lesson here for ourselves. We all need, even the fact we're here together, even in this circumstance, we need that brotherly love, that brotherly fellowship, that affection during these times of uncertainty, excuse me. I mean, these times really should bring the best out of us in terms of our love one for another. And, you know, even this is a time of testing, even a testing of true fellowship in the Lord. We've all got needs. I've got needs. You've got needs. There's the need of fellowship. There's that need to support one another. And if the church is going to be church, then there surely has to be that ongoing love one for another. You know, the early church, as you read in the book of Acts, the early church was characterized by meeting often one with another. Now, we can't at the moment do that, certainly physically, but we can do it through the God-given means of the technology that God has blessed us with. And it's not, of course, just through this particular technology.

[20 : 26] We can communicate. We can engage in active fellowship through the various means that God gives us. Email, phone call, perhaps even the basic letter writing. And, you know, even the blessing of coming together, even at times such as this, surely is a great blessing that God gives us.

And if I can just speak personally for a moment, yesterday I received an email from a retired minister. It was a very short email, but it was hugely encouraging. And it certainly lifted my spirits.

It truly was brotherly love. And I pray that we don't lose that communion one with another, but, you know, engage one with another. Be often in fellowship one with another through these particular times. And then secondly, and very briefly, the cry from the heart that we read in verses five to seven, let's just read the verses. I cry to you, O Lord. I say you are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living. Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low. Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me. Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name.

The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me. So David's moved on from saying that he's got no refuge. No one seems to care for him. But he moves on to that positive statement that God is his refuge, that God is his portion in the land of the living. So David, you can see, he's risen above this sort of deep distress that his heart's been in.

And he has come to that reality, that knowing that God is with him. And when he says that God is his portion, he's really saying, look, God's going to provide for all my needs. And he's got this joy to know that he's still in the land of the living. He's still alive. His life's still preserved.

[22 : 23] And, you know, we can reflect on that for our own needs, that God promises that he will supply all your needs through his grace and his mercy. And so each day we do pray for our daily bread.

Each day we pray for God's blessing upon our lives. And we give thanks that his compassions are new every morning, that great is his faithfulness. And, you know, we can echo the words that David wrote on another occasion when he said in Psalm 37, I've been young and now I'm old, yet I've not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread. And surely we have to have that confidence that David had that in calling before God for his help. And back to Psalm 142, you see these urgent requests that David makes, attend to my cry. In other words, listen to me. Or verse six, deliver me from my persecutors. In other words, rescue me.

Or bring me out of prison. In other words, set me free. And these are David's cry that God releases them from that real danger that David's facing. For David, the need is grave. He knows that only God can rescue him from his desperate need. That only God can rescue David from forces that are too strong for him. That only God can release David from that prison of his loneliness and his troubles.

And notice David prays that when he is set free, he's going to praise God. And he's going to know the blessing of God. And he knows he's not going to be alone. He says, the righteous will surround me.

And, you know, if you go back to 1 Samuel chapter 22, we're told that after David had fled to that cave, that actually his brothers did come to him. And they went to meet him in that cave. And we're told that everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, everyone who was bitter in soul, that they gathered around David. And we're told David became captive over them. And we're told there were about 400 men with him. And so truly, we're greatly encouraged in these words that David has given us.

[24 : 42] Truly, we're to be encouraged that God is our refuge, our strength in times of trouble, that we don't need to fear, that if our fear is anything, it has to be that fear before Almighty God. And so we give thanks that God gives us his promises, gives us his word, and that we do lack nothing, that the Lord is my shepherd, and that we lack nothing, whether it be in days of plenty, or days of the times that we're living in, that we know that God is with us, because he is our Lord. So let's come together in prayer. I'm going to pray. I'm going to bring a bit of benediction. And then perhaps we might have a short time of prayer when I ask one or two people to pray. So let's come together in prayer. Let us pray.

Lord, we thank you that you give us these means to join together in worship before you. Above all, Lord, we give you thanks for your word that comforts, that assures that you are with us, that you do provide for us in our every need. And so, Lord, we pray that in the cry for help, the cry from our hearts, that you will hear these cries, that you will hear these cries for mercy, and that you will visit us according to that mercy. Lord, hear us as we wait upon you. Hear us, Lord, as we commit to you all that is to happen, even in these next days and weeks and months. We pray, Lord, for those who are at the front line of care. We think, Lord, of those even now in our hospitals who are caring for those with this virus. We pray for them. And we ask, Lord, that you will have mercy upon them, that you'll be near them and be gracious to them. Be gracious to us as a nation. Lord, we need you. We've turned our back in you. Lord, restore us, revive us, we pray. Lord, hear us as we continue before you. Lord, hear us as we pray your mercy upon us.

And Lord, forgive us, we pray, our many sins in Jesus' name. And Lord, as we pray these things, Lord, we ask that you will have mercy. Lord, we pray, Lord, that you will go before us. And may grace, mercy, and peace from you, our God, go before us and be with us, both now, for now and forevermore. Amen.

And maybe if I can ask just a couple of those online to pray. I can ask Andy and then Ian to pray.

And then after the time of prayer, then maybe if folks want to remain, we can just have a short time of fellowship one with another. So maybe Andy and then Ian, if you would pray, and I'll get Hector to do the unmuting.