

# Psalm 77:1-20

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[ 0 : 00 ] Okay. Okay. I know of no other book in the world as honest about suffering that gives voice to our troubles.

And looks at our sorrows with so steady a gaze. That's God's word. As Becky just said, the Bible is not idealistic.

It's not juvenile when it comes to suffering. God doesn't treat our pain and our grief with a simple one-liner and then move us along.

You won't find cheap and simplistic words of comfort in the Bible. No bumper sticker theology.

Open your Bible and you won't find, keep your chin up.

God doesn't say, get over yourself or time heals all wounds. God does not gloss over our suffering. His word looks at it straight in the eye, even when we would rather not do that.

[ 1 : 26 ] That means that Christians don't have to flinch. We don't need to look away for fear that if we look at pain and grief and sorrow and suffering head on, that we won't be able to recover.

Because God does not shy away from our sorrows, so neither should we. We don't have to keep a lid on it. Instead, our Father gives us a pattern to follow in our suffering and in our grief.

In fact, he gives us several patterns. And that's where we will look these next few weeks. We're taking a break, as Matt already said, from our sermon series on the book of Matthew.

And we're going to ask this question, Is there a uniquely Christian way to grieve? We're calling this series of four sermons, Every Tear and Trial.

How Christians Walk with Christ Through Suffering. And there are going to be three patterns that we see, that God gives to us to walk through our grief.

[ 2 : 42 ] This week, the Lord is going to show us how we are comforted looking to his past faithfulness. Next week, he will tell us what to do with our grief in the present moment.

In two weeks' time, he'll direct our gaze to the future and his promises. And in the last week, we're going to think about how he instructs us to care for others who grieve.

If you're going through grief in this present moment, this sermon series is for you. If you've not yet gone through a major trial in your life, you will.

These sermons are a preparation for you. If you have a loved one walking through deep waters, and if you don't today, you will.

These sermons are for you. If you've already gone through times of darkness, and you've grit your teeth and bared it, and you've made it through to the other side, but you never went to the Lord, with what was going on in your soul, these sermons are for you.

[ 4 : 00 ] Far too often, we who belong to the risen Lord Jesus go through the trials and sorrows of this life as if we don't belong to the risen Lord Jesus.

And when we do that, we miss tremendous comfort and hope. We miss the opportunity to show the world around us just how valuable and powerful he is.

And we miss the opportunity to honor the Lord, worship in our sorrows, by leaning on him hard in the midst of our trials.

So friends, let's pray. O great and gracious Heavenly Father, will you help us not to shy away from difficult things, but to lean hard on you, on your powerful and loving arms.

We pray that in Christ's name. Amen. I think we have this idea of nice church people. They have to show up, all dressed nice, with a smile on the face.

[ 5 : 21 ] You know, it's unchristian not to have your act together when you arrive at church. Now, we might not say that with our words, but we often act that way. And if we're honest, many of us probably, just a little bit, look down on others who don't seem to have their act together in the household of God, who can't keep up that act.

You know, you walk into church, what do you hear? Conversations, right? How you doing? Great, thanks. How are you? Great. Just great. And they're both lying.

It seems like the Christian thing to do, to put on that nice and smiley veneer, but it has little to do with Christ and his word.

The Bible is full of God's people not acting like everything's okay, not pretending that things are fine. Jesus wept.

King David grieved and mourned. The prophets lamented. The patriarchs walked through deep disappointment, all of it publicly.

[ 6 : 41 ] And most publicly of all, the Lord inspired many of the Psalms, including Psalm 77, where we will be today, in his enduring word to proclaim extraordinary prayers of grief.

And so when we're hurting, God's word does not confront you for your grief, saying, you know, why don't you have your act together?

If you're a good Christian, you'd just be happy. Why can't you just get over it? Those are not the things that God's word says. Instead, he has given us a Bible that doesn't gloss over the real anguish we experience in this world.

Instead, he looks our pain dead in the eye, and he confronts it. The church of Christ isn't the place where hurting people are judged for hurting.

It's the place where suffering people meet a God who very clearly knows their trouble and their heartbreak. And he has something to say to them.

[ 7 : 56 ] In today's passage, which we just spoke as a congregation, he tells us two things. It basically breaks in half. Verses 1-9 and then verses 10-20.

The first thing he says to us in verses 1-9 is, cast your cares on me because I care for you.

God filled his word with lament for a reason. It's because he understands us.

Our sorrow doesn't bewilder him. He's not some distant God who can't quite figure out those tiny insect creatures with their sorrow and their grief.

He understands our sorrow, and he wants us to pour it out to him. See, the Psalms are prayers. It's a prayer book. And God means for them to model our prayers, for us to pattern our prayers after the Psalms.

[ 9 : 02 ] And so when we see a psalmist pouring out great sorrow to the Lord, what we see is an invitation from our Heavenly Father to go to him with our tears and give expression to exactly what's going on in our hearts.

And that's what we see in Psalm 77. Verse 1, I cry aloud to God. Aloud to God and he will hear me. Have you ever hurt so much that you had to cry out? Maybe all you could do was cry out. Well, there is a God in heaven who wants to carry your burden so much that he has given you words like these to pattern your sorrowful prayers after.

Verse 2, In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord. In the night my hand is stretched out without weary. That is, his hand just remains outstretched.

In grief. Have you ever hurt so much you could do nothing but reach out? My soul refuses to be comforted, he says.

[ 10 : 27 ] Have you ever had truly inconsolable grief? I've experienced inconsolable grief once in my life so far. When our foster daughter left our home.

I wanted nothing more in all the world than to have her back but it was the one thing I could not have. I could do nothing to bring her back and my heart was thrown off a cliff.

It was in free fall and my soul refused to be comforted. Maybe you know what that's like. so much so that in verse 3 he says when I remember God I moan.

There is a kind of grief where when you're reminded of the good things and the good times your anguish only increases.

It's as if the good things mock us and taunt us. showing us a happiness we feel we'll never have again. He says when I meditate my spirit fail in the midst of suffering sometimes the more you contemplate your circumstance the less you are able to handle it.

[ 11 : 54 ] Verse 4 you hold my eyelids open suffering has this way of capturing our minds especially suffering that lasts for a while ongoing conflict or health problems or a major loss that cannot be rectified and suffering like that has often a long term impact at least hold of our attention and won't let us look away even to sleep Asaph the psalmist ends verse 4 saying I am so troubled that I cannot speak sometimes when we are in pain and sorrow we want to vent but can't even do

that some griefs are so deep there are no words for them in those first four verses what do we see the psalmist

Asaph simply goes to God and says this is how my troubles are making my soul feel troubled he takes his personal experience of grief and honestly with no varnish no pretense turns it to the Lord in prayer and when God made this prayer part of the psalms his prayer book he invites us to do the same one preacher put it this way any believer who has ever known the deepening darkness of enveloping hopelessness can be profoundly thankful for the frankness and candor of this fellow sufferer who wrote this psalm here is a believer who has been there and back again here is a believer who knows what it is for almost all the light to go out and I'd like to take a moment for us as a congregation just as

God has in these first four verses invited us to truly and genuinely pour out our hearts to him go to him in prayer just briefly and present our sorrows to him something maybe that is a present sorrow or maybe something that in the past you have gone through and not actually ever expressed to him and gone to your heavenly father for help with maybe something in the past that has bubbled up grief because grief changes over time or maybe if you don't have those things just a moment of asking your father in heaven to help you to prepare you to do this in the future on the day of trouble so friends let's bow our heads and just for a moment go to our father in heaven with our own heartfelt language modeled after these first four verses and pour our hearts to our king ending ending the Lord invites us to cast our cares on him, to pour out our experience of grief into his loving care.

He knows that grief and sorrow and pain do more than just make us sad, however. He knows that pain can lead us to doubt.

And that's what we see in the next verses. Very real, very raw grief leads Asaph to ask some very hard questions.

[16:45] Verse 5. 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 I made a diligent search.

Will the Lord spurn forever and never again be faithful? Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? These are really direct and challenging questions. We might call it unfaithful, but Asaph is unafraid to voice his real doubts because he knows, verse 1, that God is ready to hear his cry.

Do the questions that Becky asked of God when she laid in bed and stared at the ceiling and was robbed of sleep, did they unsettle you?

Did they feel like maybe too hard or a little too pushy or unfaithful towards God? We almost want to step in here and say to Becky, say to Asaph, friend, I know you're hurting, but you can't talk to God like that.

[18:14] But God chose to put questions like these in his inspired word because pain really does make us question like this.

This is a true and accurate reflection of what pain does to us. And when our sufferings and sorrows cause us to feel abandoned by God, he doesn't want that feeling to cause us to despair and walk away.

Instead, he wants us to go to him with those very doubts. Jesus reserved his criticism for hypocrites, not for honest grief, not for fearful doubts.

And so Asaph can even say, verse 9, has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he, in anger, shut up his compassion? At first, that just looks like pure, defiant doubt.

It sounds like an accusation against God. But, this is what real faith looks like in the moment of grievous pain.

[19:40] Real faith doesn't gloss over suffering, fearing that if we really looked at how bad it was, that our religion might fall apart. If we were truly honest.

Instead, real faith looks our griefs and our sorrows head on. And knows God is there. And he is true.

And he hears. And he is strong. And that's the only reason we can cry out to him. And bring not only verses 1-4, our true expression of grief, but also verses 5-9, our true doubts and real hard questions.

So Christians can come to their God with absolute honesty. Lord, you see what has happened. And my heart recoils at this suffering.

It is so intense. My heart has to cry out. My arms have to reach out. The storm is so fierce that I cannot find any comfort. Only moaning and sleeplessness.

[ 20 : 48 ] I cannot speak. Except a voice. My doubts. Since you are God, why do I feel spurned and abandoned and shut out?

Since you are God, why does it seem that you have forgotten me? Is your God compassionate and strong enough to hear those kinds of questions?

The God of the Bible is. And he wants us to pour our sorrows and our doubts to him. And that's why he puts psalms like this one in his Bible.

One of my professors put it this way. An initial and glorious surprise to many people is that God actually encourages those who suffer to speak honestly to him.

Why is this a surprise to many sufferers? Sufferers tend to feel alone. And isolated. Isn't that true? Right?

[ 22 : 03 ] We look around us and say, oh, you don't know what I'm going through. You can't feel what I'm feeling right now. And we get to thinking that people don't care. So people's responses that seem lackluster to us or their lack of a response can compound our own grief and isolate us.

They often think, Ed Welch continues, that God is very far from them. But God penetrates our isolation and prods us to put our painful experiences into speech.

Not just any speech, of course. Not faithless bitterness. Not pagan laments in a world that is meaningless. God encourages us to direct our speech to himself.

God. Friends, I'm going to give us one more moment to pause and direct our hearts to God. And if in this moment you have genuine doubts because of grief or sorrow or pain or sadness, let them be made known to him.

Speak very honestly and openly to your God just as Asaph did. And if this is not you in this moment, will you ask him for the grace that in the moment you have these doubts that you would remember to go to him?

[ 23 : 30 ] That you would remember to follow Asaph's example instead of running away from him with our doubts? Run to him instead. Amen. Amen.

In verses 1 through 9, Asaph took his experience of grief and doubt honestly to his Lord.

He turned over his mourning and his doubts to the Lord's powerful and loving hand. The first thing that God says to us in this song is cast your cares with your griefs and your doubts on me.

Because I care for you. He does not condemn Asaph or us for feeling sorrow or even for voicing his honest and desperate questions.

Instead, he gives those questions an answer. And it comes in the form of a memory. The rest of the psalm is a memory.

[ 25 : 09 ] A truth that is bigger than the grief and the doubt. And that's the second message. The second message of this psalm verses 10 through 20 is rest in the Lord's past faithfulness.

Verse 10. 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 hope. 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.

Asaph has stopped looking at himself and his sorrows and his grief. Now, if you're grieving, you know that's a very tall order.

[ 26 : 24 ] because sorrow has a way of filling our entire view. But, he says here everything now is pointing at someone else, God and his past faithfulness.

The only reference that he has to himself now is I remember you. Actions speak louder than words. We say that in our culture and I believe that it is absolutely true. And our God has a history of acting. And his actions are big.

And so, they are really the only thing that can rest our view away from sorrow that captures our attention.

And he's going straight to the greatest act of redemption the Lord had done for his people, the Exodus. If you're not familiar with the Exodus story, it's found in the book of Exodus, second book of the Bible.

[ 27 : 38 ] Israel were in slavery to Egypt. And I guess if you want to encapsulate the whole book of Exodus into a couple verses, Exodus chapter 2, verses 23 to 25.

During the many days, during those many days, the king of Egypt died and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help.

Isn't that exactly what Asaph has been doing? Verses 1 through 4, groaning because of his misery. Verses 5 through 9, crying out for help in his down.

Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. He received their cry of sorrow and pain and anguish.

And God heard their groaning and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel and God knew.

[ 28 : 48 ] God's people could cast their cares on him because he cared for them. And so he sent the rest of Exodus is this magnificent story of redemption.

He sent Moses as a representative. He judged Egypt with plagues and the plagues eventually convinced Pharaoh to let his people go. Of course, he chases them down because he changes his mind again.

God parts the Red Sea and allows his people to cross through unharmed. He closes it in again on Pharaoh's army to rescue them.

And that is where Asaph directs his attention. This is what Asaph distracts himself from sorrow but points to a bigger truth than his sorrow.

It is that event the Red Sea. Psalm 77 again verse 16. When the waters saw you O God when the waters saw you they were afraid.

[ 30 : 01 ] 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 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 Asaph has taken his grief and his sorrow and his pain to the Lord he has taken even his honest and frightened doubts and confusions to the Lord and then he has taken his mind and pointed it at the greatest act of redemption he could imagine and he says I will remember your works I will remember that you saved here

Asaph is here basically preaching to himself I belong to this same God and friends we belong to this same God except that the exodus was the greatest act of salvation that Asaph could look back to God now because we belong to this same God the redemption of God's people from Israel their deliverance from great pain and sorrow and the parting of the Red Sea is a reassurance to us and we can look to the history of redemption found in God's word and see that he has worked all things for the good of his plan and for his people and for his glory but you and

I today we stand in a better place than Asaph did when he penned this song of lament we are in a better place because he wrote at a point in history when the exodus from Egypt was the great event he could look back to and see God's faithful powerful redemptive love and he did ground his assurance there but friends we belong to the same God and can look back to this same goodness and faithfulness the exodus is history that belongs to us as a comfort too because we belong to this same God but that's no longer the great event that we look back to we look there and we look at something greater in just a moment we will celebrate the Lord's supper together in the book of Luke chapter 9 verse 31 you don't have to turn there we see that Jesus understood his mission and his ministry as another exodus and this one is better than the first Moses didn't lead it God the son did God didn't just save his people from slavery to Pharaoh he saved them from slavery to sin he didn't rescue them into political freedom he saved them from death itself in the second exodus he didn't part the sea he tore!

into the curtain that separated us from his presence the cross Jesus led a greater exodus not just out of Egypt but to God himself it is the cross of Christ that has bought us the right to even have this comfort it is itself a comfort to us but as we celebrate the Lord's table together we are also declaring that without the shed blood of Christ God does not owe us his attention at all except to judge us without the blood that Jesus shed for our sin we have no hope that he would even hear us without his blood shed for our sin we have no guarantee that we can cast our cares on him or that we would have an expectation that he cares for us without his blood shed for us we have no right no privilege to go to him in prayer we have no foundation on which to stand in our tears trials but because

[ 35 : 20 ] Jesus died for me and for my sins I do have boldness to enter into the father's house I can cast my cares on him because I know that he cares for me he died for me the cross is the clear and final word on that this does not eliminate pain and sorrow and confusion it doesn't but it gives me solid rock on which to stand and it buys me access to a father who cares for me so I can cast my cares on him just as Asaph in his moment of pain look to God's past faithfulness I can in my moment of sorrow look to an even greater expression of

God's faithful merciful powerful love even when the sickness ends in death even when the relationship ends in suffering and bitterness and brokenness even when the finances end in bankruptcy when the knockdown becomes a knockout even when the loss is final Jesus bled and died to pardon my sin and his tomb is empty I can have confidence that I belong to a strong savior and though I do not even understand this present grief I need not despair because I have been welcomed into the family of the one who created the world and rules it for his glory and for our good and so

I can confront my own grief and pain and doubt with Asaph's same words I will remember the deeds of the Lord I will ponder all your work and meditate on your mighty deeds your way oh God is holy what God is like our God you are the God who works wonders you with your arm redeemed your people only when I hold this bread and this cup that we are about to hold in our hands Asaph's words are filled with even more substance and more joy and more remembrance than when he prayed them because today they point to the cross of Christ and they are charged with that meaning and friends that's what we're going to do now verse 11 remember the deeds of the Lord as we celebrate the cross of Christ by holding the bread and the cup in our hands but first I must say if this does not describe you if you have not been covered by the blood of Christ you've not repented of your sins and trusted in Christ alone and his work on the cross and his empty tomb for your salvation this is not true for you I cannot yet offer you the comfort that Asaph has that we all have in Christ but if the Lord has shown you his heart today and has drawn you to him if you're longing to be reconciled to this God who wants you to cast your cares on him because he cares for you so much that he would send his son as a substitute for you it is your sin that separates you from him until such a point as you repent and believe his attitude instead of care is wrath towards you but friends there is a way in the very thing that everyone in this room is looking to for comfort in time of grief is your entrance into the arms of the king so as we stand we're going to take the elements and return to our seats if you don't yet belong to

Christ don't receive the elements they won't mean anything instead receive Christ if you'd like to ask questions or if you'd like some prayer I'll be standing off to the side I'd love to pray with you so friends let us stand let us take the elements we'll return to our seats and we will partake of them together in remembrance of Christ to Thank you.

[ 41 : 52 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[ 44 : 08 ] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. open our eyes and stir up our hearts to trust every one of your promises, even when we are in grief and sorrow and pain, so that we can live in the peace that you have for all who know you, who know you to be the God who asks us to cast our cares on him because you care for us. We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, whose cross and empty tomb make all of this possible. We pray that in his name. Amen.

Please stand with us. We're going to sing the chorus of that last song one more time. Amen.

Faithful you are faithful forever you will be faithful you are faithful you are!

you are you are faithful forever you will be faithful you are all your promises all your promises are yes and amen say that again all your promises all your promises are yes and amen all your promises And all your promises, yes and amen.