

Psalm 71

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[0 : 0 0] It doesn't tell us who penned this psalm, though many people believe that it was David, because an awful lot of the expressions and the sentiments that are found in this psalm tie in with many of David's songs and writings. I think we know that even to this day, that particular authors or poets or songwriters, that there is, although there's always variety and people are always trying to do something new, there's often a thread that runs through people's songs or people's writings or the way they express themselves. So we can often say, well, I think that's so-and-so that did this or so-and-so who did that. A lot of people believe, because of the many expressions in here, that it was David who actually penned this psalm.

It's also a psalm that seems to have expressions from a lot of other psalms in it as well. And it's a psalm that deals really with life and all life's perplexities and complexities and all the different and varied situations that we find ourselves in. But it's a psalm that puts incredible emphasis upon trust in the Lord. It's a psalm that is dealing with so many of the things that can come into our lives and leave us feeling very vulnerable. You know, like today, you might be feeling fine. Life today might be great for some of you here. And everything has been going well and everything is just working perfectly. For others, it might be very different.

Today, you might be in the middle of things in your life which are complicated and painful and difficult. And we know how quickly things can change. From one moment, everything can be going just so well. All of a sudden, it changes. Life is so uncertain. And that's one of the things that really this psalmist is sort of dealing with is all the uncertainties of life right throughout all the ages of life. But all the time, he's coming back to this one place. There's only one place that you can really go to. One place that you can really stake your own. One passion that you can depend on. And that's why he goes back over and over again to the Lord. And it shows great faith and great humility.

And that's what we need for our lives, all of us, is to exercise this faith and this dependence upon the Lord. And for instance, you see how the psalmist is. He says, for instance, at the very beginning, let me never be put to shame. He's aware of how easy it is to become ashamed in life. And we'll always remember that that's one of the things, even our shame that Jesus dealt with upon the cross.

Because life, sin affects all, all, all of being. Affects us in so many different ways. Jesus dealt with all our sin upon the cross. And that's part of the wonder of what he has done.

[3 : 1 2] And we find this dependence where, for instance, the psalmist is using words like to lean, where he learned to lean upon the Lord. And that's something you and I need to do as well, to lean upon the Lord.

Because there will come times all of us will find ourselves in a situation that is too big for us. Right now, maybe there are some here today and you just don't, it doesn't enter your thinking about leaning upon anybody else. You feel strong in yourself. You feel sufficient in yourself.

You feel in control of every situation that you meet. But you know, it can change. And the Lord will often bring us to a place where we have to learn to lean upon him. And that takes humility because naturally, it's something within our own nature, within our heart. We don't want, we want to be, we want to be in control. We want to feel self-sufficient.

We want to be able to. And we think it's a great sign of weakness when we cannot. But the Lord actually shows us that deep down, there will be situations in the open time where we will discover that maybe we're not as strong. Strong in our bodies, strong in our minds, strong in our mind, strong in our intellect, strong in our emotion, as maybe we thought.

With the sound. And this sound is really kind of dealing with all these different problems and perplexities and situations in life. And so we find that the psalmist, he says various things. And say for instance in verse 2, when he's speaking to the Lord, he says, incline your ear to me. That's what he's saying. Incline your ear to me.

[5 : 02] He's really saying to the Lord, Lord, please pay close attention to what I'm saying. Lord, please listen to me. And one of the great assurances that God's word gives us is that the Lord does listen to us. Whenever we come to him, whenever we come to him by faith, and even if it's just a word, or even a sigh, if it is to the Lord, the Lord hears that. It's one of the great complaints today for many people, is that nobody listens to them. You will often hear people say, nobody listens.

And even when you might talk, maybe you've understood, or maybe you've experienced that yourself, you're maybe going through something difficult, and you're trying to tell people.

But there's nobody who really listens. Yeah, they might give the appearance of listening. And they might be with you for a wee while, but it's like they don't, they're too caught up, and I suppose it's the way it is, they're too caught up with other things, and sometimes too caught up with themselves, and I suppose that might be true of all of us. It's very rare to find somebody who is a superb listener, who will listen, and it's like engage right in with where you're at. And after that person has gone away, you think, that person understood me. That's the first person who has really listened to me. It's quite a rare quality and a rare gift. Well, that's something that the Lord does.

The Lord promises that he will listen to our cry. And that's what the psalmist is saying here, Lord. It's like picking your ear right down close, inclined, just bend over a wee bit so that you're really hearing what I'm hearing. And I want us to have that faith and that trust so that we also will come to the Lord with everything and all that we have.

And we find here also that the psalmist's confidence in the Lord has been built because he looks back over his life and at verse 6 he says, Upon you I have leaned from before my birth. You are he who took me from my mother's womb. And so the psalmist is here, he has come to this realization that the Lord has been watching over him, not just as he's a grown-up person, but he was watching over him in his youth. He was watching over him when he was born. He was actually watching over him in the womb.

[7 : 59] Right all the way back when he couldn't do anything for himself, when he didn't even know that he was being watched over. The Lord was watching over him. And so we realize how true that is, that the Lord is in control of everything. And the Bible will tell us that the Lord is the one who opens the womb and the Lord is the one who closes the womb. Again, there are mysteries there, things that we cannot understand.

But the Bible speaks about instances where the Lord closed a particular womb or the Lord opened a particular womb. So we see the authority and the rule and the government of God in everything, in all these different areas. But one of the beautiful things about this psalm is that it seems to embrace all the different ages and stages of life. As we said, pre-birth, youth, growing up and even into old age.

Because the elderly often feel that they're forgotten age. That people are no longer interested in them. And there are many people who have so much energy and talents and gifts and they feel that they are now of no use to anybody. They're in the kind of forgotten age. Well, this is the beauty about this psalm. That it reaches every age. From the womb, to birth, to youth, to growing up, to old age.

That even in old age, even although others may forget, that the Lord will not forget. And so the Lord is teaching his people right throughout, through all the different ages, through parental teaching and through the church and experience and so on. But the psalmist then says, from my youth, you have taught me, O God. So the psalmist as he is reflecting, and I believe that the psalmist is up in years now, he's looking back, and he's aware that God has been teaching him all the way through. And that's a principle that the word of God makes very clear to us. God takes the instruction of the young seriously. It is something that God wants happening. And the psalmist is aware that although God is the one who has been teaching him, that there have been many influences. There have been many people involved, many different experiences, but all of it has come together to come under the hand of God, so that he has been taught throughout life. And on a baptism morning like this, it is good for us to reflect upon this great fact. That people are able to look back that from their earliest days, that they have been taught of the Lord. And when we go to the Bible, that's one of the things that we see, that the Lord has a real place for the instruction of the child. You can see, if you go back to Noah, you see that as God was dealing with Noah and saving Noah, it involved his family as well. As God entered into covenant with

Abraham, that covenant involved his children. It wasn't just with regard to Abraham, but to all his children. God was always involved with the children. And if we study, if we had time and worked our way through the Old Testament, it's fascinating to see the way God works. The great events in the history of Israel were set out in such a way that the children would be taught. One of the most amazing events of all was the Passover. It was set out in such a way, you'll remember that night in Egypt, when the angel passed over every house that had the blood on the doorposts and on the lintel. As the angel passed over, Israel were to remember that throughout the successive generations. At that time, every year, they were to hold the Passover meal. And it was to involve the children. And the children were going to be asking, why do you do this? That's why the Lord set it out in this particular way. So that your children, and time will come, they will ask you, why do you do this? It's the same when today we have our Lord's supper. We would hope that young people, when they're at a very early age, would be asking, what's all that about? Why do you take drinking wine out of a cup? And why do you break some bread? And the

[13 : 03] Lord wants the young people to be taught what happened. And that's exactly what the Passover was set out in that particular way. So that the children would ask and here's the time for the parents to instruct them and to teach them in the way of the Lord. It was the same when we looked at that at another baptismal service, the memorial stones of Jordan. These 12 grade stones that were set up on the banks of the Jordan after Israel had crossed into the promised land. And it says, in time to come, when your children will ask you, what do these stones mean? You'll tell them that the Lord God is mighty. And you will tell them the history of your redemption, of how the Lord delivered you and led you and brought you into this land. So the Lord was setting things out, markers and points and places, so that the children would be taught. There are people who think, oh, the children, the Lord is concerned about the children. It's vital, it's important too. Remember when Israel came into the land of the promise. And Joshua, one of the things he was instructed to do, he brought all Israel together and he read to them the law of Moses. And it wasn't just the men who were there and it wasn't just the women who were gathered there, but all the children were gathered as well. And even those who were strangers with them, this is what it says, there was not a word of all that Moses commanded that

Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel and the women and the little ones and those who were sojourners or those who were traveling with them. So the children were gathered there, everybody.

So if we take the bringing up of our children seriously in the Christian faith, then it is vital that we bring them up under the word. That's what we do by taking them to God's house. Why do we take them to God's house? Well, one of the things is, first of all, is we are setting out a pattern for their lives.

You know, life is full of habits. We develop habits by doing things habitually. It's something we get into and so often we say, oh, that's just a habit and it might be a good habit. If it is, it's great. If it's a bad habit, sometimes we say, oh, I've got to deal with that. That shouldn't be. But this is the best habit that we could ever teach or bring into our lives. It's coming. And remember what the word says, train up a child. Train up a child in the way that you'll go. And when he's old, he won't depart from it. Isn't that quite a thought? You train up your children in the way that you would like them to go. What a solemn responsibility when our children are young. The way you would like them to go.

That's when they're young. That's how you train them. And then it says when they're old, they will not depart from it. So we see this, this is great responsibility.

[16 : 42] And again, when we come to church, we must take them prayerfully. So that it's not just as a matter of duty. Because surely what we want for their young hearts is that they will know the Lord.

And ask that the Lord will speak to them and touch them. You know, another reason why it's lovely to see families come to church, and particularly today is we live in a day where it's very hard actually for the family to get together.

Because the way people work today, the shifts and all the different ways of society, that is to get family time now, it's almost impossible.

I'm sure if you look through your week, those of you with families, you will see it's really hard even to get a meal together. Because you have young ones, one's going here and another's going there. Mealtimes are all over and people are rushing to do this.

And the whole of society today is in such a rush. It's really hard to get family time together. Surely this is one of the wonderful times where we can come together as a family.

[17 : 56] We've got a time of quiet and peace and come to, what better can we do than to come to worship God. And again, it's very important to bring our children to church, our young ones to church, because they will hear far more than you will give them credit for.

You know, sometimes people say, ach, there's no point in taking their children to church. They say, do we? They'll not understand. Well, there's lots they might not understand. Some of the time they might be kind of bored.

I'm sure we all look back as children and we can remember. We counted the pillars and counted the beams in the church and counted how many little beams. We did all these kind of things to fill up the time.

But we also remembered things. Like I said it before, the first memory I have of church, apparently I was only three and a half.

It was Ivor's father, the late Murdo Martin, who was ministering in peace. He was preaching in our day when I was a wee boy. And I can remember your picture at the bottom of the book, but still remember it.

[19 : 05] So don't say little children can't remember. I have forgotten most of the things of my life. I've never forgotten that. Three and a half.

So you see how important it is to bring the children under the wall. And again we think of the words of Jesus. You remember...

Little children to come unto me and do not forbid them. Don't prevent them coming. Because the disciples are trying to hold their parents back from coming.

It is vital to bring our children up in the way of the Lord. We've got to remember we live in a world that is opposed to the things of God.

The attitudes of this world are opposed to the things of God. We've always got to remember that it's a difficult thing to guide people in the way of the Lord.

[20 : 09] Because this world, remember, is opposed to the things of God. Remember when Adam and Eve sinned. What was the first thing they did? They ran away from God.

And this world is still running away from God. This world doesn't want God. So that there is this opposition to the things of God. It's natural within us. It's even within our very heart.

And so it's vital that children will be taught in the way of the Lord. We're not to think that we're going to allow children to work it out for themselves.

Some people think they'll work things out for themselves. No. We don't do that with anything else. If we followed that logic, we would never send our children to school.

We would say, I don't want them to go to school because they might learn things there that it's not their thing. We don't think like that.

[21 : 11] Nor should we think with regard to the church and say, that's the same with, do we teach them right from wrong? Some people will say, no, they'll discover us, they'll go through.

Like, if we follow that policy, it leads to anarchy and chaos. And that is why it is so important that we teach our children. The Lord expects it.

Indeed, the Lord commands. There's clear evidence in the Bible that he's asking for that. So it's important. We take the soul.

Each soul is precious. And that is why today it's a reminder, reminder to all parents about the importance of bringing up, of teaching your children in the way of the Lord.

Because there will be loads and loads of other influences. These first few years are so, so vital. And that's why, even as a congregation, we take the work of the young very seriously.

[22 : 17] Where you have, for instance, we have the creche going on, and there's the mother and toddler group. And then you have the various levels, starting with C Club of the campaigners, and then the kids zone, and the cross tracks.

And then moving on into the youth club. There's the youth fellowship. There's the Sunday schemes. There's synergy. Maybe I'm forgetting things. But you see, there's this emphasis upon teaching your young.

That is why Marianne is employed. But other things specifically as a youth worker within the congregation. And Alison, as a youth worker within the presbytery.

Because it is so important. Because God is telling us from the word the importance of instructing our young. Jesus, we'll move just as we, time is going.

But Jesus, remember when he said, suffer the little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven. Kingdom of heaven. God's kingdom. Like little children.

[23 : 16] Jesus, on another occasion, when he took a child. Remember, he took this child, and he placed the child in front of the disciples. And he said, unless you become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Whoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. So what is Jesus meaning? Well, the one thing that we know about little children is that they can actually be very, very self-centered.

In fact, life is all about them. So at one level, there isn't, we can't say that the child is the most humble of all. But what Jesus was talking about here is the example of children when they're very, very young.

They live in absolute dependence. They can't feed themselves. They're dependent for food. They're dependent for drink. They're dependent for clothing.

They're dependent for washing, for everything. And so there's just this, they're not really aware of what they're doing. But that's just who they are.

[24 : 29] Dependent upon somebody else to do everything for them. And that is the idea that Jesus has. It's got, you look at a little child and you can have all kinds of difficulties going on within your house.

There can be huge problems and difficulties. And that little toddler, as Noah is almost, is oblivious to what's going on. Just this dependence upon the one, or the ones who are feeding and nursing and caring for.

And it's that idea that the Lord has of this kind of contentment in Him. Of being content with this, with our lot in life, as we look to Him and depend upon Him.

And so today as we come, as a morning of baptism, it's very important for us to drive home the huge responsibility that has been placed today for people who are bringing up their children.

And as in coming forward for baptism, really each parent is saying, I want my child brought up in the way of the Lord.

[25 : 50] Really they're saying there's nothing I would love more than for my child to come to know the Lord. And for however long our young are spared, wouldn't it be wonderful to hear the sentiments of this verse.

Oh God, from my youth you have taught me. I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. It would be great to hear that.

Well, the way in order to hear that is to bring them up and to instruct them and to teach them in the way of the Lord.

Let us pray. Oh Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks for every blessing that we receive. We give thanks for your goodness and mercy and thy patience with us.

Because we are even the oldest here. We're like little children who are slow to learn. Because so often as we bring up children, we have to instruct them and teach them.

[27 : 03] There's things to do and things not to do. And we're still like that, that little children who are slow to learn so many lessons. And so we ask Lord to forgive us, to be merciful to us, to watch over us and to cleanse us from all our sin.

Guide us and continue with us, forgiving us our sin in Jesus' name. Amen.