

Continually Close

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Date: 17 January 2024

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[0 : 00] Psalm 71, the passage that we read there. Last week, we gave our attention to the beginning of that psalm, from verse 1 down to verse 12, verse 11.

And tonight, we'll follow on from there. We'll start at verse 12 and take that small section from 12 to 16.

And last week, as we came to this psalm, we saw the psalmist's undergirding faith. Underneath all these words, his faith was underneath it, his faith in the Lord.

He was holding fast to God in the midst of this great affliction, whatever it was, and the attacks of the devil. So it's as if when we read through these words, we heard these personal expressions that he had, his cry to his Lord, his rock and his refuge, to protect him, to rescue him, to save him.

And we give our mind to three points of his vision. He looked to God. He looked also to himself. And he looked to the situation around him, which are all aspects that we should be mindful of as believers.

[1 : 21] Who we are to others, who we are within ourselves, and who we are before God, primarily with our attention to our God and our Lord, Jesus Christ.

And last week, we also mentioned that when generally, when you come to the psalms, it is believed the main point is found within the middle of the psalms. And this is a section we come to tonight, from verse 12 to 16.

And there's wonderful words in this section, and words that we're maybe more familiar with in the Scottish Psalter rendering of it. If verse 14 has the words, but with expectation, I will hope continually.

And verse 16 is, and I will constantly go on in strength of God the Lord. These words are well known to us, and they speak of faith in general, and holding on to God, and constantly remaining with him, and clinging to him, when things are rough, as if we're in the roughest of seas, and holding on to this one rope, as it were.

When there's no, there's no signs of dry land, there's no signs of hope, and the evil forces suppress us. These waves keep battering us, and it's relentless.

[2 : 49] They come, and they come, and they come, and we feel beaten. This was the psalmist's cry, in a sense. He's feeling as if his strength is spent.

He's got nothing left to give. He's running on empty, and he's crying out to his Lord, in his need. And as we saw his personal faith, in the psalm, clinging on, we saw that, the greater faithfulness of his Lord, that God was so faithful to him, that was his assurance, in his own faith, to cling on, because of God's faithfulness, through the years, the years as he had gone on, God who had been with him, his Lord, as we saw in Isaiah, he was the Lord's, and he knew he was the Lord's, and he knew the Lord had made so many promises to his people and to him, and the Lord had not let him go thus far.

And so why would he let go of him now? He's holding on faithfully to the Lord, when everything else, every other offer of salvation, is hopeless.

But the hope that he has in his Lord is an anchor for his soul, both sure and steadfast, a refuge and a rock to him, could hold on in that hope.

And we can hold on to that hope, in the storms that we face in our life, too. But as we acknowledge, there are many times and days where we feel maintaining that hope and maintaining that faithfulness is the most difficult thing.

[4 : 43] And it's so attractive, when we look at the world and the way they live, almost just to be washed away, to let go, and to let the waves take us, to let the sweeping movements of the world and go with them.

But we know all these things would be in vain. It would be us chasing the wind. It would have no hope within it. And it's like the psalmist in Psalm 73, but he assessed all these things that the world had.

And then when he came back to the Lord's house, he saw the difference view on the world. Someone once said that when faithfulness is most difficult, it is most necessary.

When faithfulness is most difficult, it is most necessary. That's a very true statement. Faith in God, holding on, will never put us to shame.

We will be honoured for having faith in God. We will be honoured by entering into his rest as adopted sons of God for being faithful. Well done, good and faithful servant.

[6 : 01] And in this section from 12 to 16, the writer, composer of this psalm, not entirely sure if it is David or not, but he has these three views of God himself and others.

But he has a particular focus on being close to God, a closeness to God, and a consistency in his faith.

Closeness and consistency. Two points that we can use just to guide us as we look at this section from 12 to 16. We'll begin with closeness.

Now you look there at the first verse of our attention, verse 12. Oh God, be not far from me. And then his continued cry, and a more personal cry.

Oh my God, make haste to help me. Now even if you were to take these few lines on their own, there's a lot in it, and there's a lot we can get from it to understand where the psalmist is coming from.

[7 : 13] If you take it on its own, oh God, be not far from me. Oh my God, make haste to help me. We can see that he desires the presence of God.

He also, he does not feel like God is near him. He's calling out to God, be not far from me, but he doesn't know how far away he is.

He doesn't, he doesn't feel like God is near him. He's not sure where God is. The third thing that comes from it is that we can see his personal faith in God.

Oh my God. He leans on God in his faith and his trust. And the fourth thing we see is that there's an urgency to his need.

Make haste to help me. And they are all at times truthful elements for the Christian, for ourselves. I'm sure we can associate with these topics that we've touched on there.

[8 : 16] But is it surely true that it is one of the greatest desires of the Christian to know the presence of God, to know his closeness to us, to feel his hand, to hear his voice and to see his outworking in our lives.

His presence to the Christians is a comfort and a joy to each of us. and the believer they long to be with God.

They have this longing to be with him, to have that communion restored, that we would know something of what it was like for Adam to walk with God in the cool of the day.

That it was just something so natural and something so pleasant. And we know that, well, this side of glory, while we live on earth, our communion with God will never be so rich in our experience.

For sin has come into our lives and sin is a great separating element. Sin in a way produces maybe a fear of God.

[9 : 38] where because of our sin and we look at ourselves and we see our sinfulness and we come before this holy God, there's almost a fear within us of what God would do to us, of how God would treat us.

And you kind of hear of that and I think it was one of the revival stories from Barbra. us. They were speaking that the presence of God was so prevalent in the area and so prevalent with the people and it's almost like we desire it but the person was saying it was a fearful thing to know that God was so close to us.

But nevertheless we long for this communion to be restored. It's something that's planted within the believers' hearts to be near to God and we can remember Paul's words where he says he is hard pressed between the two.

My desire is to depart to be with Christ for that's far better but to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. There's something in this at once we want to see our Saviour.

We want to see our Lord. We want to have a restored communion with him but surely it must be true that as we long for it so God desires it.

[11 : 10] God desired to be with his people. God had them build a tabernacle so he would be with them and that was even taking place as they were creating their own idol at the bottom and he's giving Moses at the bottom of the mountain and he's giving Moses instructions to build a tabernacle so that he could dwell with them.

I find it's amazing that God is so gracious to his people and still desires to dwell with his people and draw near to his people even when they are so rebellious and so stiff-necked and maybe we see that in ourselves at times where we've gone our own way we've done the things that we want to do and we wonder how would God ever draw close to me but he does and that is the wonder of his grace maybe what we can say is that in our experience it is more like those who walked the Emmaus road you remember that story from the end of Luke the two men walked and whilst they went on their way and they were consumed with their worries and their anxieties they were reasoning out what had happened in their experience who draws right beside them but the Lord the Lord is with them and the Lord walked with them all the way and their own hearts were put on fire and they longed that this man would stay with them and subbed with them but he didn't it's like that in our experience we long for God maybe we wonder why he's not with us but unknown to us maybe he's walking right beside us maybe he's talking with us through his word maybe he's closer than we ever understand him to be and maybe it's only after that time that we realise just how close he was to us and he set it hard on fire and then we realise how gracious he has been to us and how he walked with us and how he talked with us and how he showed us through scripture who he is revealed these great things too as it just promotes praise and wonder within our hearts how gracious he is and how loving he is as we read in Isaiah

I love you and he's so considerate of the people in that passage but we as his people as we said we long for his presence and we long that God would draw near to us and it's a great motivator of our praise we may be familiar with the hymn abide with me abide with me fast falls the even tide the darkness deepens Lord abide with me abide when other helpers fail and comforts flee help of the helpless oh abide with me there's so many praises within scripture and hymns that have been written desiring the Lord to be with his people desiring personally that God would be there and would be known but often we doubt as we said that the Lord would be with us and it was true in the psalmist experience we saw that last week in verse 9 he said do not cast me off in the time of old age forsake me not when my strength is spent and we said that well even these great men of faith even these great examples of faith in our lives personally the doubts are instilled within them it is the truth of the

Christian that there are doubts within our hearts and if we were left to our own devices if we were left to reason things out if we were to see our sin before a holy and almighty God we would see our feelings we would see we would not understand how he would love us how he would draw near to us because he is so righteous we are so sinful it's almost the echo of psalm 13 he longed for God do not forget me draw near to him he was crying out to God almost as if the Lord had forgotten he felt that way and if we are left to our own devices that's the way we would become we feel like God will have left us but he doesn't we come back to the word of God and he says that he is faithful to those who trust in him and he loves us even when we when we walk away when we do things that are not pleasing to him and then we come back to him the prodigal son that left and came back the father will rejoice to see him the lord says to his people when you pass through water they will not overwhelm you through fire you shall not be burnt the lord is with his people and though we can have doubts in our experience it's true it's an undeniable truth that we will doubt and have doubts in our

Christian lives but the word of God when we come to it the word of God is so important when we doubt when we reason that God would never love us that we come to the word of God that says I love you it reorientates our minds it gives us a new understanding it gives us a different it gives us an eternal perspective it changes our view this is the word this is what the word of God does almost just what we said in Psalm 73 the psalmist had been seeing the things that the people were doing in the world and wondering why everything was going so well for them and he was struggling alone until he went to the Lord's house where the word would have been read out and he considered God and he heard of God his his view was reorientated to to view things eternally not in temporal means and that that changes things for us as believers

[18 : 38] Mac Shane says that to live near to God all things will appear as little in comparison to eternal realities all things will appear as little in comparison to eternal realities we can be so consumed with the little at times and we focus on the we focus on our own what's happening in our lives we kind of get bogged down in that the difficulties of the challenges of it whatever it may be the word of God makes us take a step back view things differently in light of eternal realities eternal truths eternal words that the Lord has spoken to us to draw near to God we all desire it and the

Lord draws near to his people we see there that in verse 13 that he he addresses his accusers so they would be brought to shame and consumed with scorn and disgrace they may be covered who seek my hurt and I don't want to really I don't have time to go into this but really he speaks of shame through this psalm that he would not be put to shame at the beginning and now he's saying that his accusers would be put to shame he wants them to feel shame he wants them to know they've done wrong for all they've done but he wants them to understand I believe this is what he is saying he wants them to see God he wants them to see the glory of God and what the Lord has done for them that they would might also know him and as he in verse 12 longs that God would not be far from him come down to verse 16 with me with the mighty deeds of the

Lord God I will come I will remind them of your righteousness your shalom that speaks of drawing near to God or being close to God but he doesn't in verse 12 he seeks God to come to him verse 16 he says I will come he constantly declares that he will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord for evil seeks to divide us from God but the strength of God will reunite us with him he remembers who God is and what he has done for him throughout the years of his life and he is confident knowing that God's hand is mightier and stronger than the hand of the evil one and it is in that name and in that power the Lord is God that he will come with confidence remembering who he is and all that his word has taught him but he will not forsake him in this time of need he will draw near to him when he is broken hearted if he draws near to God he will draw near to you let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need let us draw near with a true heart and full assurance different scriptures say that draw us near and call us to draw near the Lord will draw near to us and it is done in mighty deeds and again this is true that it is only by the power of the

Lord Jesus Christ that we can come at all it is through the mighty deeds that he has done for us at Calvary that we have any confidence to come and his faithfulness to go and give his life for us gives us assurance in our own faith that he loves us the Christ that was that sacrifice to atone for our sins to pay to pay for sin to separate us from sin so that we may be reunited with our God so that we may come and commune with God again Christ dealt with that great dividing element Christ Christ has restored our communion with God and it is through his mighty deeds that we can come at all and we go we go on we come to him in the strength of the

Lord our God we draw close to God but we come we constantly go on there's a consistency in our lives of coming to God and we'll just touch on consistency of the time that we have left verse 16 of the Psalter is maybe the one that we know and I will constantly go on in strength of God the Lord the wording it's slightly different it's quite different actually in verse 16 of the written Psalm but it carries that same emphasis in the strength and the mighty deeds of the Lord he will come and the constancy of coming comes through in the Psalm there from verse 14 in the central part of the central verse of the central part the main focus I but I will hope continually and will praise you yet more and more the great confidence is evident in his life

[25 : 11] I I will I will hope continually his faith in God to deliver him trusting that God will not put him to shame and he will not fail him in his promises I will hope continually and will praise you yet more and more and maybe this great resolve this great faith this great confidence has been something that's over a life as he has lived he looks back now as he comes to old age he says I will hope continually the Lord has been with me thus far and the Lord will not forsake me now the Lord will keep me and protect me as he did in the womb as we saw last week when he was so vulnerable and fragile when he had no strength of himself the Lord kept him there and so the Lord shall keep him now when he feels like his strength is likewise spent he will praise him more and more there's an increasing praise in his life as he as he grows in age he grows in faith he grows in praise of his Lord consistently praising his

Saviour and continually relying on the strength that is given to him such as you find in Isaiah 40 that those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength they shall mount up like wings like eagles they shall run and not be weary they shall walk and not be faint waiting in faith upon God it can be a great test of our faith and the hardest of circumstances it can be in the hardest of circumstances when as we said when faithfulness is most difficult it is most necessary and in our times when we feel like we are just holding on people are going to be looking at us and watching us to see how we react and what we do faithfulness isn't holding on until it gets bad and then letting go and doing what we want or doing what we think is right faithfulness is holding on every day every hour all the day and all the hour and all the year all the time consistently holding on to the

Lord holding on to all that we as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have in his word and his promises that he has redeemed us and that we hold on to that every day every year faithfully whatever the circumstances for us and he proclaims his mouth it's a thing of praise more and more and his mouth in verse 15 tells of all these righteous acts your deeds of salvation all the day for their number is past my knowledge it's almost as if as his praise grows more and more his cup is overflowing it's just been filled to the top his praise is so abounding that it is I remember an image of that cup overflowing and the water is making such a noise as it comes over the sides the faithful's proclamation and praise of how their cup has been so filled by the

Lord and the psalmist he's unashamed before his enemies he feels no shame for trusting well he may feel shame but he knows that he will ultimately not have shame before his enemies he knows that the Lord will not put him to shame and he knows that the Lord will honour him and yet at times we acknowledge it there may be an element of shame that we feel for trusting in our Lord it's a truthful thing but ultimately when we have that perspective that the word of God gives us we can see that it won't be shame it will be honour we need to have that eternal perspective that the word of God brings to us to rely on our own understanding and he has this praise within his heart all the day he proclaims these things and this phrase all the day it's something that comes through in this psalm three times maybe you've maybe not noticed it maybe you have it comes through in verse eight his mouth is filled with praise and glory all the day we have it here in verse 15 all the day proclaiming what his righteous acts the deeds of salvation all the day and then we have it there in the final version verse 24 my tongue will talk of your righteous help all the day it's a characteristic of a life of faith a person who is wholeheartedly holding on to his

Lord and knows that his Lord will not forsake that he will speak of his Lord all the day and he will continue in his worship of his Lord all the day he will hope continually verse 14 the main point of the psalm it's a continuous thing in his life and when he thinks about all the Lord has done for him all these things that provoke praise in his heart he comes to realize that well for their number is past my knowledge all your deeds of salvation I don't grasp them all they're beyond my understanding and you may know that yourself I've seen it to Fiona when we tell her testimony we can go so far and then it's like we just don't know how the

[32 : 03] Lord has worked and why the Lord did the things that he did we do not know and we're just left in wonder at the things that the Lord has done his deeds of salvation they are beyond their number is beyond our knowledge yes there are things that we look back and we see the Lord was with me then and they're here and there he guided me here and showed me this but equally we don't know exactly when he was there it's like we're walking the road to a maze and we don't know he's there and we don't even remember that he was there with us but he was and he guided us and he showed us the way and these things that we have no knowledge of it's just like our footsteps poem where they looked back together on the two pairs of footsteps then there was one and he asked why the

Lord had left him but it was that the Lord had carried him and he knew nothing of it but the Lord told him it's we don't know how close the Lord is to us at times and we wish we knew it we wish we felt that presence of walking with God every day but the reality of the Christian life is that it comes and goes at times yes we know it there's times where we don't feel it at all but nevertheless whatever we feel the Lord is with us the Lord draws close to us even when we don't realize it the Lord is often walking with us in our difficulties as the psalmist he had held fast to the Lord he asked the Lord to draw close to him and he declared that he would come it's almost got a relational element to it our faith is relational and the best of relationships are when each party longs to see each other when each side desires to be near again to talk and commune with one another long lost friends or relations that's what

Christ has done for us he will bring those who have been separated back together and we shall commune again with our Lord we draw near to God in worship as we come to him and we continue to do so we come to his word to be guided by it we pray that we would know and be encouraged by feeling his presence with us and that as we gather together we may know his blessings coming upon the people as he promises in Psalm 133 where the people gather he will pour down his blessings upon them so we go on in faith we may feel like our strength is spent we may feel like we are running on empty but we go on we go on we go on just as

Ali was praying we step by step we feel like we're slipping we feel like we're dragging our heels we feel like we're walking through sludge but we go on we constantly give on with the strength that the Lord gives to us it's not in our own strength the Lord strengthens us along the way and his faithfulness to us is our assurance in our faith as we as we go on to continue every day when faithfulness is most difficult it is most necessary I think that's something that we should all remember worth beneficial for us to remember that had got a go on person