

An Appeal to God (who is seemingly asleep)

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] in our worship now, and we're singing firstly today in Psalm 118, Psalm 118 on page 397, singing verses 1 to 9.

O praise the Lord, for he is good, his mercy lasteth ever. Let those of Israel now say, his mercy faileth never. Now let the house of Aaron say, his mercy lasteth ever. Let those that fear the Lord now say, his mercy faileth never. So this is a call by the psalmist to God's people, which applies nowadays to God's people, wherever they are, to come and praise the Lord for his goodness and for the mercy and loving kindness that lasts forever from him to his people.

Psalm 118, verses 1 to 9. O praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, for he is good, his mercy lasteth ever. Let those of Israel now say, his mercy faileth never. Now let the house of Aaron say, his mercy lasteth ever. Let those that fear the Lord

Azure say, his mercy lasteth ever. Let people have Quandohythmia in Jerusalem. dobr his mercy lasteth ever. suas mercy blanks whatever. Let those that fear the Lord have come as the Lord has come and has come before the Lord. Let those that fear the Lord have come and ■■■aillac as The Lord did answer me.

He in a large place stood. He said, from trouble made me free.

[2 : 36] The mighty Lord is on my side. I will not be afraid.

For anything that man can do, I shall not be dismayed.

The Lord doth take my part with them that help to succor me.

Therefore, O those that do me hate, I my desire shall see.

Better it is to trust in God and trust in man's defense.

[4 : 06] Better to trust in God than make princes our confidence.

Let's call on the Lord in prayer. This prayer is particularly for the young folks present and for the Sunday school.

Let's pray. Lord, our gracious God, once again we give thanks that you have gathered us here together to worship you today. We know that this is our great privilege and that we are blessed in even coming together this way.

We pray that your blessing will accompany, Lord, that privilege for us. We pray especially today for our children, for the young folks, and we ask that you would grant your blessing to them as once more we have them with us and we give thanks for them.

And we pray that they, as they grow up and continue to learn different things day by day, that they will learn especially more about yourself, that they will be blessed by you in such a way as to place their trust in you and come to follow you and confess you as their God.

[5 : 19] Remember them, we pray, as they receive further teaching today in Sunday school. Be with their teachers as well, as we give thanks for them. And grant, Lord, that your blessing will accompany all the efforts made in your name, both at home and in church, to have our young people schooled and nurtured in the things of God.

Make these things precious to them, we pray, and go before us now and pardon our sin. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Now I have here today an old recipe book.

It's called the Glaxo Recipe Book. Glaxo apparently was a substitute milk powder, which especially in the times after the wars you would have found very important with the scarcity of goods that people had then.

So I'm going to read a little bit from the introduction to this recipe book. It's not very big, but you can see it's very old and I have to handle it carefully. It doesn't actually belong to me, so it's on loan.

But here it's what it says. To compile this recipe book, we asked nurses to give us their best recipes for children and invalids. I don't think nurses probably do that nowadays, but in those days that's how it was done.

[6 : 35] These recipes were then tested and revised by our own cookery expert and other recipes added. The result is a collection of over 160 recipes, which while mostly suitable for everyday cookery, will be found particularly useful to those who have to cater for children, invalids, dyspeptics, and the aged.

And so it goes on. And it's a really interesting read, that introduction. It tells about glaxo itself. It was a powder which came from milk originally, made into a powder, and then you added water, and that was a substitute for milk.

For all of these recipes, you're asked to use the glaxo. And that's interesting that that's what they say at the beginning because obviously it had to be tested, first of all, to see whether it would work or work as well as ordinary milk or milk before it became powdered.

And it's interesting that the cookery experts that glaxo themselves had actually took the recipes the nurses provided and tested them out. And when you go through the book, it's really fascinating to find some of these recipes there, including cakes and biscuits and puddings and even such exotic recipes as stewed calves' feet.

Let's not go into that, but it's one of those recipes that's mentioned. So how would they know that the thing was actually, that this glaxo was going to work? How would they know that these recipes actually were recipes that were tasty?

[8 : 16] How would they know that a pudding made with glaxo was actually very nutritious and also very tasty? Well, you'd have to actually prepare it and then you'd have to eat it, of course.

And there's a saying nowadays, which is not actually accurately spoken. Many people will say, the proof is in the pudding. Well, that doesn't really mean anything, does it?

Because the proof of what? The saying is actually, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. You can only prove that a pudding is tasty and good for you or whatever by preparing it according to a recipe and then tasting it.

You make it up, you then eat it, and then you decide if it's tasty or maybe it's not. But you can only decide that by actually making it and eating it and tasting it.

Now, the Bible, in many ways, is God's recipe book. He has provided us with the Bible as a guidance to how our life should be lived.

[9 : 23] And if you look at the Bible as a recipe book, there are many things in there that you can only actually find out for yourself and prove to be as the Bible says by taking it to yourself and then by actually tasting and seeing that God is good.

How do you know that the peace of God is really precious? Well, not just by reading the Bible and reading about it, but by testing it for yourself.

You find that the peace of God is precious. By coming to Jesus, by doing what the recipe says, coming to Jesus, putting your trust in Jesus, loving Jesus, following Jesus, taking Jesus as your Savior.

And when you do that, and you confess your sins, and you ask God to pardon your sins, you ask God to accept you, all of these things are in the recipes of the Bible, if you like.

And as you do that, then you find out that these things are actually true and precious to yourself. You'll never find out that God is good just by reading about it.

[10:37] You have to test it out for yourself. And you know, one of the great things that we have in the gospel is an invitation to taste and see that God is good.

So I hope all young folks and older folks like ourselves as well today will know that for ourselves and realize that just having a Bible or having a Bible in our homes is good, but really there's more than that needed.

You need to use the Bible, take what it says into your heart, put it into practice in your life, and then you'll be able to truly see, I know that God is good.

I know that this Bible is true because I've tested it and tasted it for myself. Let's now say the Lord's Prayer together. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

[11:42] And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

I'm going to sing again to God's praise, this time in Psalm 141, Psalm 141. This time it's in the Sing Psalms, that's on page 185.

We're singing verses 1 to 5. O Lord, I call to you, come quickly, I'm in need. When I cry to you for help, to my appeal give heed.

Like incense, may my prayer before your face arise, the raising of my hands be like the evening sacrifice. Verses 1 to 5 to God's praise.

O Lord, I call to you, come quickly, I'm in need.

[12:47] And when I cry to you for help, to my appeal give heed.

Like incense, may my prayer before your face arise.

The raising of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.

Keep watch, Lord, on my mouth, and guard my lips, I pray.

Let not my heart to evil thoughts be drawn and led astray.

[13:52] Keep me from taking part in what the evil do.

Let me not taste their choices food, lest I be false to you.

A righteous friend's rebuke will be a soothing balm.

Such blows in kindness aimed at me will never do me harm.

Let's now turn to read God's word in the book of Psalms, Psalm number 44. Psalm 44, we'll read from the beginning right through to the end of the psalm.

[15:01] It's on page 564 or so if you're using the church Bibles. O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us what deeds you performed in our days in the days of old.

You with your hand drove out the nations, but them you planted. You afflicted the peoples, but them you set free. For not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm save them, but your right hand and your arm and the light of your face, for you delighted in them.

You are my king, O God, ordain salvation for Jacob. Through you we push down our foes, through your name we tread down those who rise up against us.

For not in my bow do I trust, nor can my sword save me, but you have saved us from our foes and have put to shame those who hated us. In God we have boasted continually and we will give thanks to your name forever.

But you have rejected us and disgraced us and have not gone out with our armies. You have made us turn back from the foe and those who hate us have taken spoil.

[16:23] You have made us like sheep for slaughter and have scattered us among the nations. You have sold your people for a trifle, demanding no high price for them.

You have made us the taunt of our neighbors, the derision and scorn of those around us. You have made us a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples.

All day long my disgrace is before me and shame has covered my face. At the sound of the taunter and the reviler, at the sight of the enemy and the avenger.

All this has come upon us, though we have not forgotten you and we have not been false to your covenant. Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way.

Yet you have broken us in the place of jackals and covered us with a shadow of death. If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign God, would not God discover this?

[17:25] For he knows the secrets of the heart. Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord?

Rouse yourself. Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust.

Our belly clings to the ground. Rise up. Come to our help. Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love. And again, may God follow with us blessing our reading of that portion of his word.

Let's call upon him again in prayer. O Lord, our God, we give thanks that your word draws us into circumstances that we find sometimes above our own experience, but very often also true to what we experience in this life.

And we thank you especially that in regard to all the experiences we have, you bring us to yourself. You bring us to know yourself. You bring us the account that we have in your word of your great doings, of your wisdom, of your sovereign government, of all that exists.

[18:43] And we thank you today that we have been reminded of that in this psalm. We thank you, Lord, for the facility you give us to pray, to appeal to you, to come before you, Lord, to entreat you that you would come once again with your blessing to visit us, that you would restore, that you would come and bring us once again this knowledge of your power, of your strength working in our own hearts, in our situations, in our circumstances, in our nation, even throughout the world.

Forgive us, Lord, we pray, for the many times we fail to acknowledge that you rule over us. Forgive us for the many times we neglect to think of your wisdom as so superior to ours, and that your plans are not like our plans, or your ways like our ways.

We thank you today, O Lord, that we can worship you in this way, and that you guide us by your word as to how we worship you and how we call upon you, and indeed what we can place before you.

We ask your blessing to be with us then today in our gatherings. We pray that your Holy Spirit once again will take your word, make it effective in our experience, we pray.

Lord, leave us not to its outward sound merely, but give us, like the psalmist, to delight in your word inwardly, that they may be our delight, even your laws, that we may find, Lord, our comfort in your word, in a world which has so much to discomfort your people.

[20:19] We ask today that you would continue to encourage us, to lift us up, that you will continue, Lord, to strengthen us against all the temptations that we face, temptations especially designed to draw us away from obedience to you, and designed, Lord, to demoralize and to bring us despondency instead of assurance.

We ask that you would grant to us, Lord, that today we may know that the Lord has indeed been amongst us, that you have been pleased once again to look upon us in your favor.

We ask that you would revive us and quicken us, give us in our hearts, Lord, to know of that work of your Spirit bringing us out of our times of gloom and despondency and even against the many things in the world that we know are contrary to you and contrary to the advance of your cause.

Nevertheless, help us to rejoice in you and help us to realize, Lord, once again, that you are the God who governs all things, even the movements of evil. We pray today for the world in which we live, the society we belong to ourselves, in our own locality and in our nation.

Lord, again, be merciful to us, we pray, as we bring before you so many things that are of a concern to your people. We ask that you would bring through the power of the gospel many people under conviction that the ways of sin are not ways that are good for us as a people.

[21:52] Not only are they ways of which you disprove, but they are ways that damage our lives, that prevent us from fulfilling the chief end of our creation, which is to glorify you and to enjoy you forever.

We ask your blessing today for the efforts being made against attempts in our own parliament, especially, to further reduce the impact of the gospel and the freedom with which we are able to declare the gospel and its message.

Lord, we pray that the attempts to introduce this bill against conversion practices, as they are called. We ask, Lord, that your people will be moved to counter it.

We pray that that attempt itself will fail, that you would show, Lord, your own great care and compassion towards your cause in doing this and help us, we pray, to respond as we are encouraged to this and to every other means by which we will seek to set the truth before the minds and the world of our day.

Lord, remember those who do roll over us. We pray for them. We pray that you would enlighten them in your paths. We pray that you would bring them, Lord, to your laws and to your word.

[23:10] We pray that you would come into their lives to give them to follow you, to give themselves over to you, to be ruled by you and to realize that obedience to Christ is not the restriction the world thinks it is, but is indeed the greatest freedom we can know.

And we pray that your blessing will be with all throughout the world today who are moved to pray and to act on behalf of the cause of Christ.

Encourage your people, we pray, and give us as we pray to you and seek to wait upon you for your answer that we may nevertheless, Lord, be encouraged to continue to wait upon you and to hold to the fact that your gospel is true, that your word will not return to your void, that it will accomplish that which pleases you.

We pray your blessing today for all other aspects of our national need and our local need. We pray that you'd bless all those today whom we know are caught up in various types of difficulties and challenges in life.

remember them, we pray, whether they're in terms of mental health or in terms of behavior, we ask that you would be gracious to us, Lord, and come and help those who maybe not themselves cry out to you at this time.

[24 : 36] We pray that you'd bring them to do so and we ask that you would help those who seek to help them. We remember those who provide care for us in our community. Again, we commend them to you, O Lord, and ask that you'd bless them in our health services of various kinds and the many other ways in which we find volunteers and paid employment too, helping us in our times of need.

Remember those who are ill at this time, continue to bless them. Remember those who are mourning the passing of loved ones. Draw near to them, we pray, to their comfort. Grant you blessing to our young folks.

We thank you for the time that the Bible class have had in Scalladale in recent days. We pray that that will be blessed to them. We ask that you would continue, Lord, to bless the teaching of your word to them and to the younger ones as well.

We pray that you bless our schools. We ask that in all our schools, O Lord, we indeed may know again the influence of your truth, the influence of your word, both on those who teach and those who are taught.

And we ask, Lord, that you would continue to provide us with the resources we need against the powers of worldliness, the powers of secularism, the powers that seek to destroy the impact of the gospel.

[25 : 56] Continue to hear your prayers, your people in their prayers. Guide us now, we pray, into your word. Hear us and bless us and forgive our sins. For Jesus' sake.

Amen. Before we turn to God's word, let's sing once again. This time we're singing in Psalm 43 on page 54. We'll sing these five verses.

Come, vindicate me, O my God. Against this nation plead my cause. Deliver me from wicked foes and hypocrites who break your laws. You are my stronghold and my God.

Why then have you rejected me? Why must I go about in grief, downtrodden by the enemy? And you can see that these words carry over into the next psalm, which we've read a short time ago.

Words where the psalmist is pleading with God to send out his light and his truth as he has that in verse 3 of this psalm. So we'll sing these five stanzas.

[27 : 03] Come, vindicate me, O my God. Come, vindicate me, O my God.

Against this nation plead my cause. Deliver me from wicked foes and hypocrites who break your laws.

You are my stronghold and my God. Why then have you rejected me?

Why must I go about in grief, death trodden by the enemy?

enemy. Oh, send your light forth and your truth.

[28 : 31] Let them direct me in your grace and bring me to your holy hill into your sacred dwelling place.

Then to God's altar I will go. To God my joy and my delight and I will praise you with the harp.

Oh, God, you are my God of might. Why are you downcast, O my soul?

Why are you so disturbed in me? Trust God for I will praise him yet my saviour and my God is he.

Let's turn now to the book of Psalms, Psalm 44. Psalm 44, especially the last few verses from verse 23 to 26. Awake, why are you sleeping, O Lord?

[30 : 28] Rouse yourself. Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust, our belly clings to the ground.

Rise up, come to our help. Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love. What's going on here?

Why would this man of God be so bold as to call upon God to awake as if he were sleeping? Why are you sleeping, O Lord?

Rouse yourself. Do not reject us forever. What's the context? What's behind that? What's the reason he would speak in that way to God?

Is that not wrong? Would we not find fault with him for doing so, for using these words as he addresses God? Well, perhaps, but we need to understand where that cry is coming from.

[31 : 32] Sam, you can say, divides into two main parts, verses 1 to 8. You'll notice as we read through it, verses 1 to 8 are in many ways a celebration of God's victories on behalf of his people, and especially how he brought them to be settled in the land of Canaan, his covenant people, having brought them out of Egypt safely and on through the wilderness.

But then there's a turn from verse 9 onwards. The first eight verses are verses that prepare us for the complaint and the context that bemoans the defeats that they have suffered.

We're not told the exact historical context of the psalm, but it's obviously a time when they faced defeat and experienced defeat against their enemies because, as you can see there in these verses, the Lord, he says, has rejected us, you have not gone out with our armies, you have made us turn back from the foe, and those who hate us have taken spoil, and then twice he says in the psalm, you have made us like sheep for the slaughter.

So the context is really that context of defeat and of seeing that God had not actually acted on their behalf as he had done previously.

and he's bringing this to God and actually setting that before God and expressing the pain of his heart, the bewilderment indeed of his heart as why is this the case?

[33 : 10] Why are we now like this when previously the Lord showed his power in our support on our behalf? Well, that's a pattern here that really the church of God, the people of God have known throughout history because as you know yourselves, there are periods in the history of the church down all these generations where you find times of blessings nevertheless accompanied by times of barrenness spiritually, times when the church has experienced growth, but that's sometimes accompanied or followed by or even preceded by times of reduction and lack of growth, indeed times when there's been such great decline numerically as well, times when the church has advanced, when the power of the gospel through the church, through God's people, has really had an impact on society, but times such as we're living in now when that's not the case, when you can say that these verses 9b to 10 might characterize the times in which we live, you have not gone out without armies, you've made us turn back from the foe, those who hate us have taken spoil, the reduction in the impact of the gospel, the reduction even in terms of not only the volume, the number of God's people that represent him and witness for him in the world, but how we ourselves experience such a lack of power accompanying that witness.

These are the kind of times that we have actually come to experience in the wisdom and the providence of God. And undoubtedly that's the case with the church in the west today, that while there are other parts of the world for which we give thanks to God, where the church is increasing, where the gospel itself is having an impact, even if you wouldn't necessarily agree with everything that's happening, nevertheless it's still the case that in other parts of the world the church is growing.

It's not the case by enlarge with ourselves in the western nations. And we find ourselves sometimes in the position of the psalmist here, asking the question why.

And there are three things I want to take from this context today. I want to look first of all at the importance of a living relationship with God.

Secondly, I would call our second point behind a frowning providence, taking words from William Cowper's great poem God Moves in a Mysterious Way.

[35 : 52] So that'll be our second point. We'll try and open up why we're giving it that title, that second point. The third will be, again, borrowed from Romans, this time Romans 15, these things were written for our instruction.

Things which are written beforehand were written for our instruction. So that's our way of final application of these verses and of the context in the psalm.

So the importance of a living relationship with God. The psalmist now has the benefit here, though he's speaking in this way, he has the benefit of personally knowing God.

You can see that coming through. Nobody would use these words in the form of a prayer and of an appeal unless he actually knew God to begin with. These are not the words of somebody who is a stranger to fellowship with God.

God. They're not the words of somebody who's never known God in his life. They're the words of somebody who values the relationship he and his people have with God, have had in the past with God, and continue to have with God.

[36 : 59] And that's why he can express his sorrow and his consternation and his puzzlement to God in his way. It's through this relationship that he has with God that he's able to use such language in expressing the sorrow of his heart.

And he even uses this language very boldly, this bold language, calling on God to awake. Why are you sleeping? Did the psalmist really believe that God had fallen asleep?

Of course not. God never slumbers nor sleeps. He knew that very well. But he puts it in this form as as to reinforce the strength of his appeal to God.

It's as if God has fallen asleep. It's as if God is no longer active. It's as if God has withdrawn his power altogether and is not prepared to come to bless them as his people anymore.

And so he uses this graphic language, awake, why are you sleeping? He didn't believe God was actually asleep, but it reinforces his appeal to God for God to act once again.

[38 : 08] as he used to in the past. In fact, you could say that the words he's using here actually reveals that he believes in a God who acts.

Why would he call upon God to come, as he put it here, to awaken himself from sleep and to show himself again if he didn't believe to begin with, this is the God who acts on behalf of his people, the God who actively intervenes for their support from time to time.

But he also believes in a God who is wise, who for his own sake sometimes does things like this, and instead of acting as he once did, he withdraws his power sometimes for reasons unknown to us.

God. But there's one of the great benefits we have in a living relationship with God. Where do you go today with the agonies of your heart?

Where do you go today with the things that really trouble you? Where do you go with the stirrings that come within your soul that you cannot really understand or fathom that cause you bewilderment?

[39 : 21] Where do you go with the events in your life that perplex you? Where do you go with the things that actually cause you real hurt and real pain and unexpected agony of soul?

You bring them to God and even if it's expressing it in this way it shows that you're bringing them to God means you still believe in him. You still believe in his power to act.

You still believe that he is able to help you. He allows us the outpouring of our grief. He allows us to frame things in question.

questions which perhaps at other times we wouldn't ask or wouldn't even need to ask. But as part of the greatness of our God, as part of the facility he gives us in his kindness, in his loving kindness, that's how the psalm finishes, redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love, your loving kindness, for your own sake, Lord.

Lord. And we today can bring to him all that is lying on our hearts and perhaps say to him as we would not say to anyone else, these Lord are the things that I'm experiencing.

[40 : 35] Come to me. Tell me why. Tell me about them. Explain them to me. Help me through them. What a great God we have that we can do this.

That we can do this and he doesn't then say to us, you put that into more decent language. You put that into language that shows you understand something more of what I'm doing. He doesn't turn us away and say, come back with your more polished prayers.

He hears us. He hears the cry of our souls. He hears the tears that sometimes fall from our eyes when we can't put into words the things that really bewilder us in this life.

God is still our God, even when we can't understand how he deals with us at certain times. Is that the case with yourself?

Do you have this living relationship with God where you can come not only to sing his praises as we do in church, but to sing his praises, even the kind of words that you find in the psalm that are real expressions of how you feel, how you know in your heart things to be?

[41 : 51] Are there things in your life today where you know things are not as they should be between yourself and God? Is God less clear to you today than he was previously?

Is there something in your life where you know there's something affecting your relationship with God? Or perhaps you haven't even come yet to embrace this God and all that he is.

Perhaps you'd rather the things were comfortable all the time. Well, so would I. But that's not the God we worship, the God we follow, the God we serve. Instead, we need to come at all times, as Psalm 34 begins, at all times I will bless the Lord, even the times when it's beyond your understanding why he's dealing with you in certain ways.

First thing then is a living relationship with God, the importance, the necessity of that, the need we have, each one of us, to have that for ourselves. Secondly, behind a frowning providence, as we said from verse 17, especially, the Psalm is showing why he's perplexed.

And what's really perplexing is that he's saying here, we have not forgotten you, verse 17, all this has come upon us, and we have not been false to your covenant, our heart has not turned back, not have our steps departed from your way, yet you have broken us.

[43 : 21] This is what makes it really perplexing. If he was coming with a confession of backsliding, a confession where he found the people and himself to have departed from the ways of the Lord, or as he says there, if we had forgotten the name of God and spread our hands to a foreign God, to idols, in other words, God would know this and he would make it known to us.

This is not the case. He's convinced that it's not because they've gone astray or badly astray that this has happened. So he's asking God the question, well, what is the meaning of this then?

Maybe in your life today, you can't put your finger on something you've done that you know is wrong and that you may think God is now laying some sort of chastisement upon you to bring you back to himself.

Maybe you say, well, I can't put my finger on anything, so why don't I have God's closeness the way I used to? Well, if you go to the book of Job, you'll find a man in exactly that position.

And the book of Job, difficult though many parts of it is to understand, we can certainly understand the main thread of it, which is this, God is showing, he's showing Satan, with which the book begins, the first few chapters, Satan coming to be given permission to attack Job.

[44 : 39] Job's a holy man. Job has not gone astray. Job is respected in his community as a man of God. And yet, he has this immense suffering laid upon him in God's providence.

God has given permission to Satan to attack him in this way. what's the purpose? What's the meaning? Well, so that when you look at the book of Job, God is showing that Job wasn't a believer for personal selfish reasons.

He's showing that Job didn't put his confidence and trust in God, as it were, just so he could get so much out of it for himself. He's showing that faith, in the case of Job, when we trust more and more in our own case, faith trusts in God, come what may.

Faith trusts in God not just in the fair weather, but during the storms. Faith is concerned to honor God, even at the worst of times, if we can put it that way, as much as the times when we have things going quietly and comfortably.

Whenever you find a Christian suffering, when you find a Christian obviously suffering, never conclude that that's a chastisement. Never conclude about that person, something's gone wrong between himself and God, he's done something or she's done something really bad, or else there wouldn't be that sort of suffering in their life.

[46 : 22] God sometimes brings suffering for other reasons, reasons known to himself, reason known to his wisdom. You see, that's when you go to the likes of Job and his wife came.

You remember early on in the book of Job, his wife came and was a temptation to him, used of course I'm sure by Satan as well, who's so involved, as we said, in the whole of Job's incidents.

You find there in Job chapter 2, verses 9 to 10, that this is what Job resisted, where his wife said to him, do you still hold fast your integrity?

Curse God and die. She was really saying to him, you know, you're believing in this God and look what's happened to your life. What benefit has it been to you? What advantage do you have continuing to believe in this God?

Now, what did he say? He said, you speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God? And shall we not receive evil or what is bad?

[47 : 26] In all this Job did not sin with his lips. That's why I've called this point behind a frowning providence. Because it's not always the case that God brings difficulty into our lives to test us by way of bringing us back from disobedience.

Every suffering is a form of testing, yes, but it doesn't always mean we've done something really badly wrong. You bring it back to that great poem of William Cowper's God moves in a mysterious way his judgments to perform.

And later on in the poem, these three verses, judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace. Behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour. The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower. Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan his works in vain.

God is his own interpreter and he will make it plain. Well, Cowper knew very well himself of grievous providences.

[48 : 48] He was a man who suffered from severe acute depression, a friend of the hymn writer John Newton, but that was his lot in life. And that's out of that agony of soul, out of that darkness that came upon him from time to time, he actually penned these wonderful words, words that have been such an assurance and comfort to God's people down through the ages.

God is his own interpreter and he will make it plain. His ways are not our ways, his paths are not as our paths.

Behind the frowning providence there hides a smiling face. that doesn't mean, of course, that when God lays something difficult and grievous upon us in providence, he's not correcting us into his way.

There are times when we do cause an interruption or a break between ourselves and God in fellowship, and that we need the kind of chastisement that sometimes he lays on us to bring us back.

But here is the man, a man in the psalm here as we're looking at it, in Psalm 44, who's asking these great questions of God in that context where as we see him awake, why are you sleeping, rouse yourself, do not reject us for his concern, is not just for himself, his concern is for the people of God, for the cause of God, for the name of God, for the reputation indeed of God, because they have just capitulated against the enemies of God, the enemies of his people.

[50 : 29] And the psalmist here is concerned that God would come to act for them once again, and show once again his power and his grace.

A living relationship with God behind a frowning providence. And then from the book of Romans, some verses from chapter 15, just to make our third point, it's written for our instruction, verses 3 and 4 of chapter 15 of Romans.

Romans, where he says that Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me. For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope.

That's why it was written. That's why these passages exist in the Bible. That we, through encouragement and assurance of the scriptures, might have hope, that we might come to have assurance.

And interestingly, it's in Romans chapter 8, we'll see that in a minute, that Paul actually quotes from this Psalm, Psalm 44, these words that we are made as sheep for the slaughter.

[51 : 44] But let me take you to another incident first of all, before we come to that, and you'll find it in the Gospels, especially in Mark's Gospel. I'm going to read from Mark's Gospel, and from chapter 4, and verses 37 to 38.

This is something that took place when the disciples were on the sea in the storm. And when Jesus came to them, and when Jesus rather was in the boat, but actually was asleep at the back of the boat.

And the disciples called upon him, did they not care for him, for them at all? Why was he sleeping in this way? Very similar really in a sense to what you find in Psalm 44.

And when the disciples came and found Jesus asleep, how did he actually respond? He said, where is your face? Now that's really interesting in the context. And then of course he arose and rebuked the wind, the storm, and the sea became a great calm.

And they were amazed, and they said, who is this then? That he commands even the wind and the seas to obey him. She has the whole point of the purpose to bring the disciples to learn something more about Jesus.

[53 : 00] To actually come once again to stand in the presence of Jesus and say, this is no ordinary man, this is no ordinary person, this is a person who's got extraordinary ability and power, and he's here with us, and he's in this boat, and he's looking after us.

See, that's one of the great privileges we have in this life. These disciples were actually quite safe, even while Jesus was sleeping. The storm was not going to overwhelm them, but they were being tested.

That's why he addressed them in terms of their faith, or indeed the lack of their faith. And so, for you and I as well, our privilege is to learn more and more about God.

And sometimes that comes through the asking of questions in really difficult times. But when we use that facility to come to God, and wait upon God, and bring our concerns to him, we know that he's still the same God.

We know that he hasn't changed. We know that even although things change maybe in our relationship with him, in terms of how we see things and how we feel things to be, essentially, nothing is different with God.

[54 : 18] He remains the same. He remains faithful. He remains the God we can depend upon, the God we can pray to, the God we can pour our heart out to, and bring our concerns to him.

And then, I mention Romans chapter 8, again written for our instruction. Romans chapter 8, one of the great chapters of this great book of the Bible.

And near the end of the chapter, Paul moves to encouraging those Christians in Rome by that wonderful passage, beginning verse 31.

What shall we then say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he also not with him graciously give us all things?

And so it goes on. These questions that he then puts in the form of questions that are designed to assure us, designed to encourage us, to reinforce the truth that we know about God.

[55 : 21] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword, as it is written, and here's Psalm 44, for your sake we are being killed all the day long, we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

Why does Paul find Psalm 44, given the kind of Psalm it is, to be so meaningful and important in the context of encouragement, the context of giving assurance to those people that he's writing to, that God has not changed?

Well, because that's the context in which, as we're seeing, Psalm 44 has to be looked at as a sign itself of encouragement, pouring out the heart before God and waiting upon God.

Somebody put it this way, and I like this way of describing it, the use of these words here from Psalm 44 in Romans 8, a passage of great encouragement.

Sometimes he says, the scars that we bear, the sufferings that we have to go through as Christians, he said, they are actually more battle scars rather than punishments.

[56 : 35] What he meant by that was that, as he put it again, in our battle with the world, in our fighting against a world which is at war with God, why would we not expect some scars, some battle scars?

Why would we not expect sometimes to be defeated rather than just pushing and advancing all the time? Why would we not expect the kind of suffering that really tests us, just like a soldier on the front line is tested, seeing many of their comrades killed, all different kinds of testings, it's all part of the war, part of the engagement, part of the battle scene, and many go home with mental and physical scars from that battlefield, and God's people are like that spiritually.

We bear battle scars. We bear sufferings to do with following Christ, to do with faithfulness to Christ.

And you know, these words in the psalm are picked up as well in Paul's use of them. For your sake we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

In many ways that's really the key to everything, isn't it? For your sake. For the Lord's sake. Why are we engaged in a battle against the world in its opposition to the gospel?

[58:02] Why are we engaged in living the kind of life that's contrary to the world, and therefore attracting suffering and difficulty and challenge to ourselves? Why is it done?

What is the purpose of it? What is the rationale? It's for his sake, isn't it? Why are we encouraged to combat the attempt that are being made to introduce further measures in law that would curtail the gospel for his sake?

That's why. Why do we encourage one another as those who are together in this battle? For his sake.

For his loving kindness sake. The struggles, the defeats, the challenges, the hurts and the pains of being a soldier of Christ, male or female, they're not evidences that God has forgotten us.

They're evidences of the struggles that we're engaged with in our war with sin and with the world. They're marks of honor, in fact, in that sense. You wouldn't have them if you weren't a Christian.

[59:12] You wouldn't have them if you didn't belong to these people who are sometimes bewildered, but can bring their bewilderment to God and wait upon him until he comes once again to act on their behalf.

It's an aspect of that living relationship with him. So today, friends, don't be discouraged. Don't be discouraged when you look into yourself and find much to be discouraged about.

Don't be discouraged as you look out on that world and find even more to be discouraged about. Don't be discouraged when you are sad about how little impact the gospel and the church has in our society today.

Don't be discouraged. Take all of that to God. Bring all of that into your living relationship with him. Set it out before him. Pour out your heart to him. Beseech him.

Appeal to him to come as if you were sleeping, to rise up again like the psalmist here, to come and revive his cause and revive ourselves. In other words, make it a means of encouragement to pray and to beseech and to appeal to God and to continue to serve him.

[60:26] May God bless these thoughts on his word. Let's conclude by singing some more verses this time. We're singing from Psalm 119. Psalm 119 and at verse 51, that's on page 404.

And singing from verse 51 down to the end of that section, verse 56.

The men whose hearts with pride are stuffed did greatly me deride, yet from thy straight commandments I have not turned aside. Thy judgments righteous, O Lord, which thou of old forthgave, I did remember, and myself by them comforted have.

Horror took hold on me, because ill men thy law forsake. I in my house of pilgrimage, thy laws my songs do make. Thy name by night, Lord, I did mind, and I have kept thy law, and this I had, because thy word I kept and stood in awe.

from verse 51 to the end of the section. The men whose hearts with pride are stuffed did greatly me deride, yet from thy straight commandments I have no turn aside.

[62:13] Thy judgments righteous, O Lord, which thou of old forthgave, I did remember and myself by them comforted have.

Horror took hold on me, because ill men thy love forsake.

I in my house of pilgrimage, thy laws, thy songs to make thy name my night, Lord, I did mine, and I have kept thy law, and this I had, because thy word I kept and stood in all.

Can I ask you to be seated for a moment, please? I have something to announce to you. I notified the Kirk session last Monday, and the presbyter the following day, Tuesday, of my intention to retire, and to retire as from the end of June this year.

So it's only right that you, as the congregation, would actually have that announcement as well. So we've got a few months yet, it'll go past fairly quickly, I'm sure, God willing, but it's only right that you know that just now, and especially for those who need to make some preparation for the time after which I'm no longer here as minister.

[64 : 53] It's something that I find difficult to announce, simply because of the love that you have shown to me, and the love that I have for you, as the congregation, God has called me to the final part of my ministry in, and that has been certainly a time of much delight to myself of much benefit, and I hope to yourselves as well.

So that's really all there is to it, let's just enjoy, God willing, the months we still have together, until that final cut-off point comes. After the benediction just now, I'll go to the door here to my right, no, I'll go to the main door because I won't see you this evening, at least not at the door, so I'll go to the main door after the benediction.

Please stand there for the benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and ever more.

Amen. his name ■■■■■■■ and the behavior you Thank you.