

Psalm 71

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Preacher: Greg Hendrickson

[0 : 00] If you want to turn in one of the Bibles to look along with me, if you're looking at one of the Pew Bibles, it is page 484, Psalm 71.

We've been doing a series in the Psalms this summer, and we'll be concluding it this week and next week, and then we'll be starting a new series in two weeks. In the evening service, we'll be looking at the Gospel of Mark, at the question of who is the real Jesus, and then in the morning service, we'll be starting a series in the book of Hebrews.

So I want to invite you to consider coming to one or both of those, the evening service or the morning service, or both. So Psalm 71, this is, we don't know who wrote this psalm.

It might have been David, or it might have been someone else, but we know that it has come to us as God's Word, and we're thankful for that.

So let me read Psalm 71 for us tonight. In you, O Lord, do I take refuge. Let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness, deliver me and rescue me.

[1 : 11] Incline your ear to me and save me. Be to me a rock of refuge, to which I may continually come. You have given the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.

Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel man. For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, for my youth. Upon you I have leaned from before my birth.

You are he who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you. I have been as important to many, but you are my strong refuge. My mouth is filled with your praise and with your glory all the day.

Do not cast me off in the time of old age. Forsake me not when my strength is spent, for my enemies speak concerning me. Those who watch for my life consult together and say, God has forsaken him.

Pursue and seize him, for there is none to deliver him. O God, be not far from me. O my God, make haste to help me. May my accusers be put to shame and consumed.

[2 : 15] With scorn and disgrace may they be covered who seek my hurt. But I will hope continually and will praise you yet more and more. My mouth will tell of your righteous acts, your deeds of salvation all the day.

For their number is past my knowledge. With the mighty deeds of the Lord God I will come. I will remind them of your righteousness, yours alone. O God, from my youth you have taught me.

And I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs. O God, do not forsake me. Until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.

Your righteousness, O God, reaches the high heavens. You who have done great things, O God, who is like you? You have made me see many troubles and calamities.

But you will revive me again. From the depths of the earth you will bring me up again. You will increase my greatness and comfort me again. I will also praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God.

[3 : 18] I will sing praises to you with the lyre, O holy one of Israel. My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to you. My soul also which you have redeemed. And my tongue will talk of your righteous help all the day long.

For they have been put to shame and disappointed who sought to do me hurt. For much of his life, he was a missionary in South America. He invested his life in preaching the gospel, in starting new churches, in caring for people.

When he retired, he and his wife moved back to the U.S. A few years later, he began to lose his memory. He was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and moved by his daughter to an assisted

living facility.

Eventually, he could not remember where he was. He could not even remember who his daughter was when she came to visit him. But he would walk the corridors, singing the hymns of praise that he had sung all of his life.

And greeting people and welcoming them as if they had just arrived in his church. Even in his mentally impaired state, he became, in his old age, what he had clung to throughout his life.

[4 : 32] What kind of person will you be when you grow old? The psalm we're looking at today is written by someone facing the reality of old age.

Now, we don't know exactly what decade he's in. But he's old enough to look back on his youth as a time of the past and to recognize the inevitable approach of old age and its challenges.

Now, for some of you, that might be exactly where you are in life. You know that you're not young anymore. And you're beginning to experience the pains and fears and limitations of growing old.

But for many of us, many of us are relatively young.

Maybe you're looking forward to going back to school this fall. Or starting college. Or grad school. Or applying for a job. Or trying to advance in your career. Or getting married and raising a family.

[5 : 35] And you might think, well, why should I care about a psalm written for people who are twice or three or four times my age? You know, I still have most of my life ahead of me.

I'll deal with the problems of growing old when I get there. But let me say two things, if that's you.

First, even if you're not old yourself, this psalm can help you as you care for people who are facing old age.

It can give you some encouragement, ways to encourage and challenge them spiritually from the truth of God's Word. But more importantly, whatever your age, whether you're young or old, the patterns and habits that you develop now in your younger years will launch you on a course for the rest of your life.

Whether you intend to or not, the life that you're living today in the present will shape you into the person that you will become in the future.

So this psalm is not just for people over 50. This psalm is written to help all of us face reality. Unless we die young, we will all grow old.

[6 : 46] And this psalm is written to prepare us for that. So whether we're young or old or anywhere in between, this psalm gives us two habits to develop in order to run the race of life and to finish it well.

And the two habits are dependent prayer and confident praise. Now if you look at the psalm as a whole, I spent a couple days this week reading through this psalm and trying to figure out how is this psalm structured and ordered.

And it's maybe not immediately apparent, but what I've settled on is that he goes back and forth between crying out for help, prayer, and singing God's praises.

So if you look verses 1 through 4, he's crying out for help. Verses 5, excuse me, verses 5 through 8, he's singing God's praises. 9 through 13, he's crying out for help.

14 through 17, he's singing God's praises. 18, crying out for help. 19 through 24, singing God's praises. Now you might think, goodness, this guy is just a yo-yo, going back and forth and back and forth.

[7 : 52] But he's being honest. He's bringing his doubts and fears before God and turning them into prayer. And then he's bringing his knowledge of God and turning that into praise.

So that's the two things that this psalm shows us and calls us to do, is to turn our doubts and fears into dependent prayer and turn our knowledge of God into confident praise.

So let's look at those two things in turn. First, turning our doubts and fears into prayer. The psalmist is very honest about his doubts and fears.

And as he looks back on his life, verse 20, he says, I have seen many troubles and calamities. In other words, he hasn't had an easy life. In verse 7, he says, I have been a portent to many.

Now you might look at that word like I did and think, what does that word mean? So I had to go online and look at the dictionary and do some research and some commentaries. So a portent is a sign or a wonder.

[8 : 55] It's something that causes people to marvel. And depending on the context, it can have either a positive or a negative meaning. So he could be saying, my life has been a sign of the wonderful, miraculous provision of God.

And ever since I was born, people look at me and praise God for his goodness. They marvel at God's goodness. But in this, but in the context of the whole psalm, it's more likely actually that he's using the word in a negative sense.

People aren't gazing at him in admiration. They're looking at him and drawing back in horror.

They're saying, look at this guy. Look at all the terrible things that he's gone through.

That must mean that God has abandoned him, that he's cursed. So I'm not going to keep my distance. I'm not going to associate with him. If you look at verse 10 and 11, that's exactly what his enemies are saying.

God has forsaken him. There's no one to deliver him. So he's had a hard life. He's facing people who want to undermine him and take advantage of him.

[10:06] And then as he looks to the future, he's facing the fears and uncertainties that come with growing old. Now, there are many fears that come with growing old. Whether it's fear of losing your job and not being able to get another one.

Because, you know, there's not a lot of employers who prioritize hiring people in their 60s today. Or fear of getting sick. Not being able to take care of yourself.

Not being able to think clearly. Or maybe the biggest one, the fear of being abandoned. As you see friends die or move far away.

Maybe your kids grow up and pursue their own lives. And don't seem interested in spending time with you anymore. Or if you're single. Or if you have no children.

Or if you're divorced or widowed. You wonder, will somebody be there for me? Will anybody be there for me when I really need someone?

[11:05] And these are all very real fears. But what we see is that the psalmist takes his fears and turns them into prayer. He doesn't just live in denial.

He doesn't just say, I'm not going to think about those things. He doesn't say, well, God loves me.

So he's going to protect me from any bad things happening to me. He's had a hard life. He's trusted God his whole life.

And he's had a really, really hard life. So he knows that that's not a... That following God doesn't guarantee that life goes smoothly. And he doesn't...

But he also doesn't respond to his fears and doubts. He says, no. No, all the bad things that have happened in the past.

And all the fears and uncertainties I have about the future. They're just more reasons for me to turn to God. He says, oh God, be not far from me.

[12:01] Make haste. Come quickly. Help me. It's almost a desperate cry. He's saying, God, I need you more than anything else. Everyone else has forsaken me.

God, don't leave me alone like everyone else is. Take me in. Be my refuge. The place where I can come and be safe from all the threats and all the accusations and all the shame.

And all the guilt that I feel. And then as he faces the future, he makes the same request. He says, God, don't forsake me when I get old.

Verse 9 and verse 18, he says the same thing twice. Don't forsake me. Don't leave me alone. So he turns his doubts and fears into prayer.

You know, whether you're young or old, doubts and fears are a normal part of human experience.

Including Christian experience. You know, some people say that the minute you ask Jesus into your life to be your Lord and Savior, that you should, for the rest of your life, every single day, every single moment, have 100% complete assurance that you belong to God and you're destined for eternal life.

[13:15] Now, in one sense, that's totally true. Jesus says, all that the Father has given me will come to me. And whoever comes to me, I will never cast away.

And he says, I will lose none of all that he has given me. But I will raise them up at the last day. So Jesus is completely sure of his commitment to us.

And he will not waver. But you know what? You won't always feel that way. You won't always get up every morning and bounce out of bed and start singing the praises of God.

Sometimes, you might struggle to drag yourself out of bed at all. You might lie in bed sometimes in the middle of the night with anxious thoughts flooding your mind.

You might ask yourself, maybe you are asking yourself, am I really a Christian at all? Even if you've followed God for a long time, like this psalmist, you might experience doubts and fears for all kinds

of reasons.

[14:22] Now, some of you might have grown up in places where almost everybody identifies as Christian. So growing up, maybe you didn't really have any doubts. Because your family was Christian.

And almost all your friends are Christian. And it all seemed to make sense. And nobody really tested you with hard questions. But now you've come to the Northeast. Right?

And you might be working or studying alongside all kinds of very smart people. Maybe people who are much smarter than you. Very creative, very compassionate people who don't believe in God at all.

Or follow a completely different religion. So, it's very common that being engaged with your fellow students or your co-workers might raise questions.

That you haven't thought about before. And being in a stressful environment can make you feel fear and insecurity in a way that you haven't felt before. So, if that happens to you, don't be taken off guard.

[15:27] You know, just because you have doubts and fears doesn't mean that Christianity is false. It doesn't mean that you're not a Christian at all. It's not about whether you have doubts and fears.

It's about how you respond to them. There are temptations. Doubt can lead us to paralyzing despair. To just doing nothing.

Which isn't a neutral position to be in either. Fear. Fear can drive us to anxious activity.

And constantly trying to prove ourselves to other people or to ourselves. And both doubt and fear can tempt us to withdraw from the church or from other Christians, from the community of faith.

But this psalm calls us to resist those temptations. Not to despair. Not to be filled with anxiety. Not to withdraw and isolate ourselves. But instead to bring our doubts and fears before God.

[16:28] Honestly. In prayer. Alongside other believers. So, let me urge you. If a few months from now, or a couple years from now, you get to the point where you feel like you have a whole bunch of new questions that you can't answer.

Or if you feel swamped by all your work and far away from God. Don't stop coming to church.

Because many of us here in the church have dealt with the same things.

We face the same doubts. The same fears. The same pressures. So, let's talk about it. Fill out a prayer card. So, we can pray for you. Join a small group.

Where you can get to know some other Christians. And talk and pray for one another. But most of all. Let your doubts and fears.

Whatever they might be coming from. Let them drive you to prayer. And dependence on God. Sometimes experiencing trials. And pressures.

[17:30] Can show us more than anything else. How much we need God. Every single day. Every single moment. So, may your doubts and fears drive you to Jesus.

And cause you to cling to him. As your refuge. And your rock. And your fortress. And the one who will keep you safe. Now, the writer of this psalm.

As we've seen. He was most likely an older man. But you know. He learned to pray. When he was very young. And we know that. Because verse 5 and verse 17. He says.

God, you've been my source of hope. Since my youth. You've taught me. Ever since I was young.

And we know that he had prayed a lot. In his life. Because the words of this psalm.

Echo the words of previous psalms. I've included a list. In your. Inside the bulletin. On the insert. Of echoes of this psalm. And you might be asking. Well, what's the point of all these parallels.

[18:28] With other psalms. Well, you know. He wasn't sitting at his computer. On Bible Gateway. Cutting and pasting verses. Because he couldn't think of anything original to say.

No. It's the opposite. He had spent so much time. Praying. In the words of these other psalms. That the words. Just became part of who he was.

And so when he prayed in his old age. He just prayed. With those words. That he had prayed. With his whole life. And if you read certain books. By old Christian writers.

You'll see this pattern. So if you read. Pilgrim's Progress. By John Bunyan. Or if you read. The Confessions of St. Augustine. Just for two examples. They're full. Of allusions.

And quotations. And echoes. Of the scripture. In fact. If you try to list them all. It's hard to even list them all. Because these people. Spent so much time. Reading the scripture.

[19 : 25] Memorizing the scripture. Praying. In the words of the scripture. That it just. Became part of who they were. They ate. And drank. God's word.

And so it just came out of them. Naturally. Freely. In their words. In their writings. In their prayers. You see. What we cling to. When we're young.

We become. When we get old. What we cling to. When we're young. That's what comes out of us. When we get older. So turn your doubts and fears. Into prayer. Today.

So that when you face the challenges of growing older. That you won't despair. And you won't be. A nervous wreck. And you won't. Run away and isolate yourself.

But you'll cling to Jesus. And cry out to him in prayer. So that's the first thing. Turn your doubts and fears. Into prayer. The second thing that this psalm teaches us to do.

[20 : 21] Is to turn our knowledge of God. Into confident praise. And praise. You know. It's not just about us. And our situation. And our struggles. And our doubts.

And our fears. The psalm isn't just about the psalmist. And his life. It's also about God. And what the psalmist knows to be true. About God.

And as he's lived a long life. He's had a long time. To learn. Many things. Many truths. About God.

And so he takes those truths that he's learned. And he turns them into praise.

So verses 5 and 6. He says praise God. For his provision in the past. As we've seen. He says you've been my source of hope. And confidence. Ever since I trusted you.

But then he goes back even further. Verse 6. Upon you I have leaned from before my birth. You are he who took me from my mother's womb.

[21 : 18] He doesn't just say. God you've taken care of me. As long as I can remember. He says God you've taken care of me. Before I can remember. Now I have a son.

He just turned 3 this week. And ever since he was born. My wife and I. Have invested a lot of time and energy. In him. And my wife invested a lot of time and energy.

Over the 9 months before he was born. In caring for him in utero. Right. But as I think back. On my own childhood. My earliest memories are from about 4 years old.

I don't have any distinct memories. Of all the ways. That I was cared for by my parents. And by others. During the first 4 years of my life. Let alone.

The 9 months in my mother's womb. Think about it. God in his providence. Has cared for you. In more ways than you will ever know.

[22 : 16] Know. Or remember. In fact. He's cared for you. In more ways that you don't know. Than ways that you do know. And his care for you.

Is not a function. Of your performance for him. Right. God's care for us. Flows out of his steadfast love. His unchanging faithfulness.

From the beginning. To the end. And that's what gives the psalmist confidence. In facing the challenges. Of growing old. Now. He doesn't just look back.

At God's care for him. He also looks back. At God's care for his people. For his community.

Throughout history. This is verse 15 and 16. He praises God. For his mighty deeds. His righteous acts.

And he says. There are too many to count. You might ask. Well what was he thinking of? Well probably. First and foremost in his mind. Would have been. The exodus. When God brought the people of Israel.

[23 : 12] Out of slavery in Egypt. And brought them into the desert. And then they faced this wall of water. At the Red Sea. And the Egyptians coming behind them. Wanting to destroy them. And God made a way.

Where there was no way. And he brought them through. Actually verse 19. He's quoting. From the song that Moses sang. After God had brought them through the Red Sea.

Where he says. God. You've done great things. Who is like you? No one is like you. So he looks back. And he says. We were helpless. We were as good as dead.

And in your righteousness. In your faithfulness to us. Your faithfulness to your promise. You stepped in. And rescued us. And that's why I'm here today. And as Christians.

We can do the same thing. We can look back. We look back. Especially to the death and resurrection of Jesus. That's what defines us more than anything else.

[24 : 11] Right? God's saving righteousness. While we were still sinners. Jesus died on the cross for us. And he rose again for us. And he ascended into heaven.

And he's seated at the right hand of the Father. And all that happened. Before any of us were born. Before any of us knew a thing about it. He did it. Already.

Because he's a faithful, righteous God. And because he acts toward us in steadfast love. And that's what gives us confidence.

In facing the future. Whatever the uncertainties that you're facing right now. Even if it's old age.

Even if it's death. You can find confidence in God's unfailing love.

And in his righteousness and faithfulness. You know, in some ways, getting old can make you a little bit like a child. Like a baby. All over again.

[25 : 11] You become physically weak. And needing others to care for you. Limited in how easily you can move around. You might feel less able to contribute.

And often in our culture. Less wanted. Less valued. Sometimes even pushed to the side. In favor of somebody younger and stronger. Or maybe.

Instead of you taking care of your kids. Your kids are starting to take care of you. That's a big switch. But whatever you're facing. Look back to God's provision in the past.

When you are a helpless collection of cells. Clinging to the wall of your mother's womb. God did not forsake you. And he will not forsake you in old age.

Even if you become completely physically helpless. And just as he brought you out of your mother's womb. And into the world. He has promised in Jesus Christ.

[26 : 09] To raise you up from the grave. That even death cannot separate you. From God's unfailing love. And his promise in Jesus Christ. That's what Jesus promises.

That one day he'll raise up everyone who believes in him. To stand in his presence. And praise him with unending joy. So whether you're old or young.

Praise God for his provision in the past. And praise God for his promise. For the future. That's why this psalm ends. With praise. He goes back and forth.

And back and forth. And back and forth again. But he ends. With praise. And that's actually how the book of Psalms goes. As a whole. This summer we've looked at book two.

Of the psalms. Which is Psalm 42 through 72. And Psalm 42 begins. With a psalm that says. Where he's thirsting for God in the desert. As the deer pants for streams of water.

[27 : 09] My soul longs for you Lord. He's in the desert. He's longing for God. And he doesn't feel God's presence. And he's saying God. He's crying out for help. But then we come to the end.

Of this second book of the Psalms. We have this psalm. And then the psalm we're looking at next week. Is a psalm about the great king. It's about Jesus. The great king will reign forever.

And the world will flourish. And everything will be made right. Under his good rule. It's really a picture of heaven.

Coming to earth. That's how the psalms progress. And then if you go all the way to the end of the psalms. The last seven psalms. Are all songs of praise. Triumphant praise.

The point is. That's where we're headed. And walking this journey of life. There's plenty of doubts. And fears. And trials. And tears. But in Jesus Christ.

[28 : 08] We're destined for an eternity. Of joyful praise. And so old age. It's not just the last stage. Of life on earth.

It's not just the last. And maybe. One of the more difficult parts. Of all the fears. And trials. And pain. That we experience in this world. It's a prelude.

It's a prelude. To eternity. It's a prelude. To life. When we'll praise God. Unhindered. And unending. That's what our whole life is. That's why Jesus says to his disciples.

He doesn't just say. One day. One day. One day. After you die. I will give you eternal life. It says. Anyone who looks to the son. And believes in him.

Has eternal life. In other words. We have eternal life. Now. In the present. And then it's going to continue. Forever. Forever. We have that life.

[29 : 07] That we're going to. The first fruits of that life. That we're going to experience in full. Now. By trusting in Jesus. So if you're facing old age. Let this last stage of your life on earth.

Be characterized by preparing. For eternity. Praise God. For his provision in the past. Look forward to his promise for the future. As your years increase.

Let your praise of God increase. You know. For some people. As their years increase. Their bitterness increases. They become cranky.

And disagreeable. Because the things of this world. Which they held on to. And found joy in. For many years. Are being taken away from them. And they can't do a thing about it. So whether you're young or old. Don't cling. To the things of this world. Hold them loosely.

[30 : 08] Cling. To Jesus. And he will become ever more precious to you. As the days. And the years. Go by. Let me conclude by looking at verse 18.

The psalmist prayer. He says even to old age and gray hairs. Don't forsake me God. Until I proclaim your might. To another generation. Your power to all those to come. You see.

God's purpose. In bringing you. Into the time of old age. Is not just so you can. Enjoy a pleasant retirement. Or spoil. Your grandchildren.

Or pursue all the hobbies. And interests. That you didn't have time to pursue. As a younger person. His purpose for you. As an older person. Is to take all that God has taught you. During your earthly life.

And pass it on to others. For his glory. And praise. In other words. It's not just about. Making your way to the end. It's about singing. Your way to the end.

[31 : 09] And singing. So that others can hear. And follow your trail. So let me urge you. Be intentional. In seeking to engage. Those of us who are younger.

To give us reasons. To praise God. Because of who he is. And what he's done for you. And what you know. Is true about him.

And what you've learned. And what he's taught you. Throughout your whole life. Now I know this isn't always easy. Many times those of us. Who are younger. Can seem. Can be.

Preoccupied. Or standoffish. Or even rude. Please forgive us. For our immaturity. But don't give up on us. We need you.

As a part of this church. We need you in our lives. We need you. To pray for us. You know. One of the most important things. That you can do. For somebody else. Is to consistently.

[32 : 05] Pray for them. Whether you're young. Or old. It doesn't have any. Physical ability requirements. You know. In the church I grew up in. There were two old ladies.

Their names were Irma. And Kathy. And neither of them. Were related to me. By blood. But both of them. Prayed for me. Regularly.

Irma prayed for me. Every single day. Until she died. At age 96. Just six years ago. Now in their later years. They couldn't leave their house.

But if you visited them. They could tell you. Of God's faithfulness. And they could sing. God's praises. What kind of person.

Will you be. When you grow old. You'll become. Like. What you cling to now. So cling. To the Lord. Jesus. Turn your doubts.

[33 : 00] And fears. Into prayer. Turn your knowledge of him. Into praise. Let's pray. Amen. Lord God.

We thank you. For your faithfulness. We thank you. For your faithfulness. To this. Psalm writer. For preserving. His. Prayer.

His song. For us today. So that we might join in. In singing this song. About you. As our refuge. And our rock.

And our fortress. Lord. That we might. Come before you. In prayer. And bring all of our doubts. And all of our fears. And all of our needs.

And to cry out to you. For help. And yet. To remember. Lord. Help us to remember. What you've done in the past. Help us to look forward. To what you promised. For the future. Lord.

[34 : 00] Lord. We pray that. With every year. That. Passes by. That we would praise you. More and more.

And that we would give. One another. And other people. Reasons to praise your name. For your righteousness. And your faithfulness.

We pray in Jesus name. Amen.