

Guest Pastor

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- [0 : 0 0] Psalm 77 tonight. Psalm 77. It's a privilege to be here tonight. And when you're in someone else's pulpit, it's a great privilege and it's a great honor.
- And I want to do my best anytime I'm standing in someone else's pulpit to try to help their church. Try to encourage their members and try to encourage them as well.
- And that's what I want to do tonight. As I have been in the ministry this year, 25 years. The Lord's allowed my wife and I to be involved in about every kind of ministry you can possibly be involved in.
- If you've named it, we've been involved in just about everything through our years. And I'm thankful for that. The Lord's allowed us just to be in different places at different times serving the Lord.
- And now I'm thankful that He's led us to the pastorate there in Athens, Tennessee and all the Lord's doing there. But in those years, it's been sad to see a trend.
- [0 : 5 5] And even now, just this week, two different people sitting in my office. One, I passed in the grocery store walking out the door as I was walking in. And these thoughts just came up on my mind this week as I came down here.
- And thought about just the trend of this and what we see often in God's people. And when I say God's people, I mean people who have direct access to the throne of grace.
- I'm talking about people who know God's power through His Word and through prayer. I'm talking about God's people. When I say that, I mean people who have seen the hand of God heal.
- They've seen the hand of God provide. They've seen the hand of God work. People who have seen God move. God's people. People who have the Holy Spirit residing within them.
- If you're a child of God tonight, you have all of that at your fingertips. And you have the Holy Spirit dwelling within you. These people, God's people, will allow one circumstance of life to throw them in the ditch.
- [1 : 5 8] As I said across the desk this week from a lady in our church who was struggling, as I passed another family going out of the grocery store this week, it just made me think that in those thoughts, one of them had a child go astray and it's thrown them in the ditch.
- They're struggling to get to church. They're struggling to live for God. They're struggling to get their life right. One of them had a significant health diagnosis and in their discouragement have just got discouraged and gotten into the ditch.
- Another one, a death of a loved one. Someone died or passed away. Financial struggles. It's just that one struggle, that one problem, that one difficulty when they've seen so many things that God has done in their life.
- They've seen God move so often and seen God's power and seen God just do great things in their life. But that one problem gets them in the ditch. And I can tell you so often we allow that to happen.
- I think of the children of Israel in the wilderness. You think about how God blessed them. Every time they came upon a circumstance, they came to the Red Sea. Oh, we're going to die. God's part of the Red Sea and they went across.

[3 : 08] They didn't take very long to say, Well, you brought us out here and you're going to starve us to death. You're going to thirst us to death. Excuse me. So he gave them water out of a rock. Then he's going to starve us to death. He gave them manna. We're going to die eating this manna.

He gave them quail. But over and over, every time they got frustrated, they found themselves in the ditch. We have some dear friends at a church where I served for 10 years under my pastor, my dad.

And then also were missionaries out of that church. So we spent almost 20 years in that church. And there's a dear family there. It's Chilhoi Baptist Church in Chilhoi, Virginia. But there's a family there by the name of the Bradleys.

And God used this family at this church running the RU program and other things like that. They have five children of their own and five children either by adoption or fostering.

So 10 children. Their father recently got a grave diagnosis. He found out that he either has a fungal infection in his lungs or a severe cancer that has reached his lungs.

[4 : 06] He had surgery at Virginia Hospital, University of Virginia Hospital not long ago that hasn't proven successful. I messaged him to let him know I was praying for him. And he sent me a quote from Paul Chappell's book I want to share with you before we look at this passage and see what the Bible says about this thought.

He said this, Some of the greatest gifts from God are wrapped in the darkest package. I have a choice. I can hold the package and grow weary and bitter.

Or I can open the package and experience the great rewards of trusting that God knows best. Resting in his rich grace and stewarding the resources that he has given me.

We have a choice tonight. All of us have a choice. Another man said this, Mishaps are like knives. They either serve you or they cut you. Whether you grab them by the handle or by the blade.

It's a choice that we make. And I want to encourage you to choose right. Here in Psalm 77, Asaph. Asaph is one of David's chief musicians.

[5 : 13] And he wrote this psalm. This is one of the few psalms David didn't write. But Asaph wrote. He wrote several psalms as well. And in this one, Asaph is facing a problem. An insurmountable problem.

A problem that has him in the ditch, per se, as we said. He's facing an issue of life. The Bible doesn't tell us what the issue is. And you can study it out. And we can't know exactly what the issue is.

But I think there's a reason for that. Because it shows us it could be anything. That's why Paul's thorn in the flesh. You can guess what it is. You can wonder what it is. You don't really know what it is. You know what it reminds you? It could be something that you deal with as well.

And you need to get over it like Paul did. And in the same way, Asaph, we don't know what he's going through. We don't know the struggles he's facing. But we do know this. He's in the ditch. And he's struggling. When we come to this chapter in the Bible.

I want you to see how Asaph handled his problem. First, he handled it just like most of us handle it. Notice what it says in verse number 1. Psalm 77 verse 1.

[6 : 11] I cried unto God with my voice. Even unto God with my voice. And he gave ear unto me. In the day of my trouble, I sought the Lord.

My sore ran in the night and ceased not. My soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God and was troubled. I complained. And my spirit was overwhelmed.

Selah. At that point, he wants you to stop and think about what he's saying. I like when the scripture outlines itself. The first thing I want you to see is this. What did he do first? He cried and complained. He cried and he complained.

Look what it says he did here. Notice what's occurring in this passage of the Bible. He said he cried. He said my sore. Notice what he says in verse number 2. My sore ran in the night. But notice in the beginning of the verse.

He says in the day of my trouble, I sought the Lord. My sore ran in the night. So day and night, night and day, this issue was bothering Asaph. You ever had a problem that's kept you awake at night?

[7 : 13] You have an issue or a diagnosis, maybe a health diagnosis or a loved one that's sick. And it keeps you awake at night and night and day and day and night. You're worried. That's where Asaph was.

As a matter of fact, he was to the point that it says at the end of that verse that his soul refused to be comforted. He couldn't get any rest.

He couldn't find any peace. He couldn't find any help. To the point that he used these words at the end of verse number 3 when he said this. My spirit was overwhelmed.

How often have we said the words to somebody, I'm just overwhelmed. Overwhelmed. Overwhelmed can be a good thing and a negative thing. You can be overwhelmed with the goodness and the blessings of God.

Or you can be overwhelmed with life. You can be overwhelmed with problems. You can be overwhelmed with circumstances of life. And he said at this point, he was overwhelmed. But his overwhelming was not a good thing.

[8 : 05] It was a negative thing. And he was crying and complaining. And so often, we find ourselves exactly where Asaph was. Crying and complaining about what is going on in our life.

We get in despair. And we struggle. And the fact is, as we're complaining. Do you know the truth about complaining? It never fixes anything. All it does is make everyone around you miserable. As you complain, the fact is, the misery loves company.

We know that statement. And that's why we complain. If I can get someone else just to complain with me and fall into the ditch with me. As we're in the ditch, it makes a lot better company when we're in the ditch. You heard about the farmer that was going through the graveyard.

And he fell into the dugout grave. They were waiting for a funeral the next day. And he laid there alone thinking, I'll never get out of here. I'm all in here alone. And another man, a drunk, came through. And he was walking through the cemetery that night.

And he fell in as well. The farmer said, hey, as he was trying to claw his way out. He said, you're not going to get out of here. But he did. One person got that one.

[9 : 11] The problem is, sometimes we like to have company in our troubles. And we get in trouble. And we're discouraged. And we complain. Or else we even try to fix it ourself.

Listen, we get to the point where Asaph was. And Asaph was crying, complaining, overwhelmed, frustrated. And all of these things were struggling in his life.

That he got to the point in verse number 4. The Bible says this. Thou holdest mine eyes waking. I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

He didn't know what to say. He could get no rest. He could find no peace. He cried and he complained.

Let's continue to see what he did secondly. It says in verse number 5. I have considered the days of old. The years of ancient times.

[10 : 09] I call to remembrance my song in the night. I commune with mine own heart. My spirit made diligent search. Will the Lord cast off forever?

Will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone forever? Doth his promise fail forevermore?

Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah.

Again, he's dividing this chapter up because he's going through his thought process. The first thing he said is I cried and complained. Now think about it. He says, now think about it again when he says, Selah, stop, consider what I said.

Here's what happened. After he cried and complained, the second thing he did was he considered and he communed. You see both of those words here. He considered, verse 5, and he communed in verse number 6.

[11 : 06] But here's the thing. When you look at that, you would think that would be a positive thing. When you have an issue or have a difficulty, just stop and think. Just stop and consider. Just stop and commune for a moment. But here's the problem.

He wasn't communing with God and he wasn't considering the greatness of who God was. He was considering and communing in the wrong place. Notice what it says again.

I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. He was looking back at past exploits, not at his current circumstance. He says in verse number 6, I call to remembrance my song in the night.

And I commune with, notice what he says, with mine own heart. You know what happens so often when we find ourselves in the ditch? It's because we're sitting there trying to find the answer ourself.

I'm communing with my own heart. I'm trying to figure out how to meet my financial problem. I'm trying to figure out how to answer my health problem. I'm trying to figure out in my life how to answer all that's in front of me. And Lord, I am searching, but I am communing with my own song.

[12 : 06] I'm communing with my own heart. And all of that is dwelling upon me. When you go in those verses, notice what happens. In the first six verses, 20 times he uses personal pronouns.

20 times. You say, well, what do you mean by that? Notice, go back to the beginning. Look at what you see. Verse 1. I, my, my, me. And here in these verses we just read, verse 5.

I have considered. He's talking about himself. He said, I call to remembrance my song. I commune with mine heart. My spirit made diligent search.

When problems get big so often, we put the focus on ourself. We try to find the answers. We try to figure out what's going on. And the truth of the matter is, is this.

We do not have the answer. The fact is, God knows everything and he's always in control. I can tell you this. No matter what you're facing tonight. No matter the issue in your life.

[13 : 08] No matter the difficulty in your life. No matter the mountain that stands in front of you tonight. I can promise you this. God knows all about it. As a matter of fact, you can see often in scripture, not only does he know about it, he put it there in the first place.

As a matter of fact, when you see the children of Israel at the Red Sea, the Bible says God led them there. He made them turn there. He made them go there. You know why? He was going to show himself mighty. Sometimes God puts things in our life just to show himself mighty.

And here in this time, he's communing with himself. And when you do that, here's the problem. When you start to try to find the answer in yourself. When you try to meet the problem. When you run to the checkbook instead of God's book.

When you run to the doctor. And you run to the friends and the family in our life. And we try to search out the answer. Instead of falling on our knees and falling on our face and getting in the word of God. Here's what begins to happen.

What did he do? He began to doubt and question the goodness of God. As I sit across from these people and listen to their stories.

[14 : 13] You begin to hear them say, I just don't know what God's doing. We're really struggling to talk with God. Meet with God. We're struggling to get to church. Because man, when we come to church, I even had one of them this week say, Would you just please take my daughter's name off the prayer list?

Because I just can't stand to see it anymore. I tell you, when we see those problems, we begin to doubt. And we begin to think. And we begin to struggle and question the goodness of God.

Because notice what happened when he got to the point that he got all consumed with himself. Notice what happened. He said, Will the Lord cast me off forever? Did God forget about me?

Has he just laid me aside? You begin to doubt your salvation. You begin to doubt your walk with God. He said, listen, God has laid me aside. Will he be favorable to me anymore?

Forever is his mercy. Is his mercy clean, gone forever? If you're not careful, I tell you tonight, what you'll do is you'll lay in your bed and you'll consider and you'll commune with yourself.

[15 : 18] And that old fleshly self and the devil will begin to tell you, God doesn't love you. God doesn't care about you. God doesn't know your circumstance.

God has forgotten you. And that's what happened to Asaph. He said in verse number 9, Hath God forgotten to be gracious?

Can I tell you something? God never forgets anything. And Asaph had gotten to the point where he was questioning the goodness of God. He was questioning the working of God.

As I was studying this out and thinking about this message, I came across John Phillips wrote these words. And he says this. He says this in his commentary on the Psalms.

He says, the devil likes to torment us with doubt. He said, I love the story of the old lady. This is John Phillips writing. I love the story of the old lady who was saved one night at the tent revival by being shown John 3.16.

[16 : 21] She was a simple soul and she got in bed that night and doubts began in her mind about what she had done. She decided that the doubts were from Satan. Since the darkest place in the room was under the bed, she figured that must be where Satan is.

So she opened up her Bible to John 3.16, put her finger on the verse, thrust it under the bed and said, Here, read it for yourself. You know what? Sometimes we just need to remind ourselves and remind the devil whose we are.

Listen, as a child of God, you belong to him. You guys have the opportunity to borrow my daughter for a little while. But she's still mine. You know what?

We still call her. We still talk to her. We still get on her. We still... We're still her parents. We still watch her on the app to know where she's at. And if she's not where she's supposed to be, she gets a call.

Why are you there? What are you doing? How come you're not home? You know why? Because she's mine. I don't call anybody else here. She has other friends, but I don't call Joy and say, where are you?

[17 : 29] She's not mine. But it doesn't matter wherever the Lord takes her. Even if he takes her across the world, it doesn't matter. I'll still care. I'll still love her. I won't forget where she's at.

And listen, he felt like God has forgotten me. God will not forget you. Notice how this ends tonight. As he began to question, here's what it says in verse number 10.

The last thing he did is he made a conclusion. He concluded something. He thought something. He says in verse 10, And I said, This is a hard thing to say.

This is my infirmity. He said, God, for some reason, has chosen to put this on me.

I'll never forget when I arrived at Fairview Baptist Church five years ago. 2016. We landed there in June, moved into our house.

[18 : 30] My wife said, I will never move in my life again. We've been a lot of different places. And we had come back from the mission field. And we'd spent a year somewhere. And God had brought us to this place.

And she said, I'm tired of moving. I will never move again. Six months later, we had a tornado. Wiped out every bit of our school, half of our church, and my house.

We spent the next six months moving out of that house and moving out to a little room in our camp and a little cabin at our camp. And we ended up moving back in there.

But during that time, I'll never forget. When the news showed up, our pastor had been there 45 years. I took the place of a man who served there for 45 years. He's still there, works with me.

I'm thankful for Pastor Jack Scallions. But when the news was interviewing him, he said these words. They said, well, what do you think about, you know, this whole thing that the tornado has hit your church and destroyed everything you had?

[19 : 30] And he said these words. He said, I'm just privileged that God chose me. He said, he must have thought, he's telling the news this, he must have thought that this church and this, he said that God chose us.

He didn't say me. He said us. He said, God must have thought that this church could handle this tragedy. And we're here to be a light that he is faithful.

And when he said those words, it was a reminder. He concluded this, this is ours to hold. And he said, just like Job, when God looked down and he talked about this to our church for the next few months, he said, when God looked down, he said, hast thou considered my servant Job?

He said, I believe God looked down. I said, hast thou considered Fairview Baptist Church? And his challenge to our church was, are we going to be like Job and stand faithful? Are we going to fold and are we going to quit?

He said, let us have a testimony that God has chosen us. He said, this is my infirmity. He realized, Asaph said, listen, I came to a conclusion after I got over myself and after I whined in the closet and after I complained and got all of that out, I realized it didn't help me at all.

[20 : 41] So what Joe, what Asaph did in this chapter is he just decided, I'm going to have a change of attitude. I'm going to have a change of mind. I'm going to have a change of heart. I'm going to have a change of direction.

And he said, this is my infirmity. I'm going to own it. I can't change it. So I choose to use it. Every problem, a great preacher said, every problem is an opportunity to prove God's power.

Every day we encounter countless golden opportunities brilliantly disguised as insurmountable problems.

The key word here is this. When you notice he said, and I said, this is my infirmity, but. My favorite word in the Bible is but. I know that sounds weird. I love therefore and I love but.

Those two words. You think that's stupid, but go through the Bible and every time you see the word therefore, study it. Man, because you know what happens? It's a response to what was been said before.

[21 : 48] Therefore, all this happened. Therefore, I'm going to praise God. And the other word I love more than therefore is but. Because every time you see the word but in the Bible, it turns everything around and it's usually turning a negative into a positive.

And in this chapter, the best ones are but God, by the way. And this one, he says this. This is my infirmity. But, I will remember the years of thy right hand of the Most High.

I will remember the works of the Lord. Surely, I will remember the wonders of old. I will meditate also on thy works, work and talk of thy doings.

When you really think back, that's what he was doing earlier. He considered, he called, he communed, but here's the great difference. Back then, he was remembering, calling, considering everything about himself.

Me, my, my, my, my, my. But now, he said, no, wait a minute. I'm going to change the direction of my thinking. And now, he's saying, I'm going to remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.

[23 : 01] He said, I'm going to put my mind on God. And at this point, this thought, this scripture, he made a decision to redirect his thinking. Instead of thinking on himself and thinking on his own answers and thinking on his own problem, he said, I'm going to redirect my mind and I'm going to begin to think about God.

He was remembering the great works that the Lord had done in his life. I can tell you this, the greatest way to defeat a problem in your life or discouragement in your life or being downcast in your life is to simply thank God for what he's done.

So often, we get so caught up with the one issue, the bad health report, the financial trouble, the struggle at work, the person who's giving you a hard time and all of those things come up in our mind and we forget the things that matter most that God daily loaded us with benefits.

Instead of dwelling on the Lord, on himself, he redirected his thinking and began to dwell on the Lord. And not only did he do that, he redirected his thinking, but also he restored his relationship.

Because notice what he said, I will meditate also of all thy work and talk of all thy doings.

[24 : 17] You know what he said? I'm going to begin to meditate. I love to read the Bible and I think you should read your Bible every day. I think the greatest victory you can get in your life is when you decide I'm going to read this book every day and I'm going to get on my knees every day.

But can I tell you more than read it, you better meditate on it. You better think on it. The Bible talks more about meditation and dwelling on the Word of God than it does even reading the Word of God. You know why? Because you've got to just like that cow chews up all that grass then goes and lays under the tree and he regurgitates it and chews upon it.

That's what the word meditate means. To ruminate. To think upon it. He said, as I think upon it, I'm going to talk about it. Now instead of walking up to somebody and him saying, did you hear about what I'm going through?

Complaining. You know what he did? He walked up to people and said, have you heard about the God that I serve? And notice what he begins to say. Verse number 13, as he began to meditate and thought, notice how the tone of his voice changes.

Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary. And notice these next words. Who is so great a God as our God?

[25 : 30] Now instead of saying, Lord, have you cast me off forever? Lord, have you forgotten to bless me? Lord, have you forgotten me? Now he's saying, there's no God like my God.

There's no God as great as my God is great. And he goes down through there and he begins to say all these things. Notice in, verse number 13, thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people.

Verse number 16, notice what he says. He says, they were afraid in the depths of them. The waters saw thee. O God, the waters saw thee. They were afraid. Speaking of the waters, they were afraid of my God.

Verse 17, the clouds poured out water. The skies sent out sound. Thy arrows went abroad. The voice of thy thunder was in heaven. The lightnings lighted the world. The earth trembled and shook.

Thy way is in the sea and thy path is in the great waters and thy footsteps are not known. Thou led us thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

[26 : 30] He began to say, God, you're a great God. And instead of being awake at night with his problem, now he was resting in the fact that he simply served a great God.

What changed? Did his problem change? Never once in this chapter does it say that Asaph's problem went away. Not once. But Asaph's singing a different song at the end of the chapter.

Why? Because he decided he was going to change his perspective and get his eyes off of himself and get his eyes on to God. A shoe manufacturer sent a group of workers to the Congo.

The two salesmen got to this undeveloped territory and one salesman came back and this was his report. Prospects here are nil. No one in this place wears shoes.

The second salesman came in enthusiastic. He said, listen, the market potential is terrific. No one there wears shoes. It's all in how you look at it.

[27 : 37] And tonight the question is this. What has you discouraged? Why is it that you're questioning God? Why is it that you're down in the ditch tonight?

Because here's the thing, all you have to do to get out of the ditch is change your perspective. Asaph said, this is my infirmity, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.

I will remember the work of the Lord. Surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also on all thy work and talk of thy doing.

Can I tell you tonight, if you're discouraged, if there's a mountain in front of you, a financial problem, a health problem, a family problem, a relationship problem, a discouragement in your life, can I tell you this?

Get your eyes off of that in yourself and set your eyes upon the God who is great, who has delivered, who has set free, who has brought His children forth.

[28 : 39] The same God who worked in your heart before the problem can work in your heart now. Can I encourage you like Asaph to just say, listen, this is my infirmity, but I'm going to set my eyes on Him.

Would you bow your heads together with me tonight for just a moment? I don't know what you're going through tonight, and I don't know the struggles of your life, but I know this. I've watched so many people over the 25 years of my ministry fall into the ditch and never get out.

Have an untimely death, they get in the ditch and they never recover. Have a child away from God, get in the ditch and never recover.

A health diagnosis that didn't go their way, get in the ditch and never recover. But in the same way I've seen people keep their eyes on God, we just had a woman who finished chemo, radiation, cancer surgery, single mother whose husband died of prostate cancer.

She has prostate cancer and she has a boy. But all along the way she said, this is God's, this is my infirmity, but I'm going to lay it at His feet. She came to church on Sunday cancer-free with the same joyful spirit she had at the beginning.

[30 : 01] You know why? Because her perspective. Tonight all we need to do is say, Lord, help my perspective to be set on Thee. Heavenly Father, tonight I just pray that You'd take this passage here in Psalm 77 and drive it deep within our hearts.

As I said earlier, I know that so many in my ministry I've seen never get out of the ditch and I pray tonight that You'd encourage hearts through the story and the illustration and the example of Asaph here in Psalm 77.

God, give us great faith, great trust, set our minds upon You. During this time of invitation tonight, I pray that You'd move in hearts and lives.

I pray that You'd do a work and as we leave this place tonight, I pray that we would be different because Your Word has changed us. Use it, apply it to our lives and may You get the glory from it.

In Jesus' name.