

God saves and never forgets

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Date: 03 September 2017

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[0 : 00] Turn again to Psalm 106. We learned last time, that is in the previous psalm that we did, that it is possible to collide with God.

So here you are going along quite fine, having faith in God, and then all of a sudden you collide with God's governance over the world, and then you collide with God's governance over your life.

Now going up against God is not something that I would recommend that you do that often, but it is something that you are going to do quite often. And the reason this happens is because we, in our condition of, you know, we still have sin, means that we're going to assume the position of God.

And any moment we're sat at home or wherever we might be, assuming the position of God and thinking to ourselves we would do things differently, we then collide with God's governance of the world, and we then collide with God's governance of our life.

Lord, if I were you, looking at my family, this is how I would have things. Lord, if I were you, looking at my situation in my work, in my family situation, or this is what I would want you to happen.

[1 : 16] So what begins to happen is, even through that honest and sort of simple discussion, you're already beginning to collide with God and his governance.

And this causes or can cause a crisis of faith. It is difficult at times to believe in God, and none of us should pretend that we don't have those moments. You know, I understand that it's okay to say, yeah, everything's fine.

You know, as a pastor, I've had moments where I've even stood in the pulpit, not here, but this is back in the day. So I've been in ministry for 17 years. And back in the day, I've had moments where I've gone through a whole week wondering whether or not I'm even saved.

And then I get to the pulpit on a Sunday morning having to speak to God's people, and I'm wondering whether or not I'm one of them. So what do you do when you hit that kind of crisis of faith?

And the answer is, listen to God, not to yourself. Okay? Don't doubt in the dark what you knew to be true in the light. Okay? Don't doubt in the dark what you knew to be true in the light.

[2 : 27] This, this morning, God's word is light. Remember it. Take it in. Allow it to govern you completely. It is the only thing that will keep you safe in the dark.

Go back to this and find your bearings all over again. And the reason we start like this is because Psalm 106 is describing a group of people, God's people, who constantly lose their bearings.

In other words, the direction of their life should be set by God. But every now and then, God does say, right, have it your own way, just so his people can get themselves into the kind of trouble that they get themselves into.

But God does let us come back out. He does look after us. He does save us. But the issue here is whether or not we are going to be disciplined in listening to God and trust in his governance over the world.

So when it comes to faith, two issues come into play. The first issue, when we collide with God, is sadness. Sadness on the outside and sadness on the inside.

[3 : 36] Now, most of us here can understand that kind of sadness. All of a sudden, a death has happened on the family. And now this causes a crisis of faith. Why does this, why did this have to happen now?

Or someone in our family has become ill and this then causes a crisis of faith. God, why have you allowed this to happen right now? And this then, we're struggling all over again to deal with God.

Not deal with the issue. We're struggling to deal with God. The issue's happened. We've lost a loved one or something's happened in our family. We're dealing with the issue.

What we're not dealing with is God in the issue. So that's where the crisis point of faith happens. It could be the fact that God changes the direction of your life because something has changed in your life.

You think, right, this is where I'm going for the next five years. And then something happens. And then you realize this isn't going to happen in the next five years. What we collide with is not necessarily the issue, the issue we have to deal with and we will deal with every day, but rather God in the issue.

[4 : 48] So people can find it difficult to have faith in God because sadness on the outside. The world's in a terrible state. Children are not eating. Children are dying. There's war everywhere. And this can cause us to struggle to have faith in God.

God, if I were you, I would run the world differently. Right? And we've all said it. We've all thought it. And that can cause a crisis of faith. I can't believe in a God. Who?

And you can fill in the blank. But then we can all have a crisis of faith when there's sadness on the inside. Something's happened to me that I'm not happy about. And God, you could have stopped it.

But you didn't. Okay? These things, these things can push our faith into places that make it really, really hard to believe in God.

The other issue here, or another reason why faith in God can be difficult, comes down to the issue of authority. But no one ever sees this. So as a pastor, I try and explain it.

[5 : 52] And people not always can see it. So I'm going to try and illustrate it in a slightly different way this morning. So imagine it like this. A boy is sat at home in a room thinking to himself, out of the goodness of his own heart, he is in a really good mood.

I'm going to clean my room without being asked. Now, forget that this sounds a bit like a miracle. Just think for a moment that this is a reality. That this boy is sat in his room, out of the goodness of his own heart, he's thinking to himself, I'm going to clean my room all by myself before my mum asks me.

Remember that, because that bit's the important part. Before my mum asks me. And he's sat there, and just as he's thinking that, his mum walks into the room and says, Boy, whatever his name is, go clean your room.

Then something strange happens. All of a sudden, all that goodwill, all that good intention to go ahead and clean your room disappears immediately.

All that desire to go ahead and clean your room, all on your own, out of the goodness of your heart, immediately disappears. But the boy doesn't understand why. We understand why.

[7 : 09] And the reason it disappears is because now it's not his idea. The reason it disappears is because now he does it out of obedience, rather than out of his own will.

And that makes a big difference. Because we think, as people, when it comes to God, I'm going to do this, and then in the end, God, you can give me something in return.

But the moment God tells us to do something, God, you've messed everything up. Like the boy, who out of the goodness of his own heart, thinks he'll go ahead and clean his room, has it destroyed for his mum.

His mum wrecks everything the moment she says to him, go and clean your room. Because now he's going to do it out of obedience to his mum, not out of the goodness of his own heart.

When God speaks to you, it's a question of authority. But many, many people want to live their own life, in their own way, and then go to God and say, see what I've done?

[8 : 15] See what I've done? But when God gets there first and says, I want you to live this way, well then suddenly, you don't want to live that way. God, you have just wrecked everything.

Right? We understand the issue. When it's our idea, we want to do it. When we want to do it in our time and in our way, we have plenty of motivation to do it.

But the moment God tells us to do it, suddenly, we don't want to. Okay? What are we colliding with? We're colliding with authority. We're colliding with the fact that God, firstly, like the mum, not only has the right to say it, but it means now, if you do it, you now do it out of obedience to your mum, to God.

And that changes everything. One of the things that happens when we sit here and listen to God's word is that we are coming under authority. So when I say you, I'm including me in that you.

I'm proclaiming God's word. And when God says you must do this, I'm included in that you, along with all of you here. Okay? Now, this shouldn't wreck our motivation.

[9 : 25] But it does. And the reason it wrecks our motivation is because we collide with the authority of God all over again. Okay? We're colliding with God's governance of things. We're colliding with the way God does things.

And that's the issue. The issue is, why does this happen? And it is because we are colliding with God all over again, just in a different way. Now it's not a crisis of faith.

Now it's a crisis of authority. That's what we are colliding with. So the boy, if he did it all on his own, could expect something in return.

But if he does it out of obedience, he's doing it out of obedience. There's no bargaining chip there. He's just been told to do it. But if he does it all of his own, you know, at least I can expect a thanks.

But the moment he's told to do it, now it's just out of obedience. And that is crucial. Because as Christians, and even as non-Christians, I've met plenty of amount of people who have told me, straight to my face, that God has to let me into his kingdom because I've been good.

[10 : 29] In other words, what they're saying is, is I cleaned my room without God asking me to. But that's not the issue. The issue is, you're not listening to God. And you're not coming under his authority. You're not obeying him.

That's the point. So as we listen to Psalm 106, we are listening to a group of people who are colliding with God, not over the issue of just faith, but actually over the issue of authority.

Okay? They want to do it their way, and they don't want to do it because they have been told to do it. Now, when you collide with people on earth, that can change other people.

You know, in a bad marriage, a wife, after five years in a bad marriage, may not be the same person that she was when she entered into that marriage. And the husband either, for that matter.

And that's because the way we are towards people can change them for the better or for the worse. So it really does matter what we're like, especially towards other people.

[11 : 27] Now, let's elevate that to God. And God has been mistreated by us all the time. But here's the beauty of it all. He doesn't change.

Okay? God remains the same. Okay? We ignore him. We don't take any notice of what he has said. We've even, at times, stuck our fingers up at him and walked away from him, swearing as we do it.

But God remains loving. This is, in one sense, annoying, in the sense that God is always the same towards us, because now the fact that God remains the same, continuous in his steadfast love, then makes it, at times, even more difficult to come back to him, because we know he hasn't changed, we have.

But God is calling you back. God is never going to change. His love is from everlasting to everlasting. His steadfast love endures forever. And we're the ones that go round in circles.

We're the ones that walk off. And God is constantly calling us back. And that's the joy. That's the thing to remember here. See, God knows you're a sinner. That's why he saved you.

[12 : 37] Okay? It's not a surprise to God. It's not a surprise to God. He wants you, and he wants you for himself forever. So when it says here in verse 1, O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

His steadfast love endures forever. The reason these people have such praise for God is because it's said in the light of their own condition. God doesn't change even when I do.

And that's the joy. God doesn't reject me even when I reject him. And that's the joy. God doesn't walk out on me even when I walk out on him.

And that's the encouragement. That's the thing to remember. The reason why God deserves such high praise is because he's not like us. Okay? The reason why God's love is so great is because his love is not like our love.

Okay? The reason why God deserves all praise and honor and worship is because of who he is, of what he is like. God's value is of greater value than all of us combined.

[13 : 41] And this is the God who wants us to belong to him. So we treat God in ways that we shouldn't really treat him, and God responds to us by love.

And you figure that out. You figure it out. God continues to love us forever. His steadfast love endures forever.

Endures forever. But who does it endure to? Well, it endures to us. It's no good saying, you know, if I just stood here this morning and said, I'm in love, you'd be waiting for the end of a sentence.

If I just said, well, I'm just in love, it wouldn't make any sense. But if I said, I'm in love with, well, then suddenly it has a meaning, it has context. His steadfast love endures forever.

Okay, great. Where? Towards you. It only makes sense if you understand it, that this is for you. Otherwise, you can't understand God's love until you understand that his love is for you.

[14 : 44] That's the context that it's meant to be understood in. Now, there is another thing that we need to consider here in terms of love and authority, and that is that because we rebel against authority, we need to understand that authority and care go hand in hand.

Let me try and illustrate. Okay? You try crossing a road with a child who thinks that they can cross the road all by themselves. It is hard work.

You need to go to the gym, at least, to build up those muscles in your hand and arm just to hold them by their hand. And they may feel that as you are holding their hand to cross this busy road, which you know to be busy, that you are holding their hand too tight.

They feel, Daddy, you're hurting me. You know you're not hurting them. You know it is a tight squeeze, but it has to be tight because you don't want them to pull their hand out. But they feel it's uncalled for.

So they are kicking and screaming all the way across what is a narrow road that feels like 10 miles by the time you get to the other side of it. And they don't understand. They are rebelling against your authority over them.

[15 : 52] That's what they're doing. I want to cross the road all by myself. Let go of my hand. I can do this all by myself. They are pulling and tugging and you have to hold on tighter and tighter. And they are rebelling against your authority.

What they don't recognize is that they're also rebelling against your care. They're rebelling against your love for them. And so here you are with God.

God is getting involved in your life. You're feeling his authority, his grip is suddenly becoming that little bit tighter on you. And you're going, let me go, let me go, let me go. And not recognizing that it's care.

It is authority, but it's also care. God's authority and God's care go hand in hand. We may not like the tight grip when God has to grip us tightly and we rebel against that authority.

We rebel, let me go, let me go, let me go. But God isn't going to let us go in the same way we're not going to let go a child's hand crossing a busy road. It's just not going to happen. Why? Because the issue isn't just about authority.

[16 : 53] The issue is about taking care of the one you've got the hand of. And that's the point. So here we are colliding with God and then not understanding what we're actually colliding with.

Authority we're rebelling against, okay. But in the same time, we're rebelling against his care. Unless you really believe that God is going to take you somewhere that's not good for you. But I don't really believe that any of you believe that.

And you shouldn't because it isn't the case. So here we have people who have to live a life on earth and sometimes have to be held very, very tightly by God and they don't understand why.

They feel that this God, you're being too authoritarian. Okay. But at the same time, he's being incredibly loving. It is his steadfast love at work.

Now, there is another issue here and this is one of forgetfulness. I constantly have to tell my children that in the Bible, forgetfulness is a sin. It's not an excuse.

[17 : 55] Okay. We think if we say, I forget, suddenly all punishment is off. I can't get told off anymore if I say I forget. You know, they even come back from school with these clever things.

Teacher, if I, would I be in trouble for something I didn't do? No, you wouldn't. I didn't do my homework. They think they're clever. Right? Because how can you be in trouble for something you didn't do and I didn't do my homework?

Well, that's smart, but that's a smart aleck and now you're in trouble for it. Okay? Be smart, but don't be smart in that kind of way. Now, when it comes to God, we use forgetfulness in exactly the same way.

God speaks to us with authority and we should listen and when things go wrong, we go, I forgot. Well, it's not good enough. I forgot is what got you into trouble.

I forgot is what caused you to do this rather than that. I forgot is what caused you to walk this way rather than that way. So, I forgot it's not an excuse. I forgot is what got you into trouble in the first place.

[19 : 00] God is calling us to listen to him and God does allow us to go around and around and around in circles.

Okay? Sometimes God holds our hands tight and sometimes he let us just wander around and around in circles. Always coming back to the same place where we can grab his hand again but often we don't.

We think just for the moment I'll do it my own way and you go around and around. There's no progress. There's no change. It's just the same old, same old. Faith is holding the hand of God.

Faith is listening to the word of God. Faith is trusting God and doing it his way when you don't want to do it his way. Faith is incredibly practical. Faith keeps you safe.

So, faith is about listening to God. Faith is about coming under the authority of God. Faith is understanding that at times God will hold your hand really, really tightly but faith is also understanding that God holds your hand very tightly at times when he's caring for you when you need it the most.

[20 : 06] That's what faith does. Now, there are times as it says here when wanton cravings spring up in our heart. We don't know where they've come from but all of a sudden we desire to not live God's way but to live our own.

We don't want God's authority over our inner life. We don't want him to tell us what to feel or what to think or anything. We just want to just live and let live. And suddenly our desires are taking us in directions that cause us to then not listen to God.

And then we make another mistake. And the mistake is that when we get to the point where we don't want to listen to God and then we get to the point where suddenly I've only gone and done it again. We then think that the lesson is this when in fact the lesson is actually something else.

We even misunderstand the lessons that God teaches us. Let me try and illustrate this. You've heard this illustration before but I think it's an appropriate one. The mum walks into the room and she puts a vase on the table full of flowers.

Someone's given her these flowers. And the child's in the room and she says to the child what do you think? Don't touch the vase. And she goes out of the room into the kitchen only to come back into the other room having here this massive smash.

[21 : 25] And she walks into the room and here this child is sat in a pile of glass and water with a few flowers around themselves. Now the first thing that the parent does is grab the child and lift them out of the glass and out of the water.

Obviously. But that makes a lot of sense. But now something strange happens to the child because the child doesn't mind being manhandled a little bit if they're sat in a pile of water or they're sat in glass.

You know, we don't mind God taking care of us when we know we're in trouble. But walking into that trouble we just want to be left alone. We don't mind God getting us out of it but let us walk into it all by ourselves.

It doesn't make any sense but there we go and do it again. So God lifts us out and then we think just like the child does that this is the lesson. We think the lesson is I shouldn't have broken the vase.

We think the mum is upset because we have broken her vase and glass and water is all over the floor. And that might be true in part but that's not the lesson.

[22 : 30] The real issue is you didn't listen. Okay? The issue is not the broken glass. It is an issue but that's not the real issue. The real issue you didn't listen when I said don't touch the vase in the first place.

And if you only thought for a moment how you got into this mess you got into the mess not because you touched the vase and you pushed it over you got into it because you didn't listen when I told you to not touch the vase.

In other words that word and instruction was just not taking any care or any notice of whatsoever. And in the same way God doesn't want us to learn the wrong lesson.

We think when we get into trouble we think that we got all this sin in our life and we're having to deal with these different things that that's the issue but that's not the issue. Here we come to God's I've only gone and broken the vase again I've only gone and spilt the milk again and we think God is angry at us for that when in fact the thing that really makes God angry if we can use that phrase is that we didn't listen to him in the first place.

We may say we forgot okay we may do that but the issue is not the broken vase the issue is I didn't listen to him. So don't misunderstand the lesson.

[23 : 48] You know if you make more out of the broken vase with your child then the only lesson the child is going to learn is that the broken vase is more important to my mum than listening to her.

Okay that's what children learn. If you teach them that the vase is more important than your words all that you are teaching them is that the vase is more important than your words. More important than listening to you.

And so God doesn't want you to learn the wrong lesson. Yes you've only gone and done it again. Yes you know this same thing keeps happening but that's not the issue. The issue is you need to start listening to God.

You need to start coming under the authority of God and listening and doing it his way. In the New Testament most people tend to forget this.

That when it speaks about judgment guess what it speaks about it in the context of not listening to God. Those who have to face the judgment in the end are those who haven't listened and obeyed the gospel.

[24 : 54] Not because of the sin that they've committed but because they've never listened to God in the first place because God understands that not listening leads to committing sin. You take the first sin.

They were told not to eat the tree and they didn't listen. So listening has always been the priority to God. Who told you? Okay?

Who told you was God's point to Adam, message to Adam? The point is who are you listening to? God wants you to listen to him and not forget. Don't make the mistake of starting at the wrong end.

Don't make the mistake of concentrating on the spilt milk, the broken vase, the glass and the water all over the floor when that's not the issue. The issue is listening. The issue is listening to God.

So as we conclude, consider these things. Psalm 106 speaks of a people who come to God to only walk away again who then come back to God to only go and do the same thing over and over again.

[26 : 00] And the only reason they can't walk away forever is because God won't let them to. Okay? So these people come and go with God every time they listen and not listen, every time they obey and not obey.

And so they come to God and they walk away from God and they come back to God and they walk away from him. But the reality is they can never walk away forever. Why? Oh, give thanks to the Lord. His steadfast love endures forever.

Salvation, okay, and this is why it's amazing, is that when God saves you, you're both safe and secure forever. Okay? You cannot walk away and stay away.

God will always grab you by the hand whether you like it or not. He'll always lift you out of the pot of glass and water whether you like it or not because he loves you. And the lesson is not the spilt milk.

The lesson is listening to him. And so the same is true for people who haven't yet come to faith in God. Just listen. Repentance means listening to God.

[27 : 00] It means stop listening to yourself and other people and turn and listen to God. Or turn to God because you have listened to him. Faith is listening to God.

Okay? Don't walk away. If you feel that God is grabbing you by his hand, it's better for you just to go with him. Because he wants you for himself.

So faith, repentance, turning to God is all down to listening to him in the first place. And the reason why God is always forgiving is, or one of the reasons that we get to enjoy this is because we always have something to be forgiven of.

When we confess our sins, it includes the confession of not listening. When we confess our sins, it includes the confession of not listening. When we repent of our sins, we're repenting of not listening.

So when we come back to God, we're really coming back to listen to him, to listen to his authority, to listen to his word, and to come under his authority. So you may feel this morning that this feels as if my hand's being squeezed and now it feels uncomfortable.

[28 : 11] You may feel, well, I have to live my life this way because God says so? Well, yeah. But understand why God says so. Okay? Don't rebel against the tight hand because it feels tight.

Okay? Don't rebel against the hand at all. Rather, understand that the tight hand is a hand of authority, but it's also a hand of care. Remember the child crossing the road.

She thinks or he thinks they are rebelling against authority, when actually they're also rebelling against care. They just don't see that. So salvation is being safe and secure and to the point where you can never leave forever.

So when God speaks about his hands in scripture, the first thing you ought to do is what else does God say about his hands? And the one thing that he says is this, that for those who belong to God, those who are in his hands ought to understand that nobody can snatch them from him.

That's what God says about his hands. When he has hold of you, no one can take you from him. So here's the exhortation. Stop, look, and listen.

[29 : 23] Stop, look, and listen. Stop, just stop. Look to God in prayer and listen to his word.
Stop, look, and listen. Amen.