

We need God's help

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[0 : 0 0] Psalm 25, we'll read and then pray, and then we'll come to the words of Psalm 25.

So now hear God's word. Psalm 25. To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust.

Let me not be put to shame. Let not my enemies exult over me. Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame.

They shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. Make me to know your ways, O Lord. Teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me.

For you are the God of my salvation. For you I wait all the day long. Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love. For they have been from of old.

[1 : 2 1] Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions. According to your steadfast love, remember me. For the sake of your goodness, O Lord.

Good and upright is the Lord. Therefore, he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great. Who is the man who fears the Lord? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.

His soul shall abide in well-being and his offspring shall inherit the earth. The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.

My eyes are ever towards the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net. Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.

[2 : 2 9] The troubles of my heart are enlarged. Bring me out of my distress. Consider my affliction and my trouble. And forgive all of my sins.

Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me. O guard my soul and deliver me. Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.

May integrity and uprightness preserve me. For I wait for you. Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.

Let's pray for God's help to understand his word. While it's tempting to believe that we can read the Bible just by picking it up, it's not always the case.

Sometimes our mind and heart is filled with things that skew our reading of God's word. And so let's pray that that doesn't happen. Father God, we pray that you would enlighten our mind with a view of changing our heart.

[3 : 4 2] Father God, that we may see through faith rather than through just physical eyes, what it is that we are to be and to believe.

We recognize, Father God, that we are a people who are made to ask you for things. And we come to you this morning asking that we see your word clearly, that we hear you correctly.

But also that we would see our lives and see our nation clear also. That we may pray properly for both. We ask this morning, Father God, that you bless us who are here and you bless those who are, in many ways, on lockdown away in their homes.

And we recognize that though these restrictions keep us from being together, they do not keep us from you. And so I ask, Father God, that whether we are here or at home, that you would bless and keep us all, in Jesus' name.

Amen. So when you ask children, what are the most powerful things in the world?

[5 : 02] Or what is the most powerful thing in the world? They may come up with tanks or lorries or cranes or even weapons. When you ask adults the same thing, Christian adults are normally clued on to where you're going with that type of question, and so they go, prayer.

Well, prayer is more powerful, not because of the fact that we can enter into prayer, but rather because God can answer prayers. The power is not in us praying.

The power is in God answering. But of course, the power of prayer makes sense to perhaps term it that way because we recognize that we are praying to God.

Well, this morning, I want us to focus on asking God for help. And the reason I want to focus on that is because, at least as I have been praying, no doubt as you have been praying, that Jesus tells us not to worry about the future.

And I don't worry about the ultimate future. That is what God has planned and accomplished and what will be. I have no worries, interestingly, about what's going to happen 500 years from now or 1,000 years from now or even 3,000 years from now.

[6 : 24] For me, I tend to worry about what's going to happen next year or when I reach 65 or 67, the age of retirement. And that tends to be how worry tends to work, that we worry about the future, but what we're really saying is we only worry about the immediate future.

And this is because we know ultimately God has things in control. And so it comes as great conviction when God tells you that you're sinning by worrying, and so you have to come to God and repent of that sin is if, of course, you expect your prayers to be answered.

I mean, I know what the Scriptures teach. Even if I treat my wife in a way that I shouldn't, God's Word teaches me, well, don't think I'm going to answer your prayers now.

You go and sort it out with your wife, and then I'll answer your prayers. So it's not as if God has been unclear as the road to prayer and the road to receiving answers to prayer.

And so it's no good to say, do this, if the preceding stuff is all wrong. Amos teaches us that God's people back in the day when they turned up to church to sing, if their lives were not holy before him during the week, Amos tells us that God puts his hands over his ears so that he doesn't have to listen to his people.

[7 : 48] So we understand the things that pleases God. We understand the things that can get in the way of our worship and of our prayers. But in a world full of trouble, we need God's help, and we need to be able to be a people who can approach God and come to him in prayer.

Jesus told us that any follower of his will have peace because they belong to him. But any follower of him will also have trouble in the world. You will not go through this world without facing trouble.

You're going to have trouble on every level. So the decision we have, or at least the choice, is you can either have trouble in the world belonging to Jesus or you can have trouble in the world without belonging to Jesus.

And I, for one, much rather experience the trouble in the world belonging than experiencing the trouble in the world without belonging. And Jesus told us that if we abide in him, then we will bear much fruit.

We can come to him in prayer. This psalm teaches us that those who live faithfully will know both God's guidance and God's blessing. The fact here that a person is able to make a choice, better choices, out of a close relationship with God, shouldn't strike us as overwhelmingly surprising, but it is something that we can easily forget.

[9 : 13] More importantly, that those who wait for the Lord will not be put to shame. The church may look like a bunch of people wasting their lives, wasting their time.

You know, the fact that the early disciples spent 50% of their ministry in prayer. 50% of the apostles spent 50% of everything they did in prayer. The other 50% was spent on teaching the church and evangelizing the unsaved.

I think one of the things that has happened in the church is that once with the establishment of buildings and lists and flower rotors and stuff like that, then we end up with more activity in the things that are good and fruitful and wonderful in many ways, but sometimes when they have taken away from the more important matters, the pressing matters, then we could easily say that perhaps we have lost our way.

Is being a Christian being a glutton for sorrow? Well, in many ways it could be. It definitely exposes us to a level of persecution for some Christians more than others.

And so how does this psalm address that issue? Or rather, this psalm addresses that issue and what do we learn? Well, you'll notice, hopefully, that the psalm begins with the individual, but it finishes with a national prayer, or rather a prayer for the nation.

[10 : 39] And this is significant in part for one reason, that in order for a nation to change, the individual has to change. When you see a culture develop within a country or within countries throughout the world and you see movements start to develop, that is someone along the line has built that culture.

And that culture has been built by individuals being taught certain things, being committed to certain things, and suddenly you have new cultures developing.

And so it shouldn't surprise any of us that David starts with himself before he gets to the national level, because he understands that if the nation of Israel has to change before God, then he has to change before God, because the nation of Israel is the collection of all the people of God, the collection of individuals.

And so David then comes to prayer. He wants to see change, but he does not expect to see change on a national level before he sees change in a personal level before God.

So verses one to three, he is asking God for help. For guidance, to be taught and to be led, verses four and five.

[11 : 58] For mercy and for forgiveness, verses six and seven. To be instructed and to be pardoned, verses eight through to 15. And he's asking God to consider his circumstances, to deliver him and to guard him.

Then it says that David will wait for the Lord and he will come before the Lord on behalf of others, verses 21 through to 22. In other words, the whole psalm is a progression from the individual to the national level.

And it's a road through road, through trouble and comfort. None of us are surprised that with the rise of COVID-19 and the lockdowns, that this hasn't created more, it's created more problems.

It hasn't taken any away, but it's only added to the problems. It's not solved anything. And so we, if we had a world of troubles before COVID-19, we now have a world of more troubles during COVID-19 and no doubt even worse after COVID-19 because as we all know, the aftershock is always greater than the shock.

And the aftershock can lead to changes that are both for the good and for the worst. You only have to look at the time between the First World War and the Second World War because no one after the First World War would have ever thought you would have ended up with a second one.

[13 : 27] And that's because the aftershock was greater than the shock. And that led, of course, to a greater, more aggressive, in many ways, disaster for the world. We don't think this is going to be any different.

A vaccine will not protect the world from the aftershock. That history teaches us quite clearly. And so coming to God, being able to see these things and asking for help is going to be necessary both for the world, for us as individuals, for the church in particular.

But we come to a God who can comfort. We come to a God who can guard our hearts. But we come to a God recognizing that there is great tension there when it comes to being comforted by God.

Now, I'd much rather have trouble in the world belonging to God than trouble in the world without belonging to God. But I also recognize that my trouble can be increased by the very fact that I belong to God.

Number one, that since Christians are not spared from the troubles in the world, it's not as if being a Christian will keep us from all things. It will keep us from many of the things that the world suffers unnecessarily.

[14 : 43] We can be kept from the unnecessary troubles. Sin leads us in. God has given us by his grace the ability to say no to sin. And therefore, we can stay away from a lot of trouble.

But sometimes, our troubles are caused by persecution, not in this country again. And sometimes, they're caused by the knowledge of God's word. Some of the most comforting passages in God's word are often the same passages which causes Christians the most difficulty and the most trouble.

Romans 8, which is often seen as a very clear text of scripture, without too many difficulties, can actually lead many people to struggle massively with God, especially on the golden chain.

You know, that God works all genes together for those who love him, for those he called predestined. Predestined. And suddenly, the difficulty creeps in. What about Paul when he says in Romans 9, verse 23, I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart, for I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

In other words, Paul was saying that if I wasn't saved, then I wouldn't see the trouble that you're in. But the very fact that I am saved, my heart is greatly troubled because you're not.

[16 : 12] In other words, it's the Christian who feels that way. It's the Christian who looks upon the world and sees their unsaved brothers and sisters and family members or friends and what have you and can look upon their own children and can look upon their own parents or mother or father or whoever it may be who's unsaved and say to God, can you take him instead of me?

I would be willing to not be saved in order for him to be saved. And you think, well, how could you, being given this great gift by God, even consider that?

It is because what you're expressing is the very love of God for another individual. The reason you can feel that way, that you would be willing to give up your own salvation for others to come to faith, is because you're experiencing love.

But of course, others reject on their own terms and that's a difficulty which we tend to forget. And so sorrow can increase because of what we know and that's what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes, doesn't he?

The trouble with wisdom, the trouble, you ask God for wisdom and one of the greatest troubles with growing in wisdom is that it increases your sorrow. And I can remember being 19 and being disciplined by a solicitor.

[17 : 44] Not that I know, he is a Christian, he just happened to be a solicitor. I remember that, not that I needed solicitating or was held up in court for that long. Or, no, that's a joke, never been to court.

But I can remember, and he says, well, what is it you want? He says, and I can remember saying to him, I don't understand and I wish things were just clearer. And he says, well, you need to come and you need to pray for wisdom.

I can remember praying for wisdom all the time. And now that I'm 45 and I look back and I wish I kept my big mouth shut. And one of the reasons I say that is not because I'm disregarding the gift of God, but because now I understand what Solomon meant.

That when wisdom increases, so does sorrow. Because you begin to see things. And that wisdom increases sorrow as well as understanding.

So, being a Christian is, you're not, sometimes you can run into troubles rather than just escape them all. Sometimes, the trouble is caused by impatience or a lack of understanding.

[18 : 52] We can make our troubles worse by failing to live life the way God wants us to live them. And unnecessary trouble can be caused by our troubles being magnified by worried.

In other words, the trouble is really not that big, but we have magnified it through worrying. And worrying is, of course, is a sin. And so, now we're getting to the place where we recognize the trouble we're in and there's no way that we can get ourselves out of this.

And so, we come to God and say, I'm in a mess, I'm in a mess, I'm in a mess, I'm in a mess, but I'm going to begin with myself first. Help me.

Help me. I don't know what to do. I don't know what choice to make. I don't know what decision to make for others if I have to make a decision for others.

Help me. And so, the only place where we can find help and the only place where we can find our strength being renewed is on our knees before God.

[20 : 02] And so, you can get to your knees in one of two ways. You can either get there in submission to God asking for help or you can get there through exhaustion. And it's far better, trust me, to get to your knees in humility and submission before God asking for help before it's getting there in exhaustion in trying to do it in your own strength.

So, David shows us the way here. David demonstrates to us what faithfulness to God looks like. And remember that David is not always lived faithfully.

But his heart is after God. He is a man after God's own heart. Solomon, who follows, is the king with a divided heart. Hence why he had great wisdom but of course great acts of folly as well.

And so, David begins by starting to pray to asking to be taught and asking to be led. In other words, he wants to acknowledge the fact that he may not know what he needs to know and so lead me, teach me because God, you are the God of my salvation.

David wants to know, he wants to be taught and that knowledge is not just a knowledge of what he needs to ask God for in prayer, what he needs to ask God for on behalf of the nation, but what he needs to ask God for regarding himself.

[21 : 36] How can I get myself out of trouble and how can I get myself into a place where I feel close and clean with God and where there is no barrier between me and him?

And David understands, as do we, that sin is a barrier to a relationship with God, especially an intimate relationship with God. And I want to stress the difference there, that it is true that nothing can separate you from the love of God.

That now that you belong to God in Christ Jesus, your own sin cannot separate you. But it can separate the level of intimacy. It can most definitely separate your prayers being answered.

It can most definitely separate your walk with him. So I'm not saying that if you're sinning that you're somehow not God's. But what I am going to say, and I think we can all put our hand up and be honest with this, that we recognize that the feeling of a distant Jesus is a common one.

Perhaps to many of us at times when it really doesn't need to be. Sin is not a teacher. In other words, sin doesn't tell you about itself.

[22 : 46] It doesn't let you know what sin is. And we tend to think that as believers that we're quite good at noticing what sin is, but we're really terrible at noticing what sin is. Remember how we said a few weeks ago in Colossians that sin destroys the knowledge of what it is to be a person.

Well, sin also destroys the knowledge of what sin is. And we tend to forget just how much our minds have been renewed by the Spirit and by the Word of God, and this is sometimes why we struggle, why can't unbelievers get what we're saying?

Well, your minds have been renewed so much by the Word of God and the Spirit of God that you see things differently because of that renewing. Sin destroys all that knowledge, even the knowledge of what sin is.

And so we have to confess sins that we know about, we have to confess the sins that we don't know about, we have to ask God to be taught that we would understand what sin is, and that we would recognize that we come to God in faith rather than in doubt.

Now David expresses faith here, but this is where John Murray actually leads me to understand something that I perhaps did understand but not as clear as he did.

[24 : 09] And of course reading his work and understanding what he was saying allowed me to see it with great clarity, and I guess I want to pass that on to you now. So what I'm about to say is his insight, not mine, but I'm very thankful to God for reading his work and being able to see it.

And what John Murray introduces is allowing us to see the sin in when our faith is not integrated in everything that we say and do.

And often we don't see sin in those areas. We can do things in our own strength, we can do things in a very natural way, and because those things are not wrong, we would never consider them to be a sin.

But anything that does not proceed from faith is a sin. Without faith it is impossible to please God. And so what John Murray was saying is that unless faith is integrated into everything that we do, especially coming before God, the very fact that David comes and asks God, though faith is not mentioned, is a very act of faith because David doesn't see God.

God, he's praying to God in the same way we are, so it's a very act of faith to utter these words to God, knowing that God will hear them, knowing that God will listen to them, knowing that God will heed, take care of his prayer and answer them.

[25 : 37] But that's a very act of faith. And John Murray puts it this way, I'll paraphrase because this comes out of a couple of essays that he wrote, one on a world order and the other on the education within that world order.

Namely, is it possible for the world to become more Christian prior to Christ's return? That's sort of where he's going. And this is what he says, and I'm paraphrasing because it comes out of a couple of essays.

The Christian abandons their faith at the point of vocation in life if he or she fails to bring their faith to bear upon their work.

And this is different than them, him or herself, conducting themselves as a Christian in the workplace. He says, look, you can go to work and be a Christian, you can be known as a Christian, but if your faith does not integrate with your work, then you have abandoned your faith.

You have abandoned your faith at the moment, our faith does not influence what we say or do. But how many of us would see that as a sin that we're committing? We've left our faith at home when we have gone out to work.

[27 : 01] We've left our faith at home when we've gone out to the shops or when we've gone out to see someone or when we've gone out to do something or to say something to someone. Think of any type of work, think of any type of job, think of anything that you can say or do.

If your faith is not integrating John Murray, it says that you have at that point abandoned your faith. And yet how many of us would see that as a sin that we are committing on a regular basis.

There's a reason why David asks to be taught before he confesses his sins, before he comes to God and asks for forgiveness. God and God and God and says, yes, I see in me what you see in me.

And David knows that if he waits upon the Lord, he will not be put to shame because he comes to the God of his salvation. He asks for forgiveness, if you notice towards the end of the psalm here, because he knows that God is a God of mercy and of steadfast love.

In other words, he's not going to be met by a God who's going to turn him away. Verse 10 in particular, all the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

[28 : 22] God is a God who is able to not only lead David, but deal with David's problems as David comes and asks him.

David wants to be instructed by the Lord, for he knows that, verse 14, friendship. The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him and makes known to them his covenant.

My eyes are ever towards the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net. God is a God who will not only forgive him, but deliver him.

So here's the conclusion. We will have trouble in the world that we will not be able to escape even by belonging to Jesus. David understands that.

What David is asking for is to stay close and clean with God to avoid the unnecessary troubles and also to be protected from them in a way where those troubles will seek to destroy him as a person, whether the affliction is an opposing army or just one individual in particular.

[29 : 35] David is asking to be rescued. He's asking to be protected. He's asking to be forgiven. But notice the protection and what he is asking for is not just external but internal.

He recognizes that he has problems, not just the people around him. And so when he asks God to consider his affliction, verse 18, and to forgive all of his sins, he recognizes that he is part of the problem of those who offend God because this isn't an issue between him and the world.

This is an issue that has a triangular dimension, that we are always in relationship with other people and we're always in relationship with God and they are connected. So let's finish with the exhortation.

The exhortation from David is a fairly simple one, that God is able to comfort us both internally, that is in our soul because we are more than physical beings and externally from opposition.

God is able to bless, he is able to guide, he is able to teach, he is able to lead, he is able to instruct and he will not bring us to a place where we will be put to shame.

[30 : 49] The reason why Paul can say I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Gentiles to the Greek, the reason he can say that is because he understands who God is, that God does not put to shame those who belong to him.

And so my Christianity may look weak and useless in a COVID-ridden world, but I will not be put to shame. You can laugh at me, you can mock me, you can even tell me that God has not answered the prayers of the Christian church or else he would not have allowed the COVID to happen.

You can say all of that, but I live in the assurance that God will not put me to shame. God will not put his church to shame. And that's the assurance that we have.

So we can ask and we can be bold in our asking, especially in the knowledge of our reading this morning in Hebrews 11, that God is a God who can bring something out of nothing. And so we come to God in faithfulness, asking for blessing, asking for guidance, and God will.

Because the friendship of God, verse 14, the friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him. And he makes covenant and he makes known to them his covenant.

[32 : 09] Well, I would ask that the Lord would bless you and keep you as you seek to fear him. Amen.