

Prayer of Comfort

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Date: 05 May 2024

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[0 : 0 0] I completely forgot it, so now I have to move around on the iPad and try to work the digital Bible, and it hasn't been working as well as I wanted, but we should be all right. We're going to be looking at the psalm today, the psalm of David, actually the first psalm of David that we have in the 150 psalms that we have in Scripture. Many of them are in fact written by David, but this is quite an interesting psalm, and I think we can learn something about how to pray well in the midst of fears and anxieties, in the midst of many troubles. So I'm hoping that as we look at these words, as we understand the moment, the emotions, the struggle of David, and his response in prayer, that we might learn something for ourselves that we can apply and actually practice in our own prayers. See, I found that the psalms are given to us by God to help shape our language of prayer. Very similar to the Lord's prayer that Jesus prayed, he said, when you pray, pray like this, and he gave this generic prayer that anyone can pray at any moment, but if you've prayed it enough times, you almost learn what it looks like. Your prayer begins with an adoration for God, then in the middle you make some petitions for what you need, and then at the end you worship God again with his glory and his power. So Jesus almost gives us a framework for how we could pray in any situation from his little short Lord's Prayer in the Gospel of Matthew. So I'm hoping here that David in this moment is going to give us an instruction for how we might pray in the early morning, in the midst of struggle, for God's protection. He would give us some of that language to speak. And I find this is helpful, right, and it's true when we have been believers for a long time, when we have read God's Word for a long time, when we have prayed many prayers all the time, it can sometimes become almost stale and lifeless. We pray the same things every day, just repeated over, almost like a religious mantra, empty of its words. We read God's scriptures and we say, oh, I'm familiar with that, I know that story. And it doesn't yet strike us, and it doesn't come to our heart. And it's a big struggle. And I got into the practice of praying through psalms, because so many books are written that when you go to Bible college, when you get trained to be a minister, that it can almost become lifeless. There's books written called How to Stay a Christian in Seminary.

It doesn't make sense. Your whole job is studying scripture. Your whole job is devoted to the Lord. But people lose it because it becomes a routine. It becomes an academic exercise. It becomes an assignment to check off. And praying through the psalms was so helpful for me to be creative and fresh.

And I would read through the verse by verse and say, Lord, what could I pray that is brought to mind by the psalm? So I'm hoping as we read through these short eight verses that you might think of something in the midst of anxiety. This is how I can pray. This is how I can structure and bring my petition before the Lord and trust that he will answer it. So I'm hoping to be very practical today. We'll get a picture into the situation of David, into the words he's saying, into the meaning of the psalm. But what we're really doing is looking at the psalm as a way to teach us how to pray like David, a man who's meant to be after God's own heart. Not perfectly, but still faithfully at many moments. So let us look at the verse again. I want to read it a second time because it's very good to read psalms many times because it's poetry. You have to see the rhyme, the rhythm, the repetition, the movement so that you can see it. He says here in verse one, oh Lord, he addresses God directly. He says, how many are my foes? How many are rising against me? How many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God? Do you see that emphasis of many, many, many? David is stressed. He is seeing a great number of people standing against him. In fact, we're told exactly what the situation David's in, in the little superscription, that little description at the beginning of the psalm, where it's a psalm of David when he fled from Absalom, his son. So I'll tell you a bit of the story. You've got to go back to 2 Samuel to chapters 15 to 18. David has not been the best king. He has not been the most faithful.

At this point in time, he has stolen a man's wife. He's put him to death. He has not dealt with some serious trouble and transgressions in his own family. And God has said because of his sinfulness that someone was actually going to rise up in his own household and is going to act against him, rebel against him. And it turns out to be his son Absalom. Absalom does not trust that vengeance is the Lord, that God makes all things right. He takes it into his own hands. And for about a year, he gets all of these political friends and political powers around him and the generals, and he makes them all love him more than David. And he makes them go against them, and he starts to blame David for Saul being taken out as king. Rather than God removing that blessing, he says, well, it's David's fault that your friend Saul lost his kingdom. And after about a year of scheming and working, Absalom rises up and actually chases David out of Jerusalem. He's back on the run. Now, this is not the first time David has been on the run for his life. It's not the first time David has made caves his home. It's not the first time he's been out with the wild beasts. He did it when Saul chased him, but now he's meant to be the king. He's meant to have all the power, all the security. He has now known comfort. He probably slept in one of the few beds that people could have with nice pillows and all of his wives and all sorts of things that he thought were earthly pleasures stripped from him, all of his power taken from him. Thousands of men of Israel seeking him for his destruction. His own son turned against him. That's the situation that we're brought into. So I want you to think for a moment of David sitting in a cave. Everything good he's ever done in his life has led to nothing at this moment. It's been taken from him. He is no longer God's king. He is seeing his failures has ripped apart his family and now ripped apart his kingdom.

And you know what's interesting? Is he begins his psalm by pointing this out. He says to God, quite simply, look at my problem. Look at what people are saying about me. Is it true? Is it true that I'm not just, you know, facing adversity now because of my brokenness? Is it actually true that you've left me?

[6 : 12] That there's no chance of salvation for me? See, the psalm puts pride of place to David's emotional state. He's suffering. He's anxious. He's worried. And do you know what he does? He tells God about it. He lays it bare before him. And I don't know if you know, God already knows his situation. It's not new information to him, but maybe you've found this in prayer at moments. Sometimes I feel like I can't be too honest with God because it sounds almost ungrateful, maybe even bordering on irreverent, not actually being truly grateful for all that God's done with me. So in the midst of a moment of struggle, I don't want to say, honestly, God, there's a problem and I feel like it's you right now. I feel like you have abandoned me. I feel like these people have more say over my life than you do. What are you doing, God? Where are the promises that you gave me? You said if I was faithful in raising my children, they would follow, but here they are in the wilderness. They've left me. They've left you.

I'm struggling. So this psalm begins here with an honest declaration of, God, this is where I'm at. This is the state of my heart. And I want you to feel free that many of the psalms, this is what they begin with, is this declaration of, God, I'm abandoned by you. I'm suffering. I'm in pain. I may be angry, disappointed. I am lost. I'm anxious. I can barely think. Here it is, God, laid out all my mess. It's okay to start your prayers that way. It's okay to be honest with God. It's even, I think, okay to spend a bit of time with God in a place of anger and pain and discomfort. It's part of processing through the grief. So the first great thing that we learn from the psalm is that David could bring a complaint before God. He could really ask him. Now, I'll tell you, maybe it's the bad news for you. Often when you bring your complaint and pain before God, he will very quickly point out to you where, in fact, you have gone wrong, where, in fact, you have created problems, or where, in fact, you are being a bit, maybe, dramatic at times, that you feel like the weight of the world's on your shoulders, but you don't see the God who's actually propping you up and keeping you standing.

God might do that, but many times God's just happy to sit with you in the midst of pain. We're told that when we can't even cry, when we don't even know what words to say, that the Spirit of God would speak and cry out for us, cry out, Abba, Father, come help me, be with me. It's okay to be honest with God in our prayers. It is good to be honest about our emotions, our disappointments, our struggles.

David is there. He says, many, many, many are my problems, but the good news is that the psalm doesn't end with the many adversaries. It ends with the one who is more powerful than all of them.

So let's look here at David's comfort, because here's the other thing. Our emotions are real and genuine, and we need to speak about them and process them, but they're also deceitful. They make a bigger deal of themselves than they deserve to be. They try and rule over us, and there's moments where our own pain, our own suffering, our own struggle, that we need to preach to it the truth of who God is, and preach to it the truth of what God has done over our lives, and we actually need to speak, like David did in another psalm where he says, why are you so downcast, oh my soul? Trust in God, hope in God. You need to speak that truth to him, because that is the truth of God that empowers us. So if you look at verses 3 through to 6, this is what it says.

[9 : 39] But you, see this great but, he says, here's my state, here's my feelings, here's my emotions, but now here is the truth. You, oh Lord, are a shield about me, a shield that goes all around me, that protects me in every single place. You are my glory, not my throne, not my status, not my reality, not what people think of me, not what people say of me. In fact, you, God alone, are the one who gives me glory. You are the lifter of my head, you're the one who encourages, and we know we have the comforter who lives inside of us, always ready to comfort and encourage us. And then he says this in verses 4, 5, and 6, I cried to the Lord, I let my pain and my suffering and my anxieties out to God, and he answered me. Now it's interesting, how does he answer? Not instant restoration, not an instant answer to his prayers, he's not suddenly back in the palace, transported. No, no, it's very simple.

David laid down and he slept, and then he woke up and God sustained him. Do you know how good that is? I don't know if you've probably experienced this, where you're so stressed and worried about something that you can barely sleep. Right, for the first time since I've been married, I am sleeping alone in a bed. Right, my wife is far away, she's distant, we can't speak all the time. I found it a struggle to find sleep because I've lost that sort of comfort and security. David is in a cave somewhere, worrying for his life with thousands of men pursuing him, but what peace does God grant him? Rest, sleep, comfort. Sometimes that's the best thing we need, is just to rest our eyes, rest our soul, and then even better than just rest, God wakes him up again. He sustains him. Do you know how great it is that every breath that you breathe is a breath that God gives you? We know that our days are numbered, that the day you will leave will never be a surprise to God, that he has allotted it to you, he has given it to you for his purposes. Here David, he's not finished with David's story because David woke up again. David breathed another breath. The story of what God was doing is not finished for David.

So do you see, David here meets his pain, he meets his anxiety, he meets his problem with the character of God, and then with the testimony of God's goodness to him.

Right, do you see that? It's true that God is good, that God is great, that God is perfect, that God is in control, that God is the shield, he is protection, he is a provider, amazing. But David goes one step further where he says, you know, actually, you've been all of those things to me. Don't know if you know this, but sometimes we say things about God and we know that scripture teaches it, that he's true, that he never fails, that he never abandons us, but it doesn't feel like he's that for me and for my story. And this is why the testimony of God's faithfulness is so important to you. If you've been in a Christian world for any length of time, you have great testimonies of God's provision, of where God made a way where there was no way.

Right, my wife and I, young and married, what do we worry about? Money. Often we have trouble and worry. We do not make enough to do it. She was studying and we needed to pay it off, and we prayed, and family was gracious to us, and people blessed us. But there was a point in time where we said to each other, you know, we hear these great stories of God just providing for people, not even knowing. One of the ministers I worked with for a while, he felt that he needed to propose and get married to the wife, and immediate, that was the leading that he had. But he had no money for a ring, and that was Saturday night, and Sunday morning he walked up and someone handed him an envelope, and it was exactly the right amount of money he needed to buy the ring he wanted. He didn't even ask, he didn't even mention, he didn't get a chance to pray. He had a leading in his heart, and they didn't. God hadn't had that sort of story for me. I hadn't seen that. And in the midst of our struggles, we said, you know, it's good that God is blessing us through our family and through people providing that we know, but how great would it be to know that it's exactly God, not just the kindness of people. That someone we don't know, someone we haven't told our story to, is able to provide for us. And my wife just said it flippantly. She said, do you know how encouraging that would be to my heart? A few weeks later about, didn't even remember the story, the exact amount of money that we needed to finish off her school fees gets put into account with a simple God bless from a random person she used to work for a long time away. She had no good relationship with, she left the work because it wasn't good, but they just felt that was what God needed to do, and God provided. And that's a testimony that we can look back on, that the next time we're in trouble we can declare, but our

[14 : 25] God is a provider. He doesn't just say that in the book. It says it in my life story. It says it in the reality of the life I have lived with Christ. So it's good to come with our complaints, it's good to come with our anxieties, but it's also good to speak the truth of God's character and the truth of the testimony of God's faithfulness over us. That's what David does. He says, this is what you are. You are my protection. You are my glory. You are my comforter. And more than that, in even this little moment, he found rest and comfort. He found life again the next day when he felt like his life was going to be taken from him. So David brings his complaint to God, but he meets his complaint with the comfort of who our God is and what our God has done for him. And we must do that in our prayers.

Sometimes we run away from the truth of God's scripture, that we need to claim the promises that God has made, that we need to claim the gifts that God says, this is true of you, right? Jesus says, do not worry. Do not be anxious. God even cares for the birds. How much more will he do for you?

Have you ever thought to pray that when you're worried about your provision? When you said, I see that bird over there out my window, God. He doesn't worry. I won't worry. I will trust in my God who has provided me. If you don't have too many of your own stories, ask some faithful brothers and sisters next to you about the story of their provision. Right? It's always been a comfort to me to know that all throughout my life, God has blessed my family when we need it. He's provided for my family when we need it. So when it came time for him to provide for my new family that I was making, I wasn't doubtful. That wasn't the same story that my wife thought. She had a story of scarcity and worry and loss and feeling as if God pulls the rug out from under her sometimes. But here we have seen in our walk as we trust in God, as we pray and we have faith, he's not pulling the rug out. He's propping us up. He's sustaining us. He is giving us testimonies of his faithfulness. And this is the amazing thing is there were many foes, many problems, many adversaries, but just one God was enough to conquer it all. Just one could stand against the world. Right? There is that kind of corny saying that it says it's better to stand with God against the world than to stand with the world against God because only one wins. Only one's power never ends. Only one can provide a guarantee.

And that's God. We go on to the next part. David has now taken some encouragement. He's moved out of his place of anxiety and pain. He has been sustained by God. He has a taste of God's grace again in his life. And it puts him forward to a bit of courage where he now puts his ask, his big ask towards God.

He says, here is my cry. Here's what I want you to do for me. He says, arise, O Lord. Remember, it says that many are rising against him. He sees the tides. He sees the problem. But he says now, arise, O God, O Lord. Save me, O God. It's a very simple question. Please be it. A prayer I like to like to pray in this sort of moment where I know I'm just not sure what to do is just, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me. He knows what kind of mercy I need. He knows the exact mercy that I need for the work that he's called me to in that moment. But that is my short prayer, because I know that that little prayer of just a few words is more powerful than any plan of man that could be made, than any idea that I might have. For it says here, this is the truth of it. God strikes down the enemies of his people. God breaks the teeth of the wicked. And this is sometimes a bit difficult to think of.

[18 : 08] And all throughout the Psalms, there's these sorts of phrases where we talk about God bringing vengeance and pain. And sometimes people can confuse it and see the just punishment of God on the wicked, as if God is mean and callous and terrible. Or think to themselves, okay, maybe David could say that sort of thing. Maybe David can talk about that and pray, but I can't. But these commands of God to bring judgment, I would put it forward to you that it is better to do what David does here about his enemies than what Absalom did about his father. See, David had done wrong to his family. David had done wrong to the people. David had done wrong to the Lord. Wicked in some of his actions.

What did Absalom do? He took vengeance for himself. He took justice into his own hands. He said, so I'll make it right. I'll make myself judge, jury, and executioner of my father's reign.

David does something to Saul and was running from him. David says, in fact, that he got so close to Saul that he was able to cut a part of his robe. But he said, I will not touch the Lord. God at his own time has removed you. Here David does the same. He says, vengeance is not mine, but in fact, vengeance is the Lord. The Lord. God is the only one that should execute judgment on people. It is not for us to take that into our own hands. It's not for us to be like Absalom, to rise up and do our own justice. But in fact, we can trust that no one escapes the justice of God. The reality is every sin does get executed in the judgment of God. It was either on that cross by those who faithfully trusted him, or it will be on the day of judgment. We do not have to worry. We do not have to take things into our own hands. In fact, it is better to say, God, you see this wickedness. Make it right. I trust in your goodness. I trust in your power. And he ends here, and it's so interesting that out of nowhere, we've dealt with the many that were in opposition, the one who could save him, the I that had the problem in David. He says this, but salvation belongs to the Lord. Your blessing be on your people. Suddenly expanded this prayer. David has been so comforted in the midst of loss that he stopped just looking at himself and his own problems and his own insular thinking. And for once, he's actually thinking like a king again. He's thinking like, these are my people, and actually, they're lost, and they're broken. They're being led astray, and they're being led into wickedness by my son. So he begins to say, well, God, you will bless the people, and I will remember that that's who I'm meant to be for. See, he goes from this I, me, you, to actually we, the people of God, require the blessing of God. The other thing that's important is he says now with confidence, salvation belongs to God. See, at the beginning of the psalm, the people said there is no salvation for David. What David has found in the comfort of prayer, in the truth of who God is, is that men do not decide what happens with the salvation of God. That we are not the judges, that we do not set the standard, but in fact salvation belongs to God alone, and it's him who we trust. And that it might appear to the world that the wicked are winning, that the wicked are prospering, but the righteous prosper in the end. Maybe you could go up for a moment to the very first psalm,

Psalms 1, verses 5 and 6. It's the very end of the first psalm, which acts as a bit of an introduction to the whole book. It says, therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. See, that's the big hope of this whole book, is actually the wicked are there, but they will stand in judgment before. They will not stand in judgment. They will not be able to have any pride of place. They will not stand among God's righteous on the day of judgment, that in fact God knows those who seek him faithfully. He cares for them. He is in a relationship with them. He is a provider for them, but the wicked, they perish without him. That is the great confidence that David meets with, and it seems almost like a completely different David, a different emotional state, from one who is focused on the problem and the pain and the suffering and the danger, to one who can declare, my God is my salvation. I focus on him alone. He cries for this deliverance. He praises God for his goodness, and he trusts God to make it right. And if you go read 2 Samuel 19 through 18, God does restore David. God does make it right. Absalom's end is death in his wickedness, but God makes it right.

So I hope you can see that a framework for praying, no matter what emotional state you're in, no matter what your great fears are or your anxieties are, is that we must bring our complaint before the Lord.

[23 : 16] Say it honestly and truly, emotionally, painfully, whatever we need to do. But we cannot just leave our emotions to rule over our prayer life. We cannot just leave our emotions to rule over our mental state. In fact, we need to declare the goodness of God's character, the faithfulness of the testimony God has in his provision for our lives. And then finally, we must with confidence ask God to provide the needs that we have. Ask God to make it right. Ask God to bring the comfort and the deliverance.

This was not part of our original plan for the order of the evening, but I feel like it is right in this moment to think about it, that I want to give you a bit of time to pray before we sing the final song, before we declare what a great friend we have in Jesus, who we can bring all of our prayers to. Maybe for a little while, a few minutes, think about your emotions. Speak to God about your current state, whether it's joy or pain, whether it's a need for comfort or a need for deliverance.

Speak to him. And then I want you to remember the character of God, the goodness of God, the fact that God is a provider, that God is sovereign, that he is in control of your life. And then ask God for what you need. Ask him for the salvation and what that looks like, what it looks like for God to make it right in your life. And trust faithfully. Don't be double-minded here about what God is doing. God can provide. God can save. God can make it right. Let's sit and pray for a few minutes like that, and then we'll open up in the final song, and I'll close us off today, and we can have a chat. Good early night.

Good early night. Good early night.