

Comfort for the Comfortless

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Bible Text: Psalm 77
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We'd like to now turn to God's holy word as we find our scripture reading for this evening's service in Psalm 77. Psalm 77. The Psalm is titled,

1 To the chief Musician, to Jeduthun, A Psalm of Asaph. I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me. 2 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. 3 I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah. 4 Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. 5 I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. 6 I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search. 7 Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? 8 Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? 9 Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah. 10 And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. 11 I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. 12 I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings. 13 Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God? 14 Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people. 15 Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah. 16 The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled. 17 The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. 18 The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook. 19 Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. 20 Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Thus far the reading of God's holy and precious word. May he add his blessing to it.

Beloved congregation, I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles again to Psalm 77 and I'd like to read verses 2 and 3. Psalm 77:2 and 3. Asaph the psalmist says, "In the day of

my trouble I sought the Lord: my soul 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." Heaviness, that is the one word summary that she used, heaviness. Now to give you a little context, last week I had or two weeks go ahead synodical committee meetings and one of the committees I'm privileged to serve on is the Youth and Ed Committee. Now the Youth and Ed Committee, our task as a committee is to help care for the spiritual needs of the youth in our federation, and on our committee to help us we have a few youth advisers. So these are young people from our churches who help us; their job is to help us, as it were, keep our fingers on the pulse of our youth and their spiritual needs. And one of the youth advisers in her report to us, she used this word to summarize her report, heaviness. What she was getting at was that as she looked at her friend groups, as she looked at the young people in our churches, she said at least it seems to be there's this heaviness that's lingering and can't be shaken. And she had a few examples of what she was talking about and there's reasons and there's causes for this and we won't get into that as helpful as that would be, but what I want to do this evening is focus on that condition, heaviness. Is that you this evening, friend? Is that how you came into this church building, with a heavy heart, overwhelmed by worries maybe? And this isn't just our young people, we can go through the generations and we see that there is heaviness, there are worries that each of us faces and maybe more so even in these days that we live.

Well, where should we go with these things? What should we do if we're there experiencing that heaviness? Well, in the Lord's kindness, he has given us this Psalm, Psalm 77, and this evening we'd like to look at this Psalm under the title, "Comfort for the Comfortless." Comfort for the comfortless We have two points this evening. The first one is refusing to be comforted. Refusing to be comforted. Now beloved, the basic truth that the Lord is teaching us as we look at the first half of this Psalm, verses 1 to 9, the basic truth the Lord is teaching us is that his people can be in a place where their souls refuse to be comforted. Why did the Spirit give us Psalm 77? This is one of the major reasons why he included it in this Canon that we call scripture, is that we might learn this lesson. The Lord is saying, "My people can be in a place where their souls refuse to be comforted." Maybe that's surprising to you. His people, true Christians, true believers, those who are loved by the Almighty God and who then out of response to the love that they've received, they now love him, those people, those people who have experienced the full riches of God's grace, those people who at this very moment have an inheritance reserved for them kept in heaven for them, those people can be in such a place where their souls refuse to be comforted. Isn't that an amazing word? That word comes to us from verse 2. Do you see it there? Asaph, he says, "my soul refuses to be comforted." We can picture it just like a newborn child, a newborn infant. They need their mother's milk. They're crying out for their mother's milk. And yet maybe they just haven't yet learned to latch and so they're not getting the milk they need. Spiritually speaking, that can be the condition of the believer where they need comfort, they need the Lord, and it seems that they can't get him and so they can't get the comfort that they need.

That's where the believer can be spiritually and even a mature believer can be there. In fact, notice this is a Psalm of Asaph. He's a child of God. He's a mature believer. In fact,

he's been appointed by God, hand selected by God to be a psalmist and a worship leader under the old covenant, leading an old covenant worship, and yet even mature Asaph is there. He's there where he says, "my soul refuses to be comforted." Now we don't know what's happening in his life. Verse 2 just tells us it's a day of trouble. And that there, that day of trouble it's beautifully generic enough that we can fit ourselves under that. We all experience various troubles and here is Asaph in that day of trouble refusing to be comforted.

Now what's this experience like? We want to understand what we mean when Asaph says refusing to be comforted, what's that like? And how can a Christian be there? That's what we're looking at in the first point here, and we have three things to say. First of all, this experience is one of crying out. That's the first thing. Notice that's verses 1 to 3, crying out. Verse 1, "I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice." And so, beloved, as Asaph writes this Psalm, you can hear, as it were, the desperation that's flowing from his pen. "I cried out to God with my voice." That's how he describes his prayers, crying out. Through that there's tears at times mingled with his prayers, are there sighs brought in with his prayers? There's this heaviness. That's what he's experiencing and he's crying out this word, it signifies calling out, lifting up his voice. He's speaking out loud.

Now children, we don't know the content of this prayer but we could safely guess and safely summarize what it is. "Help! Help, Lord! I feel like I'm drowning here!" And so you can see the picture, as it were, that where Asaph is the water is covering him, it's almost like he's fully submerged, maybe his lips are just above the water, his arm is stretched out. "Lord help!" He's crying out. He's calling out, "God, save me! Deliver me! Help me!" And notice Asaph is going to the right place. He's going to God. He emphasizes that two times there in verse 1. He's going to God even to God, and verse 2 stresses this, "In the day of my trouble, I sought the Lord." Now friends, this is good. Asaph is going to the one place we need to go. Whenever we're in trouble, there is one place we must go, and it's where Asaph went, to the Lord. Are you going there? Have you learned to go there? This is something the Spirit teaches us because prior to grace, prior to the Spirit's work, we go many places but there. Then the Spirit comes and he births these cries within us and we start going out, we start going to God. We start crying heavenward, "Lord, help! God, help!"

That's Asaph, he's going there constantly, you see that in verse 2, "my sore ran in the night, and ceased not." Day turns into night and the prayers don't stop. He keeps crying out. He's praying without ceasing. In the kitchen, crying out. Now maybe silently, maybe, you know, not wanting to create a scene, the families around, crying out. In the car, now it's audible, now it's verbal, crying out, lifting up his voice, "Lord, where art thou? What is happening in my life? Lord, help me!" Was that your week? Is that where you were this week crying out, burdened, burdened by this heaviness?

Now what comes next is surprising. Here we find Asaph, he's doing all the right things. He's crying out. He's going to the right place and yet notice the next words, verse 2, "my soul refused to be comforted," and that right there, congregation, is the overarching

description of Asaph's experience. "My soul refused to be comforted. Yes, worry that's flooding in, questions are swarming about, but my heart it's as if it has a closed door to comfort. A comfort won't penetrate. My soul refuses to be comforted." And so what a troubling place to be, to be praying but to have no peace.

What do you do then? What do you do then when you're praying and you have no peace? When you're praying and your prayers don't seem to bring any peace? Now many Christians, they act as if only you prayed to God then you'd experience peace. Or if only you prayed to God more then certainly you would experience peace. And so here's the troubled Christian, they're cast down, they're in affliction, there's all of these shadows and fog surrounding them, and we can maybe come up to that Christian and we have the quick fix. we hold out, as it were, the easy button, "Pray more. Just press that. Pray more and you'll be fine. Peace will come back. Your problems will disappear." Try telling that to Asaph. Try telling that to Job. "Pray more? Pray more, I'm praying without ceasing. Don't you see? I haven't stopped praying yet there's no peace. My soul refuses to be comforted."

Beloved, when we are in this place or when we're helping someone who's in this place, we need to get rid of that mindset that looks for the quick and easy fix. There's no quick and easy fix here, and if we try to force on someone, "Just pray more," that's going to lead to more long term damage. Especially imagine coming to Asaph with that counsel, "Pray more." Yes, prayer is always appropriate, don't misunderstand me. Prayer, it's always the right time to pray. It's always a good time to pray, right? Should we pray? Now let's pray. Be praying We need to be praying and yet we dare not hold out prayer as something that guarantees peace, subjective peace to come flooding in the heart because there are times, there are depths, there are seasons in the Christian's life when that simply won't happen. It's not happening here for Asaph.

Now it actually even gets more desperate than this. Notice verse 3, it's even more shocking. Asaph says, "I remembered God," and this word "remembered," it's the idea of bringing to someone's mind. It's not like I forgot something, now it just popped into my mind. I remembered it. But This is intentional. This word expresses intention. "I remembered God. I set my mind on God. I fixed my mind on him. I meditated on him." And look what happens. "I remembered God, and was troubled." That's a Christian, a believer talking. Isn't that surprising? We would think that the thought of God would bring relief to the believer. And often it does. You read the other Psalms, many other Psalms, and often the believer is there in deep darkness and they get a view of God, they get that God comes into view and there's relief, there's comfort. Often the Lord works that way. And yet note this, there are times and seasons when the believer thinks on God and it leads to more trouble. Do you see that?

How does this work? How does this work? Well, picture Asaph here, he's in the darkness. He's in despair. He's been crying out to God constantly and yet as he cries out deliverance doesn't seem to come. His prayers aren't bringing relief, and so the thought of God doesn't bring comfort. It actually brings more trouble. When he thinks of God, all he can think about now is how God doesn't seem to be listening. It seems like the heavens have

turned into bronze and all my prayers are just bouncing off the bronze. There's this great barrier. That's what it seems like, and so, as Asaph thinks on God, he thinks of a God who doesn't seem to be listening and these questions flood his heart. Why is God not answering? Is God against me? He must be against me. He's not answering. If he was for me, he would have answered long ago. And so you see how this goes? See how it can leave even a child of God unraveled?

This is the vicious thought cycle that the believer can be trapped in and I wonder, are you there? Was that your week this week? To be there praying to God and receiving no comfort and so now asking all these questions. If so, what conclusions have you drawn about yourself? Have these experiences lead you to conclude a believer wouldn't feel this way? "A believer prays, a believer receives peace. I prayed. I didn't receive peace therefore I'm not a believer." Are those the conclusions you're drawing? Look at Asaph, mature believer experiencing no peace as he prays.

And so if those are thoughts even though they seem reasonable enough to us, they go against the clear teaching of this text. Asaph the believer prays and prays and prays, still no comfort, and so what this text is teaching us is that sometimes the believer does feel this way and does experience these things. The point for us is this: our subjective feelings of peace or comfort is not a good gauge for determining our spiritual condition. Our subjective feelings of peace or comfort is not a good gauge. The needle on the gauge of our feelings is doing this. That's not a good gauge. If Asaph went based on his feelings, he would be in a mess and he is. He's here and he's in a mess. In fact, he's praying and he's overwhelmed and this takes us to the second thing, he's worried sick, not just calling out, crying out, but worried sick. Notice this is how Asaph is feeling. Like he's troubled, verse 2. He's inconsolable, verse 2. He refuses to be comforted.

He's overwhelmed, verse 3, and now look at verse 4, "Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak." Beloved, Asaph's mental, emotional, spiritual battles are now, we might say, having physical consequences. Just look at the imagery. He says, "Thou holdest," and literally, "Thou holdest my eyelids open." And so you see the picture, children, here's Asaph, he lays down to sleep, he goes to bed and it feels like God is there holding his eyes open. No sleep. He's scared sleepless and he can't sleep and he has no rest. He's tossing, he's turning in bed, pacing around the bed, still no sleep. There's physical consequences to his troubles that he's experiencing. Not only scared sleepless but also scared speechless. He says, "I'm so troubled I cannot speak." Do you see that? He's totally overwhelmed. There's no words anymore. He doesn't want to talk to people. Being part of community is hard, it's hard work. "I just want to be alone. I want to be isolated." That's how he feels. And notice before there were these constant cries, constant calling out, but now he's scared speechless. It's like his heart has gone silent. He's numb. He's fearful.

Asaph here is worried sick. Now he feels awful, he's not getting any rest, he's not relating to others, and so the spiral continues. He's going deeper into the darkness, deeper into the depths, the burdens are getting heavier. And congregation, notice this leaves him vulnerable. When we're there, when our feelings are dominating us, then it just feeds our

worst fears. See how this works for Asaph? You see verses 7 through 9, he starts questioning everything. That's the third element here: questioning everything. Crying out, worried sick, now questioning everything. His feelings are feeding his worst fears and so he starts asking these scary questions and these are soul-shaking questions. Do you see what he says? Verse 7, "Will the Lord cast off for ever?" Will the Lord cast off forever, that's the worst fear. "Will the Lord, will my God, will my Savior, will my shepherd cast me off forever? Will he toss me aside as if I'm of no use to him? Is God done with me?"

Do you worry about that? Have you ever been there? Friend, if you've ever worried about that, that's a good sign you're his. Not that you need to worry about these things. Now I'm not saying that every Christian needs to come into these depths, but if the fact that you're worrying about being cast off by the Lord, that's a great sign the Spirit has worked in your life. You wouldn't care if you were cast off by God if your heart was still dead and hard. If you care about the Lord, about his presence, what a sign of grace, actually. But in the moment Asaph doesn't see it. Will the Lord cast off forever? Will he be favorable no more? Notice again, this is what it feels like. It feels like the Lord has drawn a line in the sand and up until now the Lord's been favorable, but we just crossed that line. No more favor. That's what it feels like for him. He's there in this place, in this pit. Is his mercy clean gone forever? Does his promise fail for evermore? Oh friend, what a place to be, if that's you this evening to be questioning everything, to be questioning our God, has his steadfast love stopped being steadfast? Has his unflinching love failed me? Has the God who never lies been unfaithful to his promises?

Congregation, this is where a poor, confused, troubled soul can be so cast down, to be asking these questions with Asaph. And these questions, they seem to be forming rock solid conclusions in his mind. These things seem so true. The answer to all of these, it feels like, "Yes, God has." Verse 9, "Has God forgotten to be gracious?" Has grace, as it were, slipped from the mind of God? Has he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Just like a fireman after he puts out a fire, he goes over and he seals up, he shuts up the fire hydrant. No more water spewing out. Has the Lord done that towards me? No more tender mercies flowing my way? These tender mercies that I depend on, this grace that I need, have they stopped flowing towards me? Congregation notice these are the conclusions Asaph's drawing based on how he's feeling and again, this might be you tonight. As you're here, as you came here, maybe you're saying, "Based on my situation, based on where I stand, these are the rock solid conclusions that I'm making about God. Others have come, they've tried to counsel me, they've tried to speak comfort to me, their words are bouncing off my heart. I receive no comfort. My soul refuses to be comforted."

Oh friend, what a hard place that is to be, and for those of us who are caring for such troubled souls, shouldn't this draw forth compassion? Isn't that one of the lessons the Lord is teaching us? Maybe you're not there, maybe you're not in these depths and these darkneses, and yet the Lord is allowing you, as it were, to taste what that's like, to draw forth compassion as you minister to those in these places. And yet troubled one, if you're in that place, then note already there is a glimmer of hope here because note this: God knows your condition. Can't you at least grant that to God? He knows my condition. He knows what I'm dealing with. He knows the questions of my heart. He knows the

thoughts that I think. He knows my experiences. And all of that should say to you, beloved, he sees you. He hasn't abandoned you.

Now if you go to a doctor and they have no clue what you're dealing with, you list your symptoms, "Here's what I'm dealing with," they have no clue, never heard of it. Okay, that's trouble. I need a new doctor. But if the doctor says, "I know exactly what you're dealing with. And in fact, I've actually helped countless others who share these same symptoms." Then you can rest assured, here's a doctor, here's an expert. Here's one who maybe has some help for me. And beloved, troubled one, take heart God knows your condition, he knows what you're going through, and he's helped countless others like you. And so go to him. Keep going to him; I know the believer already is. Keep going to him. That's his instruction for you. He has a cure. There's no quick solution but the Lord has effective remedies for his people.

Now we should note that we aren't just spiritual beings but we're physical beings as well, and so sometimes we need to change our routines, sometimes we are overworked. There's a place for medication to help our physical bodies or help our minds, yes, absolutely. But we also need guidance for our spiritual life and that's what we want to see in our second point: remembering the Lord's redemption. Remembering the Lord's redemption. So far as we look at this Psalm, Asaph has been subject to his feelings. Notice he's been forecasting all of these conditions for the future. "Has the Lord cast me off forever?" And so if Asaph was the weatherman, as it were, and he was giving the forecast it would always be rainy and thunderstorms and bad weather, hurricanes, tornadoes, because that's how he's feeling. That's what the future looks like.

And yet notice the second-half of the Psalm takes a significant turn. In fact, the pivot point is verse 10. Here in what follows, instead of going along with his thoughts, Asaph starts to challenge his thoughts. Slowly, patiently, he begins to feed his mind new truths. And notice this emphasis on the mind. Verse 10, "And I said, This is my infirmity," my weakness, my weakness led me to think this way but notice verse 10, "but I will remember," and again verse 11, "I will remember. Surely I will remember." Verse 12, "I will meditate." And so you see that there's something different happening now in the mind of this psalmist. There's something different happening in his thought life.

Now maybe you say, "Well Asaph remembered God before and it did him no good. It only lead to trouble. So what's the difference?" That's a great question. That question actually shows us the beautiful remedy of what we find in this second point here, because notice before Asaph was thinking of God generically. What I mean by that is that he was here in his circumstances, he was here in his troubles, in his feelings, and then he, as it were, was trying to fit God into the equation. And so there he is, and his feelings are speaking loudly and now he starts interpreting God through his feelings. And every time he did that it left him to conclude horrible things about God. "God is cold. God is indifferent. God is against me. I feel forsaken therefore God must be the type of God who forsakes his people." You see how this works? He's interpreting God through his feelings. "I feel overwhelmed therefore God must not care for his people. I feel scared therefore God must not be a protector." And so he's interpreting God through his feelings and that's

horrible, beloved. Every time we do that we're on the path of casting horrible shadows all over God's character, and soon before we know it, the beautiful, holy, righteous, gracious, compassionate, glorious God soon he starts to look like a monster. But now there's been a change. There's been a change in Asaph's thoughts. He's not operating this way anymore. He doesn't take a generic view of God and then try to make sense of God through his feelings. Notice what he's doing now, now he is remembering God, now he's thinking on God in light of his great redemptive works. Do you see that? This makes all the difference in the world, to know God through his great redemptive works and to think on God that way. Verse 10, "I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High." Now children, the right hand of God, that refers to his strong mighty saving hand. That's who he's referring to, and so we could read it this way, "I remember the years of salvation. I remember God's mighty salvation." Notice verse 11, "I will remember the works of the LORD," not seeing God now through the glasses of my feelings but now I'm seeing him through his redemptive works. That's how I'm interpreting God. "Surely I will remember thy wonders of old." Thy wonders meaning his wonderful works. Verse 12, "I will meditate also of all thy work and talk of thy doings."

So do you see the new focus for Asaph? Beloved, this is the best remedy. We won't find comfort if we replay over and over again in our heads how we feel. That's what we naturally are tempted to do. But hope begins to creep in when we remember God's gracious salvation. That's the first great key under the second point: remember God's gracious salvation. Yes, I feel forsaken. Yes, I feel cast off. Yes, I feel forgotten. Acknowledge that, "I feel this way yet God is the Redeemer."

Notice verse 15, that's the key word there, "Thou hast with thine arm," There's that saving arm again, "Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people." Now children, what is a redeemer? A redeemer is someone who steps in to rescue someone else who's in trouble and they do so at expense to themselves. And we get a beautiful picture of this in the Old Testament. In fact, the great picture of the Redeemer in the Old Testament was Boaz. Boaz. Do you remember what he did? There's Ruth the Moabitess. She's in trouble, and here comes Boaz. He steps in as the redeemer and at expense to himself redeems her. It cost him his reputation to take the Moabitess to himself. It cost him financially to provide for her and Naomi. And yet this is that beautiful gospel term then that speaks so much of what the Lord does. Our God of promise, our God of the covenant, the one who has said to sinners, "I will be thy God." On the basis of these great promises God comes and at cost to himself he saves these sinners.

And this is starting to fill Asaph's mind. It's the message of God over and over and over again in the Bible. What is the Bible about? Here's the message in a summary: God is the Redeemer. God saves sinners. And this great redemption of God in the Old Testament, the greatest redemptive act of God in the Old Testament was the exodus. And so, naturally, that's what fills Asaph's mind. Notice now he's meditating on this objective fact of the exodus. Verse 15, "Thou hast, with thy arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph." And there Asaph is calling to mind the Israelites, their situation when they were in Egypt. There they are in bondage. They're suffering. They're under the tyranny of Pharaoh and what did the Lord do? What did he do? Well, he did what's consistent with

his character, he redeemed them. He redeemed them. This was God's work and so notice what Asaph's doing now. He's grounding his hope and understanding of God based on God's objective works. Not on his feelings. Those come and go. But on his God and what he has done.

Now what do we find when we look at the exodus? Well, we find a God who hears the cry of sinners. We find a God who hears the cries of idol worshipers. Children, sometimes we think of the situation in Egypt as if, okay, there's the good Israelites and the bad Egyptians. That's not the case at all when you read the Bible. You find they're all bad. They're all idol worshipers. They're all busy in idolatry. And yet God comes to save, to rescue, to redeem sinners, and he does so by providing blood. Do you remember this? He gives them the Passover lamb. He says, "You are safe only under this blood. You deserve the angel of destruction and death to come and to wipe you out but, look, I've provided a lamb. Shelter under that blood." And so then the Lord leads them.

And troubled one, again just think of God's people there in the past at the Red Sea, put yourself in their shoes. They thought all was lost. There in front of them was the water. No way forward. Around them were the mountains. No way to go. And behind them was coming the mighty Egyptian army and they could literally feel the ground shaking under their feet as the chariots were stampeding towards them. If you go based off feelings, God has abandoned them. If you go based off feelings, God has left them to die. All is lost. God has forsaken them. God is unfaithful. But then God appears. God shows up. He makes a way through the water. He leads his people. He intervenes. This is the God who's giving hope to Asaph. Asaph has said, "I'm no longer just interpreting God through the way I feel here. I'm seeing the objective works of God. Look at that. This is who he is. He's the God who redeems." And for us now living on this side of the incarnation, on this side of the cross, on this side of the empty tomb, don't we have such greater works to fill our minds with?

It's the cross and the empty tomb that shout to us the character of God. Yes, he's a holy God. He's so holy he will not brush sin under the rug. It must be dealt with. And yet he's so gracious that he provides the lamb, his own Son to be the righteous one, the one to live that perfect life of obedience that you and I cannot live, and the one who's there then on the cross, his hands nailed to that cross and there he is crying out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And we're left asking this question: how could this be, he's righteous and yet he's being treated like an unrighteous one. And friends, this is what brought liberty to Luther over 500 years ago. He discovered the truth of the cross. The only hope a sinner has to be righteous, to be accepted with God is not in myself trying to be better or doing more but it's there in the provision of God. God has provided us a righteous one who's died the death of a sinner. Think on these things. Think on this God and what he's done in Christ. Go to the empty tomb. Meditate on Christ. And friends, then learn from that who this God is. Discover him and his holiness. Discover him and his unfathomable, incomprehensible love. Let your mind dwell on this one who's come for this very purpose, to seek and to save the lost. If you've never gone to him before, if you're wondering, "Have I gone? Have I not?" go to him. He's come for sinners. He's

come for the confused. He's come for those who have nothing, and he's saying there's an open door, come again.

Beloved, just think of the disciples after Christ's death. Based on feelings, all is lost. Their lives were unraveling. All their hopes were dashed. In fact, their hope was quite literally killed, lying cold in the tomb. And then hope comes walking their way. And he says, "Why are you so slow of heart to believe? Why are you so troubled? Don't you see that this was the way it was meant to be?" And Jesus then opens to them the scriptures. He shows them that this was the plan that was promised long ago. He is the risen one. And so, yes, child of God, often we live in this cloud of confusion, often there's questions, but we find shelter, we find safety at the cross, in the empty tomb. And it's through the great works of God in Christ that we then see who God is. God has declared to us his infallible unshakable love through Christ and if he's given us Christ, then what good thing will he withhold from us?

That's what our Father wants to know, that's what he wants ringing in our ears, and as we fix our minds there, the more then we can exclaim with Asaph in verse 13, "who is so great a God as our God? " Maybe you're not there today, child of God, but keep fixing your mind on his cross, keep fixing your mind on the empty tomb, the great works of Christ, and soon you'll see that God's revelation leads you where your own reasoning will not lead you. It leads you to say this, "Who is so great a God as our God?" He does the unthinkable. He does the unexpected.

And so then we can learn to sing, verse 14, "Thou art the God who does wonders," and oh what wonders they are as we as we trace out these wonders and we look at the motive that stands behind these wonders, the motive that sent God's own Son into this world, the motive that sent him to the cross, the motive that raised him from the dead. What stands behind all of this? And there's only one answer: undeserved love, undeserved mercy. He loved me so much that he would do that for me. Oh friend, then find hope, find strength there in these works of redemption.

Charles Spurgeon, the late Baptist preacher, he counsels us, he says, "Do not doubt God's grace because of your troubles, dear child of God, but believe that he loves you as much in seasons of trouble as in times of happiness." And isn't that so much our problem? When things are well, when things are happy in my life, I can believe he loves me. But as soon as troubles come the questions come. And Spurgeon says don't you see he has an shakable love. He loves you, yes, in times when there's joy and blessings, and it's tangible and you can give thanks, but he loves you the same in times of darkness and in the valleys of the shadow of death. And so take heart. Take heart.

Now right now I'm reading a book by William Bridge. He was a Puritan who's lesser known, but he wrote a very helpful book for those in trouble. It's called "A Lifting Up of the Downcast." And Bridge, as many Puritans do, he shows a great understanding of our hearts and he shows how it's possible for us to rest in all the wrong things and to do so for our detriment. And we can do this with good things. So for example Bridge, he speaks about how for the child of God, sometimes a promise of God, it comes to our hearts with

fresh power and we take great comfort from that when the Lord seems to speak personally to us. But then a few weeks go by, a few months go by, and we forget how we received that word, or the feeling has gone and there it leaves us maybe comfortless. And Bridge asked why, why is this the case? And he says it's because you're resting your comfort not in the word but in how you receive the word. And he shows us how problematic this is. If we rest our comfort in the objective truths of who God is and in the cross, these are unshakable, but as soon as we start resting in how we've received the truth, suddenly we're putting ourselves on shaky ground. Yes, of course, it's a good thing when the word comes with power but stake your hope on the word and not on how you received it.

And so remember God's gracious salvation but, secondly, remember God's mysterious shepherding, and this is what we want to close with. Remember God's mysterious shepherding. Notice verses 16 to 20. It's describing the Lord's mysterious shepherding, and here the psalmist again is painting that picture of the exodus for us. He talks about the waters, seeing God and being afraid, and you can picture then that moment when the Lord makes the way when he clears the path and the water flees, as it were, from the face of God.

And so he's picturing the Lord's care for his people and notice there's three great characteristics of his care. First of all, see the Lord's might. See the Lord's might. This is a clear message of these verses over and over again it's speaking of the Lord's power. This is the God who saves his people. He's the Almighty one. And so troubled one, your God is the mighty God. Your Father is the one who has all things under his control. I'll read again Lord's Day 10 on his providence, how all things come from his good Fatherly hand, even when we don't understand them. He is mighty. He is mighty and he will care for me.

See also the Lord's mercy. That's the second thing, see his pity, his tenderness. Notice verse 20, "Thou leddest thy people like a flock." And what a precious picture that is that the Lord loves to use, that he is the Good Shepherd. He is that gracious God who cares for his people. Isaiah 40:11, "He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs with his arm and carry them in his bosom." He carries the little lambs, as it were, close to his heart and he will gently lead those who are with young.

My troubled friend, have you forgotten the mercy of your God? In all of your troubles and all of your questions, have you forgot to see his merciful heart? Jesus Christ our King and Savior, he is the type of king who doesn't snuff out the smoking flax. And so you see the picture, he's not the type of king who sees here's a candle and it's flickering, and it's almost out and he's not the type of king who comes and says, "Just put it out already. Be done with it." No, he's the type of king who comes and he says, "Let's fan this flame so that it glows hotter." And he's not the type of king who crushes the bruised reed. There's a reed and it's just bending flopping about in the wind, he's not the type of king who comes by and just tramples on it and stamps it under foot. He's the type of king who has that gentle and lowly heart and so he comes and bandages up that bruised reed and cares for

it. Yes you don't feel it, you don't feel it right now. His hands feel rough but there's a caring heart.

And lastly, see the mystery of God's ways. Notice verse 19, and oh what comfort you can take from verse 19, child of God, "Thy way was in the sea, thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known." Do you see what the Lord is doing here? He's saying, "This is how I shepherd my people. The characteristic of the way I shepherd my people is that I shepherd them in a mysterious way. I shepherd, I'm there shepherding them but my way is not known. It looks like I'm not there. It's mysterious." And so as you look at your life, child of God, and it looks like I can't see God in here, it looks like I'm zigging and zagging all over this pasture, there's no direction, is my shepherd guiding me? The Lord is saying, "Don't be alarmed. This is how it always looks. I lead my people in a mysterious way. It doesn't make sense right now, but it'll be all clear in the end. On that great and final day, it'll all be clear. Right now it seems like you're walking abandoned into that valley of darkness, but then you'll see that I never left you and I never forsook you."

In closing, just think of William Cooper, that great poet of the 18th century. He was a friend of John Newton and John Newton wrote "Amazing Grace." And John Newton served as really a personal counselor to William Cooper because Cooper was often cast down. He had many things going on spiritually, mentally, all these various things that led to him sometimes living in thick darkness for years on end. And yet the Lord was using that darkness to press out of the heart of this poet these beautiful songs of hope that we can latch onto today, child of God. And so I want to leave you with his most famous hymn, "God moves in a mysterious way." He gets that from this Psalm, verse 19. And just let your mind linger on these words as we close.

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform.
He plants his footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sov'reign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flow'r.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain."

He will in his own time, in his own way. Amen.

Let us close in thanksgiving prayer.

O Lord, thou art the almighty shepherd of thy sheep. And Lord Jesus, what thou hast done for thy sheep, thou hast given thy life for them. Thou are not the shepherd who flees when the wolves or lions come but thou art the shepherd who stands up on behalf of thy people. Thou hast crushed the serpent's head. Thou hast destroyed the roaring lion. And Lord, thou has paid for our sins. Thou has conquered death. And so if God is for us, who can be against us? O Lord, help us to trust in thee. May each of us by thy Spirit learn what it is to know this comfort that I belong unto my faithful Savior. Our comfort is not grounded in our feelings but it's grounded in him. Lord, may that be true for each of us and may thy people then, especially those in darkness, be helped by thy word. Lord, again we pray that they would receive the care that they need, whether it's medical care or changing routines in life but, Lord, above all we pray that thou would grant them also spiritual care and that thou would bless them and care for them in every way. Lord, what a privilege it is to be able to worship thee and to gather with thy people. We pray, O Lord, that thou would forgive us for the sins that we've committed even in worship. Remember us as we go into this week. Help us to apply thy word to our daily lives. And may we be prepared to meet thee in peace on that day, that great and final day when we stand before thy judgment throne. Lord, may we have a righteousness that's not our own but that's found in Christ. It's in his precious name we pray. Amen.