

Return and Deliver Us

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Bible Text: Psalm 74
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The last several Tuesday evenings, we have completed a study on the doctrine of man in our systematic theology series and it's now our delight and our privilege to return to the Psalms and Psalm 74 will be our text for this evening. Psalm 74. One of the critical points in all of biblical history, indeed you could argue in all of world history, was the fall of the city of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Jerusalem fell into foreign hands. God abandoned his city of residence, you might say, into the hands of the Babylonians and we can read about that in 2 Kings 25. I want you to turn there as well as to Psalm 74 because that provides the background for Psalm 74. You know, all of the Psalms were written in some kind of historical occasion, often we're not able to identify exactly what those occasions are but sometimes we can and in Psalm 74, we have a pretty good idea that it was written shortly after the fall of Jerusalem and in 2 Kings 25:8, we read the historical account of the fall of Jerusalem.

2 Kings 25:8 says,

8 Now on the seventh day of the fifth month, which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. 9 He burned the house of the LORD, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; even every great house he burned with fire. 10 So all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem. 11 Then the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon and the rest of the people, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away into exile. 12 But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and plowmen. 13 Now the bronze pillars which were in the house of the LORD, and the stands and the bronze sea which were in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces and carried the bronze to Babylon. 14 They took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the spoons, and all the bronze vessels which were used in temple service. 15 The captain of the guard also took away the firepans and the basins, what was fine gold and what was fine silver. 16 The two pillars, the one sea, and the stands which Solomon had made for the house of the LORD-- the bronze of all these vessels was beyond weight.

Now if you've never read consecutively through the Old Testament, I would encourage you to do so, it's good for us to be familiar with the full text of the Bible from cover to cover, but it's difficult if not impossible to overstate the magnitude of what we were just reading in the life of Jews in Israel at that time, and more specifically the southern kingdom of Judah. When you think about it, Solomon built this lofty temple that we read about in 1 Kings and it was the dwelling place of God, it was the place where he uniquely manifested his presence and it was the center of the holy city, it was the center of the capital of the country. It was magnificent in its glory just from a human and architectural and artistic perspective and it had been there for 400 years or so, not quite 400 years and now it's reduced to rubble, it is broken down, a foreign army has come and established itself and is carrying away God's people and all that they had loved and all that they had known and everything that was a part of their heritage from King David down to the day, was suddenly reduced to rubble and pagan men, violent men, had treated it with utter disregard, had taken axes to the things that were inside, and what they regarded as holy and sacred was being treated as though it was common firewood. It's difficult to overestimate, if not impossible to overestimate the sorrow of that day.

Now elsewhere in Scripture, it states explicitly the divine reason for this event. It wasn't because Babylon had gained an upper hand or that somehow God had lost control over the situation. Turn in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles 36 where in summary form the reason for this event from God's perspective is stated. 2 Chronicles 36:15 where it says,

15 The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place;

Speaking of the years prior to the fall of Jerusalem. He sent them his prophets to warn them about their sin, to call them to repentance and they repeatedly rejected. Look at verse 16,

16 but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy. 17 Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or infirm; He gave them all into his hand. 18 All the articles of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his officers, he brought them all to Babylon. 19 Then they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its fortified buildings with fire and destroyed all its valuable articles. 20 Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, [why?] 21 to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had

enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.

So as you read Scripture, you realize that this was a fulfillment of prophecy that was being made over the prior time and that God had brought judgment upon his people because of their rebellion, their rejection of his word, and now they were bearing the consequence of their sin. God had brought judgment on his people and the stroke was severe. The temple was ransacked. The walls of the city were torn down. The people were carried off into exile into a foreign land as God had warned them in Deuteronomy that if they turned against his word, there would be judgment that would come for rejecting him and rejecting his people and the stroke was, as I said, severe. Psalm 74 comes in that time period and Psalm 74 is a response, it gives a contemporaneous response to these events from one of the few faithful remnant who were left behind and it's in Psalm 74 that we want to turn our attention now with that bit of background. Now we can read Psalm 74 with a measure of understanding.

So if you would turn there and bear with me as I read the full text, then we'll go back and we'll unpack it together. Psalm 74,

1 A Maskil of Asaph. O God, why have You rejected us forever? Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture? 2 Remember Your congregation, which You have purchased of old, Which You have redeemed to be the tribe of Your inheritance; And this Mount Zion, where You have dwelt. 3 Turn Your footsteps toward the perpetual ruins; The enemy has damaged everything within the sanctuary. 4 Your adversaries have roared in the midst of Your meeting place; They have set up their own standards for signs. 5 It seems as if one had lifted up His axe in a forest of trees. 6 And now all its carved work They smash with hatchet and hammers. 7 They have burned Your sanctuary to the ground; They have defiled the dwelling place of Your name. 8 They said in their heart, "Let us completely subdue them." They have burned all the meeting places of God in the land. 9 We do not see our signs; There is no longer any prophet, Nor is there any among us who knows how long. 10 How long, O God, will the adversary revile, And the enemy spurn Your name forever? 11 Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand? From within Your bosom, destroy them! 12 Yet God is my king from of old, Who works deeds of deliverance in the midst of the earth. 13 You divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea monsters in the waters. 14 You crushed the heads of Leviathan; You gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. 15 You broke open springs and torrents; You dried up ever-flowing streams. 16 Yours is the day, Yours also is the night; You have prepared the light and the sun. 17 You have established all the boundaries of the earth; You have made summer and winter. 18 Remember this, O LORD, that the enemy has reviled, And a foolish people has spurned Your name. 19 Do not deliver the soul of Your turtledove to the wild beast; Do not forget the life of Your afflicted

forever. 20 Consider the covenant; For the dark places of the land are full of the habitations of violence. 21 Let not the oppressed return dishonored; Let the afflicted and needy praise Your name. 22 Arise, O God, and plead Your own cause; Remember how the foolish man reproaches You all day long. 23 Do not forget the voice of Your adversaries, The uproar of those who rise against You which ascends continually.

Now this is a Psalm in a minor key, you could say. This is a Psalm that is written with the thread of sorrow prominent throughout yet not without hope and what we find in Psalm 74 is this: the writer of the Psalm is looking on this destruction and from a broken heart and from a scene of devastation from which there seems to be no deliverance, he turns to God in prayer, he reminds God of certain things, and on that basis asks God for help and to not abandon his people forever to the devastation that they are presently looking at. He reminds God of his covenant with Israel and his supernatural power as a basis upon which to deliver them and in part what we see here is we see in this Psalm, we see a pattern, we see a method of praying to God in times of devastation in our own lives.

You know, the Psalms in the Bible in totality gives us a realistic picture of life as a believer in this fallen world. It doesn't give us this false picture of unbroken prosperity, of always enjoying the good life and things always going according to what we design. You all know most of you by direct personal experience that sometimes life brings in times of devastation, times of severe difficulty, that seem to have no answer and there is no human way forward in them. You know that by direct personal experience, and there are those voices in a so-called Christianity that would accuse you of a lack of faith not only for being in the position in the first place, if you had enough faith you wouldn't be in this position, that of course is not true but that's what many would say to you, and also just there are those voices that would not give us room to recognize the devastation and work our way through it. There are those that would just say to put on a happy face, don't worry, everything's going to be okay, and utterly abuse those tender-hearted people whose hearts are broken and who need a way forward that is based in reality and is based in biblical revelation rather than in platitudes that carry no meaning and in superficialities that only make things worse. What we find in Psalm 74 is someone giving voice to a devastation that was national in its scope and yet not without hope.

The inscription tells us, look at Psalm 74, the inscription tells us that it is a maskil of Asaph. Now a maskil is a skillful or an artistic Psalm that's designed to teach wisdom. We've seen Asaph in the past and identified him as a contemporary of David. Well, this is something somewhat different, written by someone different because that Asaph was with David some 400 years before this was written. Possibly more than one Asaph, perhaps it's referring to the musical guild of Asaph, we don't really know, but whatever the case, what I would have you to see from that is that Psalm 74 is written in a skillful way to express the heartfelt sorrow of the faithful remnant in Israel and there weren't many of them left behind at this time. We see a threefold prayer as we read through Psalm 74 and I rather suspect that for many of us, we will find that it gives voice to what we would say to God but we find that our words fail us in these times of difficulty, these

times of trial that overwhelm us, that are beyond our human capacity to process and to respond to.

The first aspect of his prayer if you're taking notes this would be our first point for this evening, is he appeals to God re recognize the destruction. Recognize the destruction. He's not simply asking God to look at so that God could gain information that he was lacking, he's asking God to look on this destruction with mercy; to look upon this and have compassion on his people in the midst of this horrible devastation that has come upon them. So he opens with a question to God that is designed to evoke his mercy.

Look at verse 1 now with me. He says,

1 O God, why have You rejected us forever? Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?

"God, look at us, we're just sheep and we're your sheep and here we are in the midst of this devastation that's brought on by your judgment, by your anger. Why are you so angry that it's like smoke against us? Why is your wrath so hot against us? Does it need to be this severe, O God?" As he looks upon it and he tells God in the midst of this severe judgment that God should recall the nature of his prior dealings with his people. "God, remember how you've dealt with us in the past."

Look at verse 2. He says,

2 Remember Your congregation, which You have purchased of old,
Which You have redeemed to be the tribe of Your inheritance; And this
Mount Zion, where You have dwelt.

This is very tender language. This is an appeal to the prior love of God that he had manifested to his people. "God, remember that you are the one who chose us for yourself. God, remember that you purchased us of old," meaning here in this context referring to how God delivered them from Egypt in order to bring them out to be a nation in their own land; to be his people; to uniquely be a kingdom of priests on his behalf. He says, "God, remember Mount Zion. Remember the city, the city on a hill where Jerusalem was built, where your own presence has been manifested. And God, as you remember," as he appeals to God and as he reminds God of his prior dealings, he is making a contrast between what God had done in the past with the present reality of the situation, "God, by your own mercy and by your own choice, you chose us. By your own power you delivered us. You are the one who established us in this place. You're the one who did this. We couldn't have done it on our own and now look at the mess that we're in. Look at what the outcome of this is. Look at this devastation that is in place." He says with emphasis, "God, it was you who redeemed us out of Egypt. It was you who chose Jerusalem as the place to manifest your presence." And what he's saying is the argument that he's making in prayer here is, "God, to allow the enemy to overrun it like this is contrary to your own glory and your own purposes. I understand," he could say, "that this is a stroke of judgment against us but, God, this has gone so far and what about your prior

glory? What about your prior choice? What about your covenant with your people? This just seems completely inconsistent." And knowing most of you like I do which is one of the great gifts of God to my life to know you like I do, it's to know that a majority if not most of you here in this room even, have faced that kind of sorrow and brokenness. Not your house being burned down but events of life seeming to conspire against you in a way that seems utterly contrary to the promised goodness of God and the promised faithfulness of God in your life. "How can this be? How could this outcome attain for me when all I've been trying to do is to just live as a faithful Christian before the Lord? Lord, I can't understand it. My heart is broken. The walls of my heart," to speak metaphorically, "have been broken down. And God, look at the devastation. I don't even know where to begin to pick up the pieces here."

Well, it's encouraging, isn't it, to be able to look into Scripture and find that there were those Spirit-inspired spokesmen of God who walked in a similar spiritual valley, a similar spiritual desert and gave voice to the things that we feel ourselves? That give voice to our own questions? That give voice to the, as I said before, those deep minor keys of our spiritual lives? I find that encouraging. I find when I come to the word of God in those times, I find that Scripture gives voice to what my heart could not articulate. What we find in Scripture, my beleaguered, suffering, fellow brother and sister in Christ, is that whatever we find outside the walls in the world or in the broader realm of so-called Christianity that says you shouldn't think that way, you shouldn't feel that way, you shouldn't even be in this position if you are a person of faith, what we find is a blessed place of refuge where the truth is spoken in God's word where God's word gives voice to these deep profound sorrows that superficial people can't even understand, let alone help us in. We find in God's word a strength, a refuge, a mirror that expresses the things that would otherwise overwhelm our hearts. I thank God for these kinds of portions of Scripture like this. I find refuge in it.

So what the Psalmist does here in 74 is he calls upon God to recognize the destruction. It's as if – I'm speaking in a metaphor here – it's as if he takes God by the hand and walks him through the rubble that the enemy has left behind. Look at verse 3. He gives God a guided tour of what the enemy has done. Verse 3 through verse 8,

3 Turn Your footsteps toward the perpetual ruins [Walk with me a bit here, God]; The enemy has damaged everything within the sanctuary. 4 Your adversaries have roared in the midst of Your meeting place; They have set up their own standards for signs. 5 It seems as if one had lifted up His axe in a forest of trees. 6 And now all its carved work They smash with hatchet and hammers. 7 They have burned Your sanctuary to the ground; They have defiled the dwelling place of Your name. 8 They said in their heart, "Let us completely subdue them." They have burned all the meeting places of God in the land.

He's describing the complete devastation of the temple about which we read earlier from 2 Kings and the prior glory of this place. You know, read about it sometime in the opening chapters of 1 Kings and the glory of Solomon's temple and the majesty of it and

the intricate detail that went into it, and beyond the physical aspect, the fact that this was the unique place where God manifested his presence, where God uniquely manifested his presence to his people and now it's all just been ripped away and torn down. The contrast of the present ruin with the former glory is overwhelming and he says, "This foreign army has raised its own symbol in the temple," meaning that they've put up their own military banners, the marks of their own possession in what should have been the sacred precinct of God alone.

Imagine, if you will to get a sense of the awfulness of this, it's impossible for us to imagine what I'm about to describe but it would be like this. Imagine that somehow the Chinese army had invaded Washington, DC and we as loyal Americans, citizens of our country for all of its many profound flaws, this is still our land, and we see on tv the Chinese flag flying over the US Capitol or we see the Chinese flag flying over the White House under new ownership, new occupation, it's no longer our land, it belongs to a foreign army; we are now subject to foreign rulers whereas before all these great symbols of our heritage and of our freedom have now been ripped away and everything that we're devoted to now is going to the benefit of a foreign army who is hostile to us. That's something of a minor picture of what it would be like for the residents, the faithful Jews to see this. What I'm describing in America is our political center, for them it was their spiritual center, it was the mark of the presence of God with them. One writer says in describing this destruction from the foreign army says and I quote, "Their goal was to destroy by burning to the ground the meeting place of God with his people, thus they planned to change Israel's destiny and to remove any reminder of God's past loyalty and the true worship of God."

Their nation was built on the presence of God. It was built on his presence. Its future was guaranteed by the faithfulness of God. Their national life was structured around these things. The festivals at the temple and now it's all wiped away. "What is left of us, God, in light of this?" But he goes on to say that there is something even worse than the physical loss.

Look at verse 9. He says,

9 We do not see our signs; There is no longer any prophet, Nor is there any among us who knows how long.

There is no prophetic voice for them. Jeremiah by this point had gone into exile, Jeremiah 40, chapter 43 as well. So the people at this time, they were lost physically. They were lost spiritually. There was no place physical to turn that could connect them with everything that had been the basis of their relationship with God, their covenant walk with God. It was all wiped away and in deep agony, the Psalmist calls on God to see this and to respond to him.

Look at verse 10. He says,

10 How long, O God, will the adversary revile, And the enemy spurn Your name forever? 11 Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand? From within Your bosom, destroy them!

And you get a sense of the mixed emotions that are at work in his life. "How long is this going to go on, God? Look at what's happened. How long will this last?" And he says, "God, why have you withdrawn your hand," and in the next breath he says, "Use your hand and destroy them." So as many of you can relate, he's full of sorrow, full of conflicting emotions, full of questions that have no immediate answer.

Well, beloved, let's pause here and put ourselves into the Psalm 74 situation not to make statements about our present sorrows here but rather to remember what prompted all of this in the day of Israel in Psalm 74. Their day of mourning, this day of loss, this day of judgment that had come upon them, reminds us of something very critical that we would all do well to internalize and take to heart: sin and unfaithfulness to God bring very hard consequences. Sin and unfaithfulness to God bring very hard consequences. Here in this situation we have the testimony of God, inspired, reliable, telling us that this particular situation was a result of their unfaithfulness. Now, we can't make the same, we can't draw the same line between our sorrow and our suffering to connect it to sin of our own, the one-to-one correspondence is often not there and so we're not talking about explaining the reason for our suffering in today's day with what we're saying here at this point. Rather what we're seeing is simply the fact that there are consequences to sin and that God is a God who disciplines his people and the discipline that he brings can be severe and it can be painful. If it were not severe and painful, we would miss the point, Hebrews 12.

Now talking about something different from our experience of sorrow and just thinking about our lives and our spiritual commitments and the need for holiness in our lives, we want to remember this: that God does discipline his people and it is a warning to us and it is a motivation to holiness to us not to invite and to invoke his discipline by means of our faithlessness and by our sin. God, we could say if we stepped back 2,500 years, 2,600 years and stand in the rubble with the writer of this Psalm and look upon it, what we should see as we identify with the people of God in the past is this: is that God is a God not to be trifled with. His holiness is to be revered. His holiness is to be respected. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, Proverbs says. The fear of God turns a man away from evil. So as we look at this devastation, as we see the stroke of God on his people, it brings a sense of reverential fear into our hearts that says, "I want to stay away from sin." And if you're convicted of sin that's in your life that you've been tolerating, to say, "It's time for me to let that go because I see in the destruction of Jerusalem God's estimate of sin and rebellion against him," and to not presume upon his grace with a continued indifferent attitude toward the rebellion in your life.

Now, that's the first section, verses 1 through 11, but here's the thing, as this Psalm goes on, what we see is that the worst of adversity does not leave us without hope. The second point for this evening, the second aspect of the Psalmist's prayer here in Psalm 74 is for, God, to remember your deeds. God, remember your deeds and this is instructive for us as

well. The Psalmist does not stop in his despair and if you've gone through hardship in life where, you know, a dark night of the soul, so to speak, in any way that I have, I was content in times gone by to stop in my despair and to just dwell and linger in it but that is never the biblical pattern. That is a mark of weak faith. That is a walk, speaking of myself and what I'm referring to here from years gone by, it was a mark of weakness, it was a mark of self-pity, it was a mark of a lack of faith. It's one thing to say yes, Scripture recognizes and acknowledges those dark times in our soul, but we're not meant to stay there, we're meant to take the step forward out of that, forward out of that, and part of the way that you do that is by remembering the deeds of God. That's what the Psalmist does here. He doesn't stop in his despair. This Psalm does not end after verse 11. The Psalmist takes a critical next step and he remembers the deeds of God, he reminds God of what he has done. Here's the spirit of what he's saying before we get into it, what he's saying here is, "God, your past acts are grounds for you to provide future deliverance to us. What you have done in the past sets the precedent, provides the justification for you to act in the future to relieve this present suffering." Let's see how he makes that argument and he reaches deep into the past to provide context for his request for relief.

Look at verses 12 and 13. He says,

12 Yet God is my king from of old, [he says despite the present circumstances, something is unchanged here and what is unchanged is that God is my king from of old] Who works deeds of deliverance in the midst of the earth. 13 You divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea monsters in the waters.

And what he's doing here is he alluding to what God did in the past. He is alluding to, he is referring to in poetic language God's deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea when God miraculously parted the waters so that his people who were being chased and were cornered by the army of Egypt, the greatest army in the world at the time, they had no place to turn, God parted the Red Sea, they walked through on dry land and when the Egyptians came in after them, the waters closed upon them and they were drowned and the people were miraculously delivered. What he's saying is this, what is helpful to you and me in our lives today is this, the Psalmist is saying that God's people have been gravely threatened in the past and God's power and God's love and his mercy saved them back then and he says, "Therefore, God, do it again. God, you have saved us from humanly impossible situations in the past out of your love and mercy, you've done it before, do it again. There is an established precedent for you to act in this circumstance." That's the argument that he's making, "Remember your deeds," and he strengthens his argument with an appeal to creation.

Look at verse 14 and notice as I read these next four verses, notice the repetition of "you." He's praying, he's speaking to God and he repeatedly says, "This is what you've done. You. You. You." Look at verse 14,

14 You crushed the heads of Leviathan; You gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. 15 You broke open springs and torrents; You

dried up ever-flowing streams. 16 Yours is the day, Yours also is the night; You have prepared the light and the sun. 17 You have established all the boundaries of the earth; You have made summer and winter.

Do you see it? Do you see the pattern there? Every verse begins with that and he is telling God, he is reminding God of what God has done in the past.

Now, in pagan mythology from prior days, they made claims about their false gods doing similar things but what the Psalmist is saying with his emphatic "you's" here is, "God, unlike their false mythology, you actually did these things. You actually rule over the sea monsters. You actually created day and night. You actually established the boundaries of the sea. You made day and night. You made the sun and the seasons." Who does that? What God has ever done that? The God of Israel has. The God of power. The one true God. Yahweh. The covenant keeping God, he's the one who has done that and, "God, if you can set into course the spinning of the galaxies and maintain them there, if you can establish the seasons of the year, if you can establish the boundaries of day and night, then," his argument is, "then your power is unlimited. You are sovereign over all of creation and these prior displays of your sovereign power show something vitally important. It means that you are able, O God, to respond to this immediate situation that is at hand as well." In other words, what the Psalmist is doing is this: he's exercising his faith. He's remembering what God has revealed in his word, what he knows to be true. "I remember that. I remember these unseen things. Faith is the confidence of things hoped for, the assurance of things not seen. God, I know these things to be true and now I'm taking what I know to be true about you as shown in your work in the universe, what has been revealed about you in your word, what you have made known, God, I'm asking you to take as the basis to help us now to remember what you've done in the past and exercise that same unlimited power to reverse this situation about which I can do nothing to help myself." He believes that God can deliver based on his prior deeds and he puts his trust in him to do so.

Beloved, I want you to see that in the midst of your sorrow, in the midst of your tribulations that are chronic and won't go away, I want you to see that this is your pattern for faith today. It is a blessing from God, it is a gift from God that we can come to him and ask him for help in our trials. 1 Peter 5, casting all your anxiety upon him because he cares for you. That is a blessed place to be, to have a sympathetic omnipotent God who will receive our prayers and promises to care for us in the midst of them, but what I want you to see is that as we grow in grace, as God sanctifies us, as our spiritual lives develop, we realize that there is more for us to express to God in our faith than simply a request for help. We step back from our trials and we affirm things that we know to be true about God, we affirm things about the way that he has acted on our behalf, and we engage our mind and we engage our prayer in those things so that for a Christian it becomes something along these lines, "Lord, Lord, you're the God who saved me back in time, a few months, a few years ago, a few decades ago. God, you drew me to yourself and saved me. God, I did not choose you, you chose me. I did not love you first, you loved me first. God, I appeal to you on the basis of your prior choice, of your pre-existing love now to help me in response. God, I look back 2,000 years ago and I see your Son coming to

earth. I look back 2,000 years ago and I see your righteous sinless Son lovingly and voluntarily going to the cross to purchase my redemption, to shed his blood for the sake of my soul, to pay my debt of sin, my penalty on my behalf before I was even born. God, that's what you did for me. Christ, that's what you did for me. I remember the magnitude of sovereign love, of sovereign grace. You not only saved me in time, this was something that Christ did 2,000 years ago and I'm reminded as I continue back, that the coming of Christ to the cross was something that was foreordained before the beginning of time. He is the Lamb of God crucified before the foundation of the world. God, I remember what it means for me to be a Christian. The Father chose me before time began. Christ died for me at the cross in fulfillment of that same plan and the Spirit of God applied that work of redemption to my heart also in fulfillment of the same plan. In a perfect harmony of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, there was a Trinitarian design, God, to bring me into your family. That's what you've done, God. And God, that is an expression of sovereign power to break the power of my sin, to open my blind eyes, to break the bonds of Satan on my soul, and God, that supernatural power and combined with supernatural love and immeasurable grace shows that all of your purposes for me are good. So God, I pray to you not out of a sense of desperation and panic but out of a sense of confidence of your sovereign goodness and your sovereign love for me. God, I know those things to be true. I believe them to be true but my heart is still broken here. My situation is still desperate here. My dreams and aspirations could not possibly seem further away than they've ever been than they are at the moment. God, I ask for your help in light of, in the context of this great Trinitarian work that achieved my salvation; in light of this magnificent grace, this magnificent love. God, I know you love me. That's the only explanation of Christ going to the cross for me. It wasn't anything in me. I was vile and wretched and dead in sin, dominated by Satan, a child of wrath with a hostile mind to you, and what did you do, God? You saved me. You showed kindness to me. You showed goodness to me. So God, I reach beyond the walls of this desperation, I look beyond the broken walls of this situation where I am defenseless, where I have nothing that I can do to help myself, God, I look beyond that and I appeal to what you have done in the past as the basis for you to help me now."

So we step back and we affirm that God is sovereign in his love for us, that he saved us in the past and that becomes the ground for our request for him to help us in the future, and there just comes a point where – I'm trying not to get myself in trouble here – there just comes a point where we have to realize that that's where our ultimate hope comes from. There is a limit to what the best intentioned of friends and counselors can do for you, there is a limit to what a human being can tell you to help you in your struggles. Ultimately our help comes from the Lord himself. Ultimately the comfort comes from these things that are vertical in nature, not from somebody telling you what to do, not from somebody giving you a list of rules or giving you a ton of homework to do to work your way out of it, the hope, the fountain of water that refreshes your thirsty soul comes from remembering who this God is and interacting with him in this way, exercising faith in him directly. Counselors may mean well. I'm thinking of Job's counselors but, boy, were they a miserable failure to him, huh? He found his rest, Job found his answer when God spoke and God made himself known.

We go there now in the fullness of revelation, in the fullness of after the coming of Christ and we find the balm for our soul that no man can give and I'll go so far as to say that when you have tasted of this balm directly from the Lord through his word is what I'm saying, I'm not talking about something mystical here, but that which comes through an understanding of his word, a proper application of true doctrine to your heart and to your situation, that becomes so precious that by comparison you hate human counsel. By comparison. It's not that you actually hate it in and of itself, it's just that by comparison you realize the balm that comes from heaven is infinitely better than anything that could come from man. And what you see in Psalm 74, what you see in the book of Habakkuk, what you see in Job, what you see in 2 Corinthians 12 is that this grace that comes from the knowledge of God through his word and through his revealed Son is adequate for every human loss, every human difficulty. It is enough to quench the thirst of the driest human heart. It is enough to silence and calm the storms of the raging oceans of difficulty in the believing heart and in the ability of Christ to satisfy, he alone to satisfy the longings and the difficulties and the endless questions found in the hearts of his people, the fact that he alone can satisfy that without circumstances changing, that's really important, he can do that without circumstances changing at all, that supernatural balm for the broken heart of the believer is just another display of his sovereign power and his sovereign love. He is sovereign over your heart and he is able to satisfy your heart alone and that's part of what makes him precious to us.

There is a third aspect to his prayer in Psalm 74. He's asked God to recognize the destruction, he says, "God, remember your deeds," and now, thirdly, he prays, "God, return to deliver." Return to deliver. With his faith now expressed, the Psalmist asks for God's help.

Look at verse 18, he says,

18 Remember this, O LORD, that the enemy has reviled, And a foolish people has spurned Your name.

And it's, "Remember not simply, God, bring this to your recollection in the mental exercise of your omniscience," he's saying, "Remember so that you'll act upon it. Act on what I am describing, God. This enemy has reviled your name. These foolish people, these godless pagans, these worshipers of false deities have spurned your name. You should not only act for our sake, God, you should act for the sake of your own glory. Your enemies are defying you. Step in and change that dynamic, Lord, for your own sake."

And in the process, verse 19, "God,

19 Do not deliver the soul of Your turtledove to the wild beast; Do not forget the life of Your afflicted forever.

"God, we're defenseless like a little bird. What can we do, God? The walls of our city are broken down. Our temple is gone. We have no prophet here. God, all we have is you. We

are defenseless and we are your people. You've got to come back. You've got to display your power. You have got to do something to help us here."

And he appeals in verse 20,

20 Consider the covenant; For the dark places of the land are full of the habitations of violence. 21 Let not the oppressed return dishonored; Let the afflicted and needy praise Your name.

There in verse 20 he says, "Consider the covenant. God, remember that you made promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. You made promises to our forefathers. You made promises to David. God, we are in the line of those promises where you promised to bless your people, you promised that David would have a son to sit on his throne. O God, remember the covenant that you yourself have made and help us for the sake of the promises that you made to your people long ago. Your deliverance is required. You had promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. Look at us, God. Look at us scattered, carried off into exile. You said that you would bless us. This does not look like blessing, God, and so according to your covenant, act. God, remember your deeds and act. Remember your covenant and act." He lays out this multifaceted independent argument given on independent grounds. "God, act for the sake of your past deeds. Act for the sake of your covenant. Act according to your mercy. God, you have every reason, you have abundant reasons according to your own word to help here."

And he concludes with a final prayer referring to his adversaries. Verse 22, he says,

22 Arise, O God, and plead Your own cause; Remember how the foolish man reproaches You all day long. 23 Do not forget the voice of Your adversaries, The uproar of those who rise against You which ascends continually.

"God, in light of your relationship with your people, in light of the boasting mocking of your enemies, you should deliver us. You should return to your prior ways and deliver us once more. You should judge those who destroyed your temple and have devastated your people and loved it while they were doing it."

What do we see in this Psalm as we conclude here? What does this Psalm presuppose throughout? It presupposes the faithfulness of God to his promises. It presupposes the faithfulness of God to his people. Beloved, especially in light of what Christ has done for us now, especially in light of his promises to work all things together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose, especially in light of his promise, his triply affirmed promise that he will never ever ever leave us and never ever ever forsake us, Hebrews 13, especially in light of that, you should see that it is your prerogative, it is your privilege, it is, yes, we'll put it this way, it is your responsibility to confidently appeal to the promises and faithfulness of God even when, especially when the deliverance of your situation seems humanly impossible. It is especially – oh, beloved, I'm done here so hear me out – it is especially when your situation cannot be

reversed, it is especially when you have no answers of your own, it is especially when human counsel has been a waste of time in your difficulty, it is especially when the loss is so deep and profound, it's especially then that you should most confidently appeal to God on the sheer basis of his promise of faithfulness because his steadfast love endures. He will not abandon you to this sorrow forever. His comfort may be delayed, his provision may be long delayed, but his ultimate faithfulness to you is surer than your next breath. His ultimate faithfulness to you is more certain than each of us getting home safe tonight because his steadfast love endures forever, his strength is undiminished and therefore we pray to him in the worst of our circumstances in confident faith that he will honor his promises even though we don't see how.

And those of you who are maybe new Christians, maybe walking through these kinds of waters for the first time yourself, take heart, you're walking on noble ground. You are treading where the saints have trod and every one of those saints without exception found that God was faithful to them in the end. Many times we read about it in the course of church history and we see his faithfulness manifested in time when he honored his promises in a way that humans could see, every one of them now in glory see the fulfillment as they see and look upon their Savior face-to-face. Beloved, he'll do the same thing for you. You are not the exception. Understand that the depth of your difficulty is only expanding a broader canvas upon which God will paint the glory of his faithfulness to you in exquisite colors that will ultimately cause you to give him great praise.

God brought his people back from exile under the decree of Cyrus 70 years later. Christ came later, 500 years later, and delivered them from sin at the cross. One day he'll deliver us into glory. It's well with our souls, beloved, is it not? Is it not? Answer me. It is well with our souls because our souls are in the hands of this faithful God.

Let's pray together.

God, our present difficulties are never the end for us. O Christ, you did not go to Calvary, O Spirit of God, you did not apply redemption to our hearts only to abandon us here in time. In light of your word, in light of who you are, in light of your immutable faithfulness to your own word and in your steadfast love to your people, we affirm with absolute confidence that we can't see a cloud on the horizon that might bring the refreshing rains, we affirm in absolute confidence that you will deliver us once more as you have done so many times in the past. So our faith looks up to thee, O Lamb of Calvary. We renew our hope. We renew our confidence in you. We thank you now for your faithfulness before we see it displayed in time and we pledge to you that we will ultimately give you thanks when it is made manifest for others to see. For now we rest in the hope of your promise. It is enough for us that Christ died for us and that we are in his hands. It comes out well for us in the end, it could be no other way and for that, our Father, we give you all of the glory and all of the thanks and pray that you would look upon us in mercy in our difficulties.

Father, you know, I know, we know that there are many legitimately bruised hearts in the room with us tonight, long chronic struggles that seem to have no end. Thank you for

bringing these loved ones, these precious brothers and sisters in Christ to be with us tonight. Take your word and let it be the salve from heaven on their wounded hearts. Encourage and strengthen them in Christ. And Father, I ask you to be the Good Shepherd to your sheep as they wander. Bring them safe into the fold. Comfort them in their sorrows. Provide for them in their lack. Make the path forward straight that now seems so crooked and bless them. Father, you've dealt with me that way in the past, surely you can do it for these brothers and sisters as well. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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