

Coming Out of Depression

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Bible Verse: Psalm 77
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Well, it is the nature of life that it's serious. Life is serious. Life is important and life is sometimes very sad and difficult and one of the things that I love about Scripture, one of the things I love about being a Christian, is that the word of God addresses us on an earnest level. It takes our souls and it takes our struggles seriously and deals with them in a way that is noble, that is helpful, that meets the serious-minded person at the level of his thought, at the level of his being, at the level of his difficulty rather than treating it in a superficial way. Scripture does not pretend to entertain us, that's one of the ways that I think you can probably tell a true church from a false church is that a church that is trying to entertain you has already lost the spirit of the Bible completely, and also for those of you that have walked through difficult trials and are walking through them now, you understand that it's an insult to a discouraged person to try to put on an artificial air of happiness, of energy, when you are in the midst of sorrow. It is not good to sing silly songs to a sad and broken heart and Scripture does not do that to us. Scripture does not come and address us in a superficial way, it does not try to entertain us, rather it deals with us at the level of truth, at the level of our souls, and brings us into things that are actually helpful for our spiritual well-being. And as a church, what we try to do, what our intention is, is to have a spirit about our worship services, about our studies and times like this where a person could walk in off the street with struggles on their hearts and realize that whether or not they agreed with what was being said, at least they were being treated as an intelligent serious person whose trials in life mattered and were going to be dealt with in an earnest way. The Bible deals with us in that way and for those that have lived life long enough to walk into those valleys, it's one of the things that you really come to treasure about Scripture completely.

So Psalm 77 is certainly in the spirit of that kind of thinking. Psalm 77 begins in distress and yet it ends in spiritual triumph. It opens in depressing introspection and yet it ends in an outward looking faith. It is a Psalm that points us to a frequent cause of depression but even better, points us to the way out of depression and that's what we want to focus on here this evening. One of the benefits of going sequentially through the Psalms is just finding again and again and again the psalmist baring his struggles before us honestly and also simultaneously giving us the opportunity to identify with him in his struggles and yet following his lead on the way out of those struggles into a deeper and greater faith. So it's with a sense of anticipation that we turn to Psalm 77 here this evening.

You notice in the inscription it says,

1 For the choir director; according to Jeduthun. A Psalm of Asaph.

Jeduthun was a musical leader appointed by David. You can read about that briefly in 1 Chronicles 16 and 1 Chronicles 25. The Psalm is written in a way that leads us into the world of depression, the realm of depression as this psalmist experienced it, and then we find as we reflect on it some of the causes and some of the solutions to that difficult situation.

It has been a while but I've known the dark days of depression in my own Christian life and I always have a measure of sympathy and patience with those that are walking through those days because you see it in Scripture, you know it by experience, and you realize that sometimes people just need a loving arm around them to be patiently walking through the sorrow with them. It's not without purpose, that Paul said in Romans 12:15, "weep with those who weep." Sometimes the best thing that we can give to a struggling person is our sympathy, is to give them our ear, not quickly to run to instruct them or rebuke them because of the difficult nature of life. So Psalm 77 addresses us in those ways.

We're going to break it into two sections and the first section, the first nine verses of this you could title if you're taking notes, you could say, "A Bitter Look at Past Days." As the Psalm opens, he's reflecting on the past. He's discouraged in the present and he opens with a loud lamentation that expresses the torture that he feels in his soul.

Look at verse 1 with me. He says,

1 My voice rises to God, and I will cry aloud; My voice rises to God, and He will hear me.

In the original text, it reads something like this, a little more broken than the way they tried to smooth it out in the English. The original text it reads, "My voice to God and I will cry aloud. My voice to God and He will hear me." The repetition and the absence of corresponding verbs emphasizing his deep lament. There is a groan that this Psalm opens with. "Oh, my voice to God. My voice to God." So even in the opening part of it, you get a sense of the groaning that is taking place in his heart, his tortured soul crying out to God and his voice expressing the turmoil and the anguish of his heart.

Somehow a crisis, a chronic problem of some kind has assaulted him over a period of time. Look at verse 2 with me,

2 In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; In the night my hand was stretched out without weariness; My soul refused to be comforted. 3 When I remember God, then I am disturbed; When I sigh, then my spirit grows faint.

As he speaks of his outstretched hand, that was an Old Testament posture for prayer. What he's saying here is that this lament, this cause of my concern and discouragement, has been a matter of prayer for me for an ongoing period of time. I have cried out at night. I have stretched out my hand, extended my heart toward God in prayer, and yet I'm still here in the midst of this lament, and his words in these verses are giving us a sense of what we loosely call his depression. I'm not using that in a clinical sense, simply as a convenient term to say that he is sad, he is struggling, he is downcast. That's the sense in which we're using it and if you look there in verses 2 and 3 with me, his soul is refusing to be comforted. He was disturbed. His spirit was growing faint and his sighs are venting the exasperation that he feels with the ongoing nature of this problem that has no solution in sight and might we say, has no end in sight.

Some of you are there. We've talked about it in private conversations. It's one thing to have a problem and to see a way out of it and say, "Okay, I know how step one will lead to step two, to step three and this all resolves." It's quite another thing to be in the midst of a chronic challenge in life whether it's relational or physical or financial, a chronic situation of life and there is no human solution to it. I've been there. Many of you are there right now. Those of you that have never experienced this in Christian life, take a number, it will come to you in due course, in due time, because this is the nature of life in a fallen world and the psalmist addresses it and expresses it with an honest vigor that is appealing to those of us that have been there. So as he's opening here in this section, it seems hopeless to him and he is losing his will to continue the struggle. You know, Scripture, Proverbs, talks about a man's illness he can bear but who can bear a broken heart? When your heart is broken, when your heart is despairing in the midst of the struggle, then what do you have to go forward with?

And the "Selah" there at the end of verse 3, tells us to pause for a moment and to consider the situation; to look at the psalmist not with a sense of criticism for what he is expressing, but to stop and look and to consider and to identify and sympathize with him in his discouragement. So we do that. We look back and we look at these prior three verses and we see the groan in verse 1, his expression of prayerfulness that has gone unanswered in verse 2, and to the point now where in verse 3 where his heart is so agitated that he says, "To remember God simply disturbs me even more," and there is just this bubbling cauldron of confusion and discouragement that he is expressing as he opens it.

Now as you move on, he continues in this kind of striking candor, this transparency that is so spiritually useful to us and he tells us the troubles of his heart and what it has been like for him even physically. Look at verse 4. He says,

4 You have held my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

He hasn't been able to sleep. He has lost sleep over this over time, and it's at a point where he can't even put words to what is on his heart.

So there is just this dark cloud that is defining his existence and that present condition would be bad enough for him, it would be bad enough to not be able to sleep over his troubles, it would be bad enough to have his heart so worked into knots that he couldn't even describe it with words, do you know what that's like? I do from time to time. You don't even want to start a conversation about it because you don't even know where to begin, right? You don't even know where to begin. How do I even start to explain to you the circumstances in a way that you would understand the desperation and the discouragement that I feel in my heart? I'm not talking about within the walls of Truth Community Church but just knowing past experiences of my own and other churches, and some of you, your experiences in prior churches. If you tried to describe this in certain so-called Christian circles, they would look at you like your head was on backwards, "What is wrong with you? What's the matter with you?" And that only serves to heighten the sense of isolation that you feel like there's not even anyone you can talk to who will even begin to understand, let alone actually be able to help you, someone that will actually listen sympathetically, let alone be able to give you wise counsel from God's word. That's a hard place to be in and I can remember in times past, coming to Psalm 77 and saying at least there is one voice in the universe that understands, and I find it here in Psalm 77.

So I'm grateful to the Lord for this Psalm. He's kind of brought us into his present state of agitation and we can sympathize with the fact that he finds difficulty even putting it into words, at least I do. I sympathize with that, but his problem as you go through it, is even deeper than that. There is another compounding layer to the struggles of his soul and you see it in verses 5 and verse 6. He says,

5 I have considered the days of old, The years of long ago. 6 I will remember my song in the night; I will meditate with my heart, And my spirit ponders:

What's he saying here? He's looking back into the past, "I've considered the days of old." He is remembering earlier days in his life and in those earlier days, there was a sense of happiness. There were times of song in his past and in those happy days, in those more joyful days that are not his present experience but he remembers them, he thinks back when life was like that and he can remember the time where God seemed near to him, where answers to prayer seemed to flow very naturally, very quickly, very easily, and he remembers what that was like. "I remember the song in the night. I considered the days of old, the years of long ago." God had acted to save the psalmist. He had acted to save his people in their times of distress and as he's looking back on that, he says, "I remember when my life was like that," but that doesn't help him now in the present. It's kind of an odd dynamic in one sense, that we'll explain as we go along in a moment. He remembers when life was like that but now life is different. Now God is not providing the deliverance that he wants, that he needs. He is suffering without relief. There is no answer in sight and so his restless spirit is remembering happy songs in the night from times ago, but now what does nighttime bring to him? Sleeplessness. Cogitation. Restless tossing. Complaint in his life.

So he has laid it out honestly, laid it out, first of all, vertically before the Lord, but also laid it out for an audience to come and read later. You know, look, this just reminds us that the fundamental nature and the fundamental needs of man, the fundamental struggles of people of faith really haven't changed over 2,700 years. It's a futility and a folly of the vain modern mind to think that we have new circumstances and new spiritual needs today that Scripture hasn't addressed. That's not true. What this psalmist was expressing some 2,500 years ago is sometimes the experience of the people of God today.

So let's stop for a moment and assess where he's at and to assess him sympathetically and yet also objectively. If you went through those first six verses, you would find that he has referred to himself 21 times in these first six verses with the pronouns I, my, or me. Twenty-one times in six verses. It might seem like, in those six verses, that he has been focusing on his God but he's really not. He's not thinking quite right about God. He is remembering God over past happiness, not in the context of present trust. We say it sympathetically to his situation, we say it recognizing that we are of like flesh with him, of like passions, of like affections, but his faith is mixed with a prominent element of self-pity as measured by these self-referential statements that he is making, and in the verses that follow in verses 7 through 9, he states six rhetorical questions that show just how desperate he had become.

Verse 7,

7 Will the Lord reject forever? And will He never be favorable again? 8
Has His lovingkindness ceased forever? Has His promise come to an end
forever? 9 Has God forgotten to be gracious, Or has He in anger
withdrawn His compassion?

Now, the answer to all six of those questions is obviously no. Obviously, God has not rejected him forever, not from any objective biblical perspective. God will certainly be favorable again in the future. Of course God's lovingkindness has not ceased forever. Of course his promise has not expired. Of course God has not forgotten him. Of course God has not in anger withdrawn his compassion. Of course, of course, of course, the answer to all these questions is obviously no but here's his problem: his problem is that his feelings are arguing against the truth. His feelings, his sleeplessness, his discouragement, his cloudy, discouraged, distorted thinking is not letting him process that truth in an accurate way.

And so the first section ends with this bitter look at past days with another Selah, an important break in the text here and basically at this break, at this hinge point, at this junction in Psalm 77, he has laid out what his problem is. He stated it plainly, he has clearly articulated the spiritual struggle that he is facing and the effect that it has had upon him, and the fact that whereas you might have looked back superficially and it seemed like he was standing on a mountain, seeming like he was one of the stalwarts of faith in God in those happier days, but now he finds himself in the valley. You know, when you've been on that kind of mountaintop and people have affirmed you on that kind of mountaintop and, "Oh, what a great man of faith you are," now you find yourself in the

valley, that's a very difficult place to be. It's humbling to be in the valley when previously you were leading the procession of the people of God, you might say; when previously you thought you were an example, now you've been reduced to a more difficult situation.

Now, let's just pause for a moment and just ask ourselves why would God do that? Why would God allow us to go through such a time? Why would God, more accurately, more actively stated, why would he orchestrate the circumstances of our life to bring such difficulty to bear upon us? Why not simply set us on a five lane wide road, perfectly paved, that we can just drive in smoothness into the kingdom of heaven? Why not just do it that way? It sure would be a lot easier, wouldn't it? It would be a lot more pleasant. Why this? Well, I think that when we consider the totality of what Scripture says, there are some things that we need to realize, things that we need to understand, is that God does this in part to humble us, he does it in part to break our spirit of self-sufficiency, and perhaps even more, to break our sense of attachment to this world. It's easy for us to develop a sense of pride and thinking that we've got it all under control. Well, these kinds of experiences disabuse us of that false view of self. If things were always smooth, you know from your own experience, if things were always smooth, you would lose your sense of dependence upon Christ. You would lose any sense of dependence on God because who needs God if everything is cool, if everything is good, if everything is well?

So God allows us, God brings these difficulties into our lives to teach us humility, to teach us dependence rather than independence and self-sufficiency, but also those of you that have trod the path of saints a little longer than the younger ones, the newer Christians in our midst, isn't it true that your deepest trials have taught you something that you can't just read in a book or watch in an online video and appropriate as your own? Isn't it true that your hardest, deepest, most gut-wrenching, tear-producing trials have a way of breaking your affection for this world? Isn't it true that going through a deep valley like that helps you to see more clearly what Scripture would teach us from the beginning, that this world is not our home? That you realize that your affections and the permanence and the security for which you long is not to be found in this earth but rather still awaits the consummation of your salvation when you are with Christ in glory? You young people, go to older people you know who have walked through trials and they'll tell you that, especially after hearing me say this tonight. "Oh yeah, I'm right there with the pastor on that one. Yes sir." But it's true and God brings these things to cultivate in us a greater sanctification to bring about a spiritual disassociation from ourselves and from this world so that we are more centered on trusting Christ and looking forward to what lies ahead for us in glory, rather than loving ourselves and loving this world. So he brings us to a point of dependence and it may please him to leave us there for a very long and extended period of time.

Look over at 2 Corinthians 12 with me in this regard. We're at a hinge point, remember, in Psalm 77 and this is where the health and wealth and prosperity Gospel movement is so discouraging, so very unbiblical, and so destructive to the spiritual well-being of people who look to them for spiritual answers because they tell people that your trials are an indication of a lack of faith on your part. Well, this is nonsense. This is silliness to

think, as some people have suggested to me in the very recent past, that God doesn't want you to experience disease, he doesn't want to experience difficulty.

Well, this is just not squared up with Scripture at all. God brings these things to accomplish sanctifying spiritual goals in our lives and the Apostle Paul is Example A in that exhibit. Here he is, he's an apostle, he's seen visions that no one else has seen. He's so great with the visions that he is not permitted to speak about them. He's an apostle who had seen the resurrected Christ, directly appointed by Christ. He was this great man in the realm of the kingdom of God and yet God didn't allow him to find his satisfaction and his boast in those kinds of things and he says very specifically in 2 Corinthians 12:7, "Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason," look at this, "to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me," and he repeats himself, "to keep me from exalting myself!" Why is it that God brings extended trials into our lives? In part, beloved, it is because he understands how deeply rooted pride is even in the redeemed heart; how greatly tempted we are to self-sufficiency, to boast in ourselves, to feel like we have it all under control, and gradually imperceptibly start to reach out and bring the glory and put it on ourselves, turn the spotlight away from our Savior and onto ourselves so that we are the center of attention as the one who did it all, as the one who did it my way.

So why does God humble us like that? To keep us from exalting ourselves. Why is it so hard, why is it so difficult? Beloved, I say it sympathetically, I say it as one who has been on the receiving end of this divine discipline so I say it as one, we are on equal ground here. Our pride, our self-sufficiency, our attachment to this world is deeper than we realize. God knows how deeply rooted it is but we don't see it ourselves. We're too close. We don't get it. We don't recognize it and so God brings extended trials in part to sanctify us, to quench those flames of pride and self-sufficiency and a love for this world so that we would rather turn our attention up, turn it to Christ and find our gladness and our sufficiency in him and in him alone. When you realize that this world can't solve your problems for you, when you realize that this world can't satisfy the longings of your heart, what do you do? As a believer, you start increasingly to turn your back on those things and say, "Lord, I want you and you are enough." As I've said in the past, I'm not the first one to say it, you don't realize that Christ is all you need until Christ is all you've got, and the process of getting to that point of spiritual dependency is necessarily painful and Paul was being tormented and he said, "This was designed, I'll say it twice, to keep me from exalting myself."

Well, had the Lord abandoned him? Was this an act of unkindness and unfaithfulness from God? No. No, there was a greater purpose at work. So Paul like the psalmist in Psalm 77, says in verse 8, "Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me." Now you would think the Apostle Paul would get his prayers answered. "Lord, I ask you. Lord, I ask you a second time. Lord, I ask you a third time." What's the matter? Think about this from the health and wealth prosperity movement. From their perspective, from their worldview, you can only conclude that Paul was a man who did not have faith otherwise the Lord would have answered his prayers and removed his trials from upon him. Well, that's self-refuting, isn't it? That is utter foolishness. That is folly.

That has nothing to do with biblical Christianity whatsoever and we reject it, we detest it, we condemn it. You see, they don't have the perspective that Scripture does which means they don't have the perspective that God does. God says in verse 9, "Paul, I have a lesson for you." He said, "My grace is sufficient for you." "You don't need this thorn removed in order to find satisfaction in me. You don't need a change in circumstances in order to find joy in Christ." This is the message that Paul was learning in the midst of this and God told him specifically what the lesson was. He says, "My power is perfected in weakness." "When we get your pride and self-sufficiency and attachment to this world out of the way and people see you for the humbled man that you are, then my power can be put on display, put on display to your own heart and put on display for the world to see."

And Paul, I love this, Paul having learned the lesson, having grasped that, he goes to the other extreme. Now rather than praying that the weakness would be removed from him, he says in verse 9, "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses. I will highlight it. I will embrace it because in my weakness the grace and glory of God is put on clearer and fuller display." And he says, "That matters more than my earthly comfort. That matters more than anything else to me, and if my weakness becomes the habitation of the power of Christ, so much the better. If my being humbled means that I more consciously share in the presence and sufferings of Christ Jesus, that's very much better." I mean, Paul said in Philippians 1, "It's better for me to die and be with Christ than to continue on in the flesh."

So then he says in verse 10, "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake." You see, it's Christ. It's Christ. Verse 9, the power of Christ. Verse 10, for Christ's sake, "for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Struggling Christian, discouraged, weak-hearted, fainting believer in Christ, right there is your sense of encouragement. You have before you in Scripture a book that understands you. You have a God who understands you and a God who is accomplishing sanctifying good purposes through your extended trial of weakness so that you might come better to treasure the greatness of Christ that has been given to you, that you would miss if your life was simply an unbroken testimony of prosperity and ease. And yet it hurts but God has a spiritual end in mind that is of surpassing value, that is of a value that does not belong to this world and if you can see it from that perspective, you're on the road to embracing it even though nothing changes.

I've said this so many times, it could sound cold, it could sound harsh but it's anything but that, it is a statement of hope even if you haven't yet quite grasped it in your own heart. Your circumstances do not have to change at all in order for you to experience the surpassing joy of Christ here and now. It's not about your circumstances, it's about grasping the greatness of Christ. Habakkuk said, "The fields can falter, I can lose all of the flocks, yet I will exalt in the Lord. I will rejoice in the God of my salvation." Everything stripped away, I have nothing to my name, I have no earthly promise of change or hope, but do you know what? I'm rejoicing in the Lord. I see with clearer vision his surpassing excellency and I wouldn't have seen it in that light, in that

all-sufficient, consuming perfection of mind, I wouldn't have seen it unless everything else had been stripped away. And sometimes the surgeon's scalpel that the Lord uses on this is severe financial loss, severe relational loss, sometimes it's the death of loved ones, you can know that through it all this is the spiritual point that the Lord is leading you where you understand more clearly and embrace with satisfaction the complete and utter sufficiency of Christ alone.

So let's go back to Psalm 77 with those things in mind. I'll say more toward the end here. We started with in the first section, the first nine verses, a bitter look at past days. Here in the second half of the Psalm, we're going to take a better look at God's ways. A better look at God's ways.

Now this next verse, we left it off at the end of verse 9, this next verse, verse 10, is rather difficult to translate and interpret and if you read across different Bible versions, you will see that they handle it in much different ways. Let's look at it here in verse 10 with the New American Standard text that we're using. He said in verse 10,

10 Then I said, "It is my grief, That the right hand of the Most High has changed."

Now when you read that from a particular perspective, it could sound like that he is concluding based on everything that he said in the first nine verses, that God had actually changed in his dealings with him and the NASB translation leaves it that way, but I think that other translations clarify the sense that is better intended here because this Psalm would not be affirming the fact that God had actually changed and a translation that makes you think that, may not be the best way to understand the verse. For example, the New King James Version says, reads this way, he says, "And I said, 'This is my anguish; But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.'" In similar manner, the English Standard Version says at verse 10, "Then I said, 'I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High.'" The idea here in verse 10 is this: it's not that God has changed and that he's coming to a conclusion based on what he said in the first nine verses. One of the things that helps us know that that's not what he intends to say is the "Selah" at the end of verse 9. That is a break in the text. It is at the end of one thought and a new thought is being introduced in verse 10.

So what is this thought that is being introduced, then, in verse 10? In essence you could summarize it like this: he looks back at the last nine verses and he says, "I've stated, I've just stated my problem but now I'm going to pivot, now I'm going to turn and I'm going to remember aspects of the nature and the acts of God." And what you see coming and what helps us get a sense that this is what he means in verse 10 is that that is the direction that he goes in the remainder of the Psalm. Verse 10 is a pivot to new thinking, different thinking in the second half of the Psalm rather than a summary of the prior nine verses. We see that in what follows. And beloved, remember what I said, you can see this by remembering what I said earlier. In those first six verses, 21 references to I, me, and my, well, here in this second half of the Psalm, those first person pronouns recede and fade

into the background. They just kind of disappear like a mist in the wind and his references to God and the acts of God correspondingly increase by contrast.

Look at verse 11. He says,

11 I shall remember the deeds of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. 12 I will meditate on all Your work And muse on Your deeds.

Something really crucial has just happened. He says, "I am breaking from my introspection," and for the benefit of the many people like me that are in this congregation who tend toward introspection, who tend toward overthinking things, I'll repeat what I just said for my benefit as well as for yours. He is breaking away from, he is pivoting away from that self-absorbed introspection and is consciously applying himself to a new realm of thought, a different realm of thought. So he is going to focus not on today's problems and today's feelings about today's problems, but rather he's going to use his memory to engage a discussion in his mind about God's past provision for his people.

Look at it there with me again in verse 11, "I remember the deeds. I'll remember Your wonders. I'll meditate on Your work. I'll muse on Your deeds." So in verse 13 he goes on and you see the lofty way that he is thinking as his thoughts elevate toward heaven rather than sinking in the quicksand of self and he says in verse 13,

13 Your way, O God, is holy; What god is great like our God?

He states it as a question but that is an emphatic declaration of faith. "I've been thinking in this way in the first half of this Psalm, but let me make a declaration that changes the whole perspective on everything. What god is great like our God?" Then he immediately begins to recite in his mind historical incidents that God has done on behalf of his people to reinforce that central thought. "What god is great like our God? What god is holy like him? Let me tell you what he's done." In other words, he doesn't give room for the prior introspection to seep back in like a poorly sealed basement, polluting what was there. He remembers God's acts in history that prove the way he cares for his people.

Look at verse 14, he says,

14 You are the God who works wonders; You have made known Your strength among the peoples. 15 You have by Your power redeemed Your people, The sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.

He identifies himself and he remembers what God has done for his covenant people in the past. The sons of Jacob, the sons of Joseph, he remembers that he is a part of a spiritual lineage. He belongs to a people of God and those people have a shared common history of how God had acted in history to deliver them from greater dilemmas than what he was experiencing right now. And as he continues on in the Psalm, he focuses

particularly on when God rescued Israel from Egypt at the Red Sea when the sea was parted and the children of Israel walked through on dry land, and in verse 16 he personifies the waters as though the waters were thinking beings, if you could put it that way, and in verse 16 he personifies the waters as though they were responding to their Creator's command.

Look at verse 16 with me.

16 The waters saw You, O God; The waters saw You, they were in anguish; The deeps also trembled. 17 The clouds poured out water; The skies gave forth a sound; Your arrows flashed here and there [indicating the lightning that occurred at the time, rain and thunder]. 18 The sound of Your thunder was in the whirlwind; The lightnings lit up the world; The earth trembled and shook. 19 Your way was in the sea And Your paths in the mighty waters, And Your footprints may not be known.

All of that brief summary description of the events that we read about in the book of Exodus, what's he saying? He's making a really simple point, simple yet profound, simple in the sense that it's not difficult to understand, simple in that it's one primary point that he's making. All of the signs that accompanied the passing of Israel through the Red Sea, the fact that the waters split when Israel was in great danger and in need of immediate deliverance and – mark it – there was no sign of human deliverance, there was no means of human deliverance available to them. An army behind them and water in front of them, either way humanly speaking, death was right on their heels and what did God do for them at that time? He powerfully delivered them. He did what no man could do. He acted upon nature in a supernatural way that displayed his power in their time of distress. But do you know what else that display of power was? It wasn't a display of power just for power's sake, he wasn't simply showing off, flexing his muscles to be observed and adored, his power was being displayed because he was faithfully delivering his people. In love, he was providing what they needed in a time of great crisis. His power, in other words, was being used by his love to care for his people and the psalmist remembers that.

All of those signs showing his power, his power showing his love, his love being a manifestation of his faithfulness to his people and what was the result? Verse 20. What was the result? He says, the psalmist says,

20 You led Your people like a flock By the hand of Moses and Aaron.

The flock. The Shepherd. Psalm 23, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for You are with me." That was their experience even in the days of Aaron and Moses. God was a Shepherd leading them like a flock. Five hundred years, 400 years later, David would summarize it in Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." And through the threat of Egypt, through the tumultuous circumstances, God had led them like a shepherd. He had used Aaron and Moses to bring them to safety and the point that he's making is this – beloved, don't miss this or you'll miss the whole point of the Psalm – God was protecting them even through the frightful circumstances,

even through the discouragement and the fear that those circumstances brought. They were perfectly within the hollow of the hand of God and nothing would ever pluck them from it and, beloved, that is precisely the position that you enjoy with this same God in Christ.

The psalmist here in Psalm 77, he doesn't circle back and say, "Oh, and I trust you too." He doesn't go back and say, "I trust that you'll do this for me as well." Why doesn't he do that? Why not make it explicit? Well beloved, here's the reason why: the very Psalm is the expression of his trust. The Psalm itself by declaring it in this form is his declaration, "I now trust this God even though I went through a period of doubt and discouragement before I got there." Before, his memory taunted him and undermined his faith saying, "Look back at the past happy times. It's not like that now and do you know what? It never will be like that again. Those days of contentment and trust and deliverance are in your past," and his memory tricks him, lies to him and tells him it will never be the same again, but he takes his memory and uses it to serve his faith, to strengthen his faith, to remember what God had done in the past, and he comes out in a place of strength in the end.

How does that work for a Christian today? This is really important. I'll say this, depression as we're using the term here, discouragement, a sense of despair, it's a difficult battle for a Christian to fight. It's not easy and it's not a one-time slaying of Goliath with a stone and a slingshot, it's a battle that you persevere through not knowing when the victory is going to come sometimes but, beloved, it is a battle that you can fight and it is a battle that you can win. I would go so far as to say it is a battle you must fight and you must win. It is your responsibility as a Christian but even better, it is your prerogative as a Christian. It is your right as a Christian to win that battle.

And there are just a couple of things that I would say as we come near the end of this. First of all, addressing this to myself in times past. If the early Christian Don Green was sitting on the front row, I would look at him and tell him, "Look, this is what you need to hear. I know this is hard. I know you're really discouraged but here's what you need to hear, Don." You can listen in as I counsel my old self. This is really getting weird, isn't it? But I'm doing it this way because I think that it helps if we see it a little more indirectly. I would say to my old self, the early Christian Don, "Don, you need to admit something. You've become preoccupied with yourself. You've become preoccupied, Don, with your problem. You've lost sight of greater spiritual realities." That's what I would have said. That's what I needed to hear. I wish, I wish that I could have come forward 20 years and heard this message and then gone back, the whole course of my life might have been a little bit different. But whatever. Enough of the time travel here.

We recognize perhaps we've become embittered against God for it. The confusion has led to exasperation, fatigue in the midst of it, and perhaps understandably but not to be accepted, we lose heart and we are embittered even against God for the situation that we find ourselves in. What do we do, then? Is there any way forward out of that? Well, let me encourage you by saying this as I see it, as I understand these things, as I perceive these things: the call to a Christian in that circumstance is not a harsh, stern, severe call,

"Repent!" There's an element of repentance that's needed but there is something that provides the context for that to happen and to not simply rely on our willpower to break us out of the mold. There is something far far better. There is something that answers the longing of every true Christian heart. There is an answer that gives us a sense of perspective that we have the benefit of today that the psalmist in Psalm 77 didn't have. We looked at this text briefly this past Sunday, I think. It may be that we're going to look at it this coming Sunday. It all kind of runs together in my mind. But look at 1 John with me. When you're in that vortex of introspection and the circumstances cannot change, where do you find your way out? What is the exit ramp that gets you out of that awful perspective? 1 John 4:9-10. The psalmist remembered the acts of God at the Red Sea. We, as Christians, remember the acts of God in the red blood of Calvary. That's what we do.

Verse 9,

9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Beloved, that shatters an unhealthy introspection, looking at the past, looking within, "I'm so discouraged. I'm so heartbroken," whatever the case may be. Beloved, God help us all to grasp what I'm about to say. The cure for your depression, the cure for your discouragement and despair is not further introspection, further contemplation of the sorrow, further contemplation of the wrongs that have been done to you by others in the past. That is a fast road to nowhere. The cure for depression is not remembering your past happiness and remembering it by contrast to your present difficulty. The cure for depression is to forsake the introspection and go back to the cross. When you are tempted to question the love of God, to question whether God still cares, to question whether God is ever going to do anything, beloved, make a beeline for Calvary because when you go back to Calvary, you'll find red blood shed for your sins. You'll find a love that split not waters but split your soul from the domination of sin and Satan. You will find the Son of God, the propitiation for your sins. You will find one who actually loved you to the point of his own death, to bear the weight of your sin on his shoulders, to recognize that there is this cosmic, divine love that has been set upon you, a cosmic, divine, eternal power set upon for the deliverance of your soul for your eternal well-being, for your eternal bliss. To look back to the wooden beams where you were delivered decisively once for all from your spiritual slavery to sin, to death, to Satan, to judgment, to hell.

Go back to Calvary, beloved. Go back to Calvary and remember the better ways that God has dealt with you. Beloved, go back to Calvary and say to yourself, literally stand in front of a mirror if it will help and address yourself and preach to yourself and say, "In light of Calvary, my soul, remember that is how God acted for you. God became a man to go to the cross to save you from sin." Remember the Suffering Servant on the cross and reflect and meditate that that is the measure of the love of God for your soul and do you know what? He hasn't changed. Yeah, your circumstances have come and gone, I get that,

loved ones have come and gone, health has come and gone, finances have come and gone, but don't you see that the bright red highway of blood from Calvary is as smooth and permanent as it's ever been? That that guarantees the well-being of your soul? That that testifies infallibly to the perfect love of God for your soul? That that testifies to you what the outcome of all of your trials will ever be? Full reconciliation with God in his presence in heaven forever and ever where sin and sorrow and trials will never molest you again. And you step back and you remember Christ. You remember him in that context, the voluntary self-sacrifice that led him to do that, and you realize something really crucial, you realize that the one who died for you, the one who rose again on your behalf, he would never abandon you to death. He would never abandon you to isolation. He would never abandon you to desolation. This is only for a season to accomplish a spiritual purpose in your life with a better outcome intended and preordained from the beginning, certain to occur. It comes out well for you as a believer in Christ.

Let that be what brings you out of depression. Let that be the whistle that calls you coming out of depression. Beloved, I encourage you, I beg you, I ask you, I call you: let time in the hands of this gracious self-sacrificing Christ, let time in the hands of your gracious God be your friend.

Let's pray together.

Father, we say these things knowing that your word promises us that he who believes in Christ will not be disappointed. Father, have mercy on those crawling along in the desert of the Death Valley of their circumstances, panting for water. Father, let this be a sudden unexpected stream of cool water to their souls that refreshes them, a fresh remembrance that there are saints of old that have walked this path before us, that your word understands and addresses earnestly the difficulties of our soul. But it's not a sentiment that the word gives us, it's an answer that your word gives to us, O God, an answer rooted in a powerful God who is a God of faithful love to his people whom we now know to be manifested in the Lord Jesus Christ, triumphant at the cross, triumphant in his resurrection, triumphant in his ascension, one day to be triumphant in his return for his people. You have not left us. You have not forsaken us. You have not abandoned us. And Lord, we trust you for that through our tears, through our discouragement. Father, we declare that we trust you and we look out from ourselves up to you, up to Calvary, up to Christ, and we affirm before we see the answer, O God, that our trust in you is not, was not, could not be in vain. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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