

A Long History of Grace

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Now we're going to turn tonight to Psalm 78. Psalm 78 is our text for this evening and it is a bit of a challenge for us, in one sense. We're going to cover this entire Psalm in one evening this evening mindful of the fact that this is the second longest Psalm of all 150. Its 72 verses are second only to Psalm 119 in length, and so we already know as we start out there that we're going to be covering more than a verse a minute, you could say, in how we approach this, but if you keep one thing in mind, it will help you have a perspective that will give us an idea of what we're trying to do here this evening as we remember that the old maxim, the saying that says you don't want to miss the forest for the trees; you don't want to be so caught up in details that you miss the big picture, and tonight's a night where we're going to see the big picture of this Psalm which we have titled tonight, "A Long History of Grace." A long history of grace, and it's not because the Psalm is long, although it is, but rather that God has a long history of dealing with the nation of Israel according to grace that they did not deserve, and we as Christians can realize and look at the cross in an even greater way, that God has dealt with us according to a grace that we did not deserve; that the Lord Jesus Christ when he lay down his life for our sins at Calvary, when God appointed a plan for the righteousness and blood of Christ to be the means by which we could have access to a holy God, to realize that he has given us favor that we did not deserve. He has returned for our sin, grace and kindness and love and mercy as we have been singing about as we gather together here at the start.

So Psalm 78 looks at the history of Israel and brings those principles to light and it recites history in the Psalm, and as the Bible so often does, beloved, this is something to help you in your Bible reading, that as is so often the case, if not always the case, I don't know that I'd want to be absolute in the statement, but as is so often the case, the Bible recites history in order to teach spiritual lessons. In other words, we're not simply gathering facts here so that we can accumulate knowledge and dates and remember what happened, the point of reciting history in Scripture is so very often, if not always, to impart spiritual lessons to those that are living and are hearing the message; that we would draw from it lessons that would encourage us and point us in the right direction in spiritual life.

In Romans 15:4, you can see this stated plainly. Stick your finger in your Bible at Psalm 78 and turn to Romans 15:4 for just a moment. Romans 15 in verse 4, the Apostle Paul said that,

4 ... whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Paul says we look back at what was written in prior times, looking back at what was said in the Old Testament and we are to draw out of that accurate understanding that would fuel our hearts with a sense of encouragement as we walk through this life, and give us a sense of abiding hope that the Lord will be faithful to us just as he was faithful to his people back then, and we draw from that faith, we draw from that encouragement, we draw from that hope the sense that no matter what is happening around us now, it will be well for our souls in the end because of who God is. Not because you can see the outcome and you can trace what's going to happen from today going into the future. Often there is no hope in that at all because we're utterly bewildered, aren't we? Utterly lost in being able to guess and understand how this could possibly work out in any way that is fruitful and helpful? I've certainly gone through trials like that and I know that you have too. Our hope is not found in understanding our circumstances but knowing who God is and how he deals with his people.

So let's dive into Psalm 78. I'm not going to read through it. We'll just kind of get the text as we go along in our explanation of it, and we're going to break this into three primary sections here. They are of unequal length. So let's look at the first aspect of this Psalm and recognize that the goal of this Psalm is instruction. Point 1: the goal of instruction in this Psalm. I just say this to help you understand and orient yourself.

So often when we read the Psalms, we're reading writings that by their nature are vertical. They are addressed to God. They cry out to God and they address God, "O Lord, hear my prayer! O Lord, how long?" And the psalmist is speaking vertically and we are listening in as he prays. Psalm 78 is not like that. Psalm 78 is different. Psalm 78 is a horizontal Psalm, by which I mean it is intended to instruct the readers. It has a human audience in view with what it says and you'll see that as we open it up here in the first three verses.

Look at them with me. Psalm 78:1, he says,

1 Listen, O my people, to my instruction; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

So you see the horizontal dimension here. He is writing to instruct the people of Israel who would be reading his words. He says in verse 2,

2 I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, 3
Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us.

So he tells us right from the start, "I am going to instruct you by what I say." Now, in that we see that there is to be in the audience to the word of God, a receptive, a teachable, a believing spirit. We are not to be hard-hearted, stiff-necked mules that do not want to be

instructed. God's word says, "I will instruct you." God's word claims that authority in order that brings authority to bear on the way that we think and the way that we assess the matters of life.

Psalm 78 is written in that spirit and what he's saying is this, he's saying, "There are insights about spiritual life that are to be gleaned from our history," when I say "our history," from Israel's history, "and these are things that a prior generation told us and now we repeat the chorus to you." In that way, it kind of reminds us of 2 Timothy 2 where Paul says that we are to take the things that we have heard, teach them to faithful people, faithful men who will then go and teach them to others. There is a relay race dynamic to biblical life where we, speaking collectively here within this room, we have received the benefit of teaching from men who have gone before us. It may be parents, it may be other pastors, professors, whatever the case may be, we have been given a deposit from the people who have gone before us and that places on us a responsibility, a duty, and let's make it positive, a privilege for us to be able to tell others who have not yet heard about the things that we have received from those that have gone before us. We're not trying to come up with new things, we're not trying to come up with new revelation from God, it's far more than enough, it's far more responsibility than any one person should bear to simply faithfully pass on to the next generation what we have received ourselves. So even as we are doing what we do here at Truth Community Church week after week, month after month, year after year, there is a privilege and a responsibility that is being inculcated into your life that says as I am growing in God's word, as you and I are growing in God's word together, we understand that we are developing a responsibility that we would go and pass that on faithfully to those who come after us. Maybe that's our children, maybe it's future people who have never heard the Gospel, but we're mindful of the fact that we have received a great gift and now it's our privilege and our duty to pass it on to those who have not yet heard. The psalmist is writing from that perspective.

What is it that he wants to tell about? In verse 4 he says this, he says,

4 We will not conceal them from their children, But tell to the generation to come [what?] the praises of the LORD, And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done.

He says, "I am writing to instruct you and I am going to instruct you about the great worth of God and the great things that he has done for his people so that a generation to come will be able to hear them." He tells his audience, he tells his readers, "You listen to me as I instruct you in the worship and works of God so that we can tell a generation yet to be born," in the language, I believe it's of Psalm 22, "a generation yet to be born of the things that we have received."

So this Psalm is designed to instruct the children of Israel about the greatness of God and the wonderful things he's done for his people, so he's oriented us right from the start about what it is that he's going to do, and he has a goal in mind. He's not simply – ah, this is just so important and you could build a philosophy of preaching out of these opening

eight verses in this Psalm. That just occurred to me and maybe some day I'll be able to do that. I rather doubt it. I have other things I need to do. But he tells us what his purpose is. He's not just communicating information, he intends to produce in his readers the spiritual virtues of faith and obedience; a believing response to God that issues in compliance with his word; a glad obedience to the revelation of who God is. So these are not matters of simply abstract observation and study. We're not simply learning numbers and arithmetic here to repeat mindlessly. These are things that are designed to shape your heart, to shape your life, and to change the way that you live. He is looking to produce faith and obedience.

Look at what he says here in verse 5 through 7. He says,

5 For He established a testimony in Jacob And appointed a law in Israel,
Which He commanded our fathers That they should teach them to their
children, 6 That the generation to come might know, even the children yet
to be born, That they may arise and tell them to their children, 7 That they
should put their confidence in God And not forget the works of God, But
keep His commandments,

Don't you love the intergenerational approach to this? This is really stunning when you think about it. He is writing for the benefit of people he will never meet. He is teaching for the benefit of a second generation to come. He says, "We'll teach them to our children and they will teach them to their children." So he has this long-term perspective about the enduring value of the word of God, the enduring quality that it brings, and he has a sense of responsibility, he has a sense of obligation vertically toward God that, "You have deposited this truth to us and I am going to play my part to see that it extends to generations yet to come." And some of you young people, that would be a great thing to devote your life to; to determine now in your youth that, "I will give my life to carry out the word of God in exactly the way that this is said to do." And what we want to see is, notice in verse 7, I said he's looking to produce faith and obedience, look at it right there. Why all of this effort to do that? Why this long-term perspective? Verse 7, "That they," these ones to come, "should put their confidence in God," there's faith, there's trust, "And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments." There is the way of obedience and if his audience that he has in mind would embrace these principles of faith, trust and obedience, they would do something significant. They would separate themselves. They would differentiate themselves from that prior generation in Israel's history that did not do that; that were guilty of unbelief; that were guilty of disobedience. So he wants them to recognize this prior history of failure on the part of Israel so that they would learn to detest that, that they would hate that to the point that they would turn their backs on that kind of disobedience and turn to God with a full-throated love and obedience that embraces his word by trust, embraces it by faith, and it issues in a life of obedience.

Look at verse 8. Remember, he's been talking about the children yet to be born, that they would arise and tell to their children. What does he want them to do? Verse 8,

8 And not be like their fathers [their ancestors], A stubborn and rebellious generation, A generation that did not prepare its heart And whose spirit was not faithful to God.

I love what he's done here, he's just laid it all out on the table. He says, "I intend to instruct you so that you would walk in faith and obedience to Israel's God. I want you to know that in order to do that, you have to consider the failures of the generation ahead and consciously deliberate and consciously choose, 'I will reject that. I will not be like my ancestors. I see their failure. I see their unbelief. I see their sin and I am going to orient my heart in a different direction.'"

Some of you have the privilege of having received a godly heritage from your family, a godly heritage from your parents, or maybe a grandparent or something like that, and you have the benefit of that and you are able to walk in a path that has been laid out before you, where they have gone before you in that, and if you are walking in the wake of that kind of godliness, you should thank God that he has given such a gift as that to you because it is easier that way than to try to find your way as a first generation Christian. Having said that, however, those of you who have examples of spiritual failure from your forebears, from your parents who have not led you in the way of the word of God, you should be able to look at this and say, "Do you know what? This Psalm is especially for me because I was born into a family, I have been raised in an environment that is stubborn and rebellious against the word of God." Well, that doesn't condemn you to spiritual failure. Rather it is your opportunity to say, "Look at what they did. That's what I don't do. That's an example that is negative in the sense that this tells me what I'm not to do. They treated the word of God lightly, they treated the word of God with disdain, they didn't even open the word of God, they weren't known as people of prayer," you say, "Okay, that's what I received. Do you know what? I know now what not to do." Okay, that's progress. Now here in Psalm 78 and in the rest of Scripture, you find out what it is that you do do; what it is that you do believe; what it is that you do embrace. So the fact that you come from a negative spiritual environment, or for some of you coming from a life of a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot of sin and now you've been born again and you're trying to play spiritual catch-up, just to realize that the grace of God is operative in all of that and that God's good purposes can still be fulfilled even in your life and that's a great thing to know.

Now, in order to fulfill his goal of instruction, he has two themes that he's going to develop from Israel's history. He's going to talk about their rebellion and he's going to talk about redemption. Sin and salvation. Rebellion and redemption, you could say, and that brings us to our second section which is the longest section in the Psalm. We'll just call this the sin in history, or if you like, the R words better, the rebellion in history. You can take either one. I'll be happy either way. What the psalmist does here is he tells how one of the 12 tribes of Israel particularly failed in battle because of their unbelief, the tribe of Ephraim.

Look at verse 9. He has given his introduction, "I'm going to instruct you in trust and obedience from history and I'm telling you, don't be stubborn and rebellious." Now he

opens with an illustration from history about exactly what he's talking about and he illustrates these points from multiplied examples in Israel's history. Verses 9 through 11 here.

9 The sons of Ephraim were archers equipped with bows, Yet they turned back in the day of battle. 10 They did not keep the covenant of God And refused to walk in His law; 11 They forgot His deeds And His miracles that He had shown them.

Now Ephraim was the largest of the northern tribes of Israel and the writer of this Psalm here is describing a failure, a faithlessness in their history. We don't know, Scripture doesn't record for us elsewhere what specifically he's referring to, it's enough for us to know that in battle they fled, they ran away when they should have fought with courage. They fled when they should have fought. They feared when they should have been courageous. He attributes this in verse 11 to a spiritual failure on their part. Their failure was not because they were overwhelmed by greater physical force, their failure was found in their failure to remember who God is and what he had done for them.

Verse 11, look at it again, "They forgot His deeds And His miracles that He had shown them." Beloved, when you find yourself faltering in fear, fear of man, fear of circumstances, when you find fear and anxiety starting to grip your heart, you can look at this and understand that as fear is gripping your heart, you are increasingly forgetting what God has already done for you, what Christ has done for you in saving you. That fear is a reflection that you are starting to forget things of most vital importance that you should be remembering. There is never a cause for fear in the life of a Christian because if you remember even Psalm 23, the most familiar Psalm, verse 4, "I fear no evil." Why? "Because You are with me." Isaiah 41:10 says, turn there with me for just a moment. Isaiah 41:10 in similar spirit says, "Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

So as Christians, we're not meant to give into fear, rather we are to fight it as we would a physical battle and the source of our victory in that is remembering the deeds and the person of God, particularly for us in the New Testament era, how he's revealed himself in Christ. There's no reason to be afraid of anything. "God is with me. Of whom shall I be afraid?" But Ephraim forgot that and their cowardice in light of their own history was inexcusable.

Look at verse 12. He speaks of God – going back to Psalm 78 now – he speaks of what God had done in the history of Israel and the implication is the tribe of Ephraim should have remembered this great work that he did so that rather than fleeing in battle, they would have been courageous and victorious in it. He says, "Look at what God did for them." Verse 12,

12 He wrought wonders before their fathers In the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. 13 He divided the sea and caused them to pass through, And

He made the waters stand up like a heap. 14 Then He led them with the cloud by day And all the night with a light of fire. 15 He split the rocks in the wilderness And gave them abundant drink like the ocean depths. 16 He brought forth streams also from the rock And caused waters to run down like rivers.

He's saying, "Remember what God did for them, the miraculous way he delivered them from Egypt; the miraculous way that he parted the sea; the miraculous way that he brought water from a rock; the miraculous way that he provided for them. Under worse circumstances, under more extreme adversity, God had delivered them. Now here you are in a lesser battle, of lesser danger, you should be able to reason from the greater to the lesser. If God did the greater thing in the deliverance from Egypt, then it should be clear in your mind that he can deliver here in these lesser circumstances of adversity as well." They didn't reason that way and, therefore, they failed.

You see, there are a couple of things here, thinking about it from the perspective of the Old Testament audience. Israel, the nation of Israel existed because God had delivered them but despite that provision that occurred in their very midst, the pillar of cloud, the pillar of fire, their whole nation was grounded in these great historical events, this great historical redemption that took place, they should know their own history and know that God was going to keep them. But they didn't do that.

Now, let's think about this as Christians and apply this same principle of reasoning to our own hearts here tonight. You're here tonight as a Christian. You say, "I believe that Christ has redeemed me at the cross from all of my sin. I have been born again by the power of the Holy Spirit. God has graciously saved me." Beloved, don't you see when that's true that the very fact that you exist as a Christian is proof that God will continue to keep you until you arrive safely home in heaven? He didn't save you to abandon you. He didn't save Israel, deliver Israel in order to abandon them. The very fact that you are on the receiving end of this kind of blessing is your motivation and proof, one aspect of motivation and proof, for you to trust him for what lies ahead in the future. He's already done the greater thing in saving me from sin, then certainly he will save me in the lesser circumstances of life until I get safely home.

You say, "But what about my this and that? What about this problem? This trial? This sorrow?" Scripture's response would be, "Yeah, what about it? What about it? I say it gently and I say it in love, what about it?" Don't go there until you've thought through the implications of what we've already said. If God has saved you, that defines the entire perspective on which you look at everything else, and so you don't look at any aspect of your life, any sorrow, any sense of adversity, any broken relationship, you view all of those from the prior understanding of the redemption that God has granted to you in Christ and all of a sudden you're looking at every piece of adversity, every unknown circumstance, every threatening aspect to the future, you're looking at them from a position of strength, not weakness. That's what he's teaching us. That's how he's instructing us to think, but for Israel despite their history that should have driven them to

faith and obedience, despite that provision in their very midst, they disbelieved and they rebelled.

Look at verse 17. Remember, he has just recited some of the miraculous ways that God provided for them. Now in verse 17, he switches back and says, "Here was their response to that in real time. This is what they actually did." He says,

17 Yet they still continued to sin against Him, To rebel against the Most High in the desert. 18 And in their heart they put God to the test By asking food according to their desire.

You remember they wanted meat. They weren't satisfied with the manna and said, "We want something other than what you're providing for us."

Verse 19,

19 Then they spoke against God; They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? 20 Behold, He struck the rock so that waters gushed out, And streams were overflowing; [but their response to that was] Can He give bread also? Will He provide meat for His people?"

Beloved, what the psalmist is saying here is that that dissatisfaction with God's provision and these accusatory questions that they made against God's willingness and ability to provide for them in the wilderness, all of that was sinful. It was inexcusable, culpable rebellion against the God who had saved them in the first place and as a result, it invoked the wrath of God.

Verse 21,

21 Therefore the LORD heard and was full of wrath; And a fire was kindled against Jacob And anger also mounted against Israel, [why? why was God angry?] 22 Because they did not believe in God And did not trust in His salvation.

You see, beloved, he just made a really important point. The wrath was against their words, in a sense, but it was in a greater sense against the unbelief of their hearts that prompted them to say what they said. God had manifested his trustworthiness to them in history, he had manifested his ability to deliver to them in history. The righteous response, the way that they should have responded was in faith, in trust, that gave him honor from their inner man, to honor him from their inner man and believingly and lovingly say, "God, I trust you no matter what comes." They didn't do that. They were selfish. They rebelled. They were stiff-necked and what they spoke was a reflection of the unbelief of their hearts and that's why the Scripture says that God's anger was directed against their unbelief and their failure to trust him.

So, you see, beloved, one of the things that you and I come to grips with now in our Christian lives together both individually and corporately is that we realize that what's going on in our hearts is a matter of great consequence. The nature of sanctification, the nature of the Christian life is not simply about external compliance to a bunch of rules that make you look good in the presence of men because Scripture says that God looks on the heart and when he looks, 1 Samuel 17:6 says when God looks on your heart, what does he see there? Does he see a heart of gratitude, of thanks, of trust that's directed to him in response to his word written and incarnate? Or does he see a heart of grumbling, dissatisfaction, rebellion instead? The writer of Scripture says his wrath was directed against the condition of their heart. "Wow. You mean it really doesn't matter what men see? You know, I can't just be content that people think I'm a good Christian man, good Christian woman?" That's right. The issue, the primary issue is what is your attitude and disposition toward the God you say saved you. And what did God do in response to the unbelief of his people? God disciplined them. He disciplined them, ironically, by proving his power to provide for them. They doubted his ability to give to them what they needed and so he's going to show them that he can do whatever he wishes.

Verse 23,

23 Yet He commanded the clouds above And opened the doors of heaven;
24 He rained down manna upon them to eat And gave them food from
heaven. 25 Man did eat the bread of angels; He sent them food in
abundance.

Bread of angels in that this was food that was spiritually provided outside normal human means when God provided manna for them six days a week, with a double portion on the sixth day so they didn't work on the seventh.

Now watch this in verse 26,

26 He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens And by His power He
directed the south wind.

He's referring to an event that occurred in the book of Numbers that we look at last time.

Verse 27,

27 When He rained meat upon them like the dust, Even winged fowl like
the sand of the seas, 28 Then He let them fall in the midst of their camp,
Round about their dwellings. 29 So they ate and were well filled, And
their desire He gave to them.

The people said, "We want meat." God said, "You want meat? I'll give you meat." And so he just pours it down upon them to show that he's able to do that, but the outcome of that was not what they expected or what they wanted. Verse 29, "So they ate and were well

filled, And their desire He gave to them." So he gave them what they asked but then look at verse 30. This provision was a discipline and a punishment upon them.

30 Before they had satisfied their desire, While their food was in their mouths,
31 The anger of God rose against them And killed some of their stoutest ones,
And subdued the choice men of Israel.

They feasted according to their carnal desires but they did so without gratitude. They did so not in faith. They were not eating and drinking to the glory of God, 1 Corinthians 10:31, they were just eating and drinking according to fleshly desires that had no regard for the God who had provided for them. Watch this: they were eating all of this meat without any repentance for their prior unbelief. They didn't look at this and say, "Oh, we doubted God's ability to provide. God, I'm so sorry. I see in front of me the evidence that you are able to do whatever you want to do, and we asked for meat and here you gave us so much meat. God, I'm sorry for my unbelief. God, thank you for what you've done." Nah, they just kind of, figuratively speaking of course, they just pushed God out of the way and started greedily stuffing food into their mouth. This was a low point in the history of Israel.

Now at that point, the people of Israel had both positive and negative proof that should have led them to faith. Think with me, beloved. He's just recited how God killed some of their stoutest men, he has recited the miraculous way that God delivered them from Egypt, positive power to help them, power to discipline them and they felt the pain of their disobedience, watching some of their best young men fall for the sake of their sin and rebellion. They had all the proof at that point, they had all the proof that they needed to bring about their faith. This should have produced a response of faith and trust to them, a response of obedience like what the psalmist had alluded to in verse 7, "You should put your confidence in God and keep his commandments." They didn't do that. That was not on their radar.

God had delivered them, God had disciplined, and what was their response? Verse 32,

32 In spite of all this they still sinned And did not believe in His wonderful works.
33 So He brought their days to an end in futility And their years in sudden terror.

As we saw last time, they died in the wilderness. They continued in sin and they died in the wilderness. That's the book of Numbers for you.

Verse 34,

34 When He killed them, then they sought Him, And returned and searched diligently for God;
35 And they remembered that God was their rock, And the Most High God their Redeemer.

That sounds positive, right? But keep reading and you see that this was just superficial. This was temporary. This was just another manifestation of unbelief. Verse 36,

36 But they deceived Him with their mouth And lied to Him with their tongue. 37 For their heart was not steadfast toward Him, Nor were they faithful in His covenant.

They repented only superficially. This expression of verbal faith – watch this because this explains a lot of what you see in modern evangelicalism. They make a verbal profession that is disproved in its reality by their subsequent life of disloyalty, disbelief and disobedience. Understand that verbal professions can be false, often are, Matthew 7:21-27.

So let's just pause here for a moment and realize that this is all very sobering. This is remarkable to see. We're meant to reflect on this and think through the implications of what we're reading. A great God has done great things for his people and their response was not one of faith, gratitude and obedience, it was rather sin and defiance and rebellion, and you would think at that point that God was done with the whole nation of them; that he would have just abandoned them and maybe turned to the Ammonites instead or something. But even in the depth of that inexcusable rebellion, God still showed sovereign compassion to them.

Look at verse 38. This is contrary to all human thought, verse 38, in light of what we've read in the prior 37 verses.

38 But He, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them; And often He restrained His anger And did not arouse all His wrath. 39 Thus He remembered that they were but flesh, A wind that passes and does not return.

Here at this point, beloved, the lesson is starting to come home. He's starting to emphasize another aspect of his instruction that he intends to make here in this Psalm. You see the greatness of God and you see the sin and rebellion of the people, but the lesson goes a step further and says that despite their sin and rebellion, God was still compassionate toward them. God was still merciful to them and he's saying to his readers, he's saying to us today, "Look at this and see the work and compassion of God. Give God, in response, earnest trust and obedience. From the depth of your heart say, 'You are an amazing God! You are a glorious God! You are worthy of my full-hearted, full-throated love and obedience and praise! To be a God like that is contrary to all human experience. You have a power in your ability to work mighty wonders that is unlike anything that any man has. I worship and praise you in response to that and now I look and I see another dimension, another realm of your character when people responded sinfully and disobediently to you, you showed them compassion and forgave their iniquity and you didn't wipe Israel off the map. What manner of love is this? What kind of grace is this?'"

So as we start to think through these things, you start to see how this is to provoke a response deep in your heart. As we've said so many times in this series on the Psalms, these Psalms – I want to be careful with how I say this because I'm about to get myself in trouble and I don't want to be in trouble tonight – these Psalms are not teaching us little lessons about how to get through another day without it going too bad; this isn't just a little bump of good advice for the day and you move on to something else tomorrow. This Psalm is teaching you a profound way to regard God and to think about life. Profoundly you are to see his greatness both in his power and in his grace, and because it is profound, the power and the force of that changes the entire way that you think. Your entire disposition toward life, the entire way that you exist is now done in response to the revealed truth, the revealed acts of God. "He is like that, therefore, the totality of my life will be lived in a believing, loving, obedient response to him. Nothing in my life falls outside the realm of what that impacts." Everything in your life comes under the embrace of the greatness of this God. All of it. All of it.

So the Psalmist is saying and what he's driving us to, "Give to this God your earnest trust, your earnest obedience." As Luther said in his hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," to the point that you let goods and kindred go if faithfulness to God requires it. You let your life go. You let the world go. You let the approval of man go. Whatever else it costs me, I must give the surpassing priority of my heart, soul, strength and mind in a believing, loving response to this great God. Everything else is secondary. "Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life I'll sow. The body they may kill, God's truth abideth still."

Read about some of the Scottish Christians from the 16 and 17th century and you'll see an example of what that's like, men tortured for the sake of being faithful to revealed truth against kings and against the Roman Church. They got it. These were not misguided men who laid down their lives for the faith, these were not fools who if they had just muttered a couple of words could have avoided all of it. They understood that, "This kind of God has a claim on my very life, on my lifeblood. I cannot commit treason against him. I'll commit so-called treason against everything else in my life, I'll commit treason against my self-interest, I won't deny, disbelieve or disobey this God who has made himself known." And for us Christians, we look back not at a redemption at the Red Sea, we look back at a redemption of red blood at the cross and say, "Love so amazing demands my life, my soul, my all."

That is what Psalm 78 is teaching us. That is what Christ is worthy of. That is what this God deserves. Not a superficial approach that pays lip-service on Sunday and lives like the devil throughout the rest of the week. No, this is what you give all of your life to. That's what he deserves. We're talking about the deepest loyalties of your heart and, yeah, I say it sympathetically, I say it from my own personal experience, sometimes it costs. It costs and when you're in the middle of paying that cost, you look back at the cross and you say, "I gladly pay this price. It's a small return on a far greater price that was paid by a far greater one for my far lesser soul."

So, now the psalmist is going to rehearse his lesson again. Look at verse 40. The psalmist is going to rehearse the lesson again. He's going to kind of repeat himself using different

illustrations and we're at the halfway point in the Psalm, hopefully not halfway through a three hour message here. He rehearses the lesson again. Verse 40. He goes back to their disobedience. We've seen a flash of grace, a flash of lightning of grace against the dark sky and it illuminates things for a while and then it comes back to the darkness of their sin and rebellion.

Verse 40,

40 How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness And grieved
Him in the desert! 41 Again and again they tempted God, And pained the
Holy One of Israel.

Now he's going to go on and say that this sin and rebellion was inexcusable in light of the deliverance that they had experienced from the hand of Egypt. Verse 42, their rebellion happened, verse 42 when,

42 They did not remember His power, The day when He redeemed them
from the adversary, 43 When He performed His signs in Egypt And His
marvels in the field of Zoan,

Then he starts to rehearse some of the plagues that came from the hand of Moses against Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Verse 44,

44 And turned their rivers to blood, And their streams, they could not
drink. 45 He sent among them swarms of flies which devoured them, And
frogs which destroyed them. 46 He gave also their crops to the
grasshopper And the product of their labor to the locust. 47 He destroyed
their vines with hailstones And their sycamore trees with frost. 48 He gave
over their cattle also to the hailstones And their herds to bolts of lightning.

Now when you read the sequence of these things in the book of Exodus, you see that he's not reciting these plagues in the chronological sequence in which they are recorded there, he's simply summarizing; he's illustrating and now he gives a climax. Verse 49,

49 He sent upon them His burning anger, Fury and indignation and
trouble, A band of destroying angels. 50 He leveled a path for His anger;
He did not spare their soul from death [speaking about the Egyptians], But
gave over their life to the plague, 51 And smote all the firstborn in Egypt,
The first issue of their virility in the tents of Ham.

What's he saying here? Here's what he's saying: he's talking about the cradle of Israel's birth, he's talking about the origin of this nation which he is now trying to instruct. All of Israel should look back at that supernatural origin and see in it the proof of God's care and love and ability to provide for them. They should look back at their historical origins and see the proof of God's care for them and that should provoke in them a response of faith and obedience. That's what should happen.

Verse 52, and you see the tender care of God in contrast to the way that he dealt with Egypt. What did he do?

52 ... He led forth His own people like sheep And guided them in the wilderness like a flock; 53 He led them safely, so that they did not fear; But the sea engulfed their enemies.

You remember the story. They fled out of Egypt and the Egyptian army went after them. They were pressed up, they were pushed up against the Red Sea. They were either going to be slaughtered by the army or drown. But that's not what happened. Why? Because God cared for them. Because God loved them. Because God provided for them and made a supernatural way for them to escape and in that same supernatural event provided for the destruction of the army that drowned in the waters that they had just walked through.

How can you look at that, as an Israelite, and question this God? How can you look at that and not trust him? How can you look at that and not worship him? Their faithlessness, their disobedience, their rebellion against this God is utterly inexcusable. There is no excuse for that because God had led them safely. But then he not only delivered them from slavery in Egypt, remember what he did afterwards when he brought them to the Promised Land. What did he do? He drove out the nations that had been dwelling there so that they would have a place in which they could dwell safely, securely, a land flowing with milk and honey, having an abundant provision in a place that God had provided for them and in which God would protect them.

Verse 54,

54 So He brought them to His holy land, To this hill country which His right hand had gained. 55 He also drove out the nations before them And apportioned them for an inheritance by measurement, And made the tribes of Israel dwell in their tents.

God had supernaturally delivered them from Egypt and to the land of promise. What a good God! What a powerful God! How majestic is that? And how privileged was Israel to have this God for them and to have the history that belonged to them? What massive privilege given to them, massive privilege added to by the fact that God was giving them his revelation through Moses, and yet the cycle of sin and rebellion continued.

Verse 56,

56 Yet they tempted and rebelled against the Most High God And did not keep His testimonies, 57 But turned back and acted treacherously like their fathers; They turned aside like a treacherous bow. 58 For they provoked Him with their high places And aroused His jealousy with their graven images.

Instead of responding in true worship, they turned to idolatry, they turned to places of worship that God had told them not to do. So what's the response of God? What we see is this: the people in the land turned out to be just like the people in the wilderness. Israel was bent toward sin, not faith and it brought repeated wrath upon them.

Verse 59,

59 When God heard, He was filled with wrath And greatly abhorred Israel; 60 So that He abandoned the dwelling place at Shiloh, The tent which He had pitched among men, 61 And gave up His strength to captivity And His glory into the hand of the adversary. 62 He also delivered His people to the sword, And was filled with wrath at His inheritance. 63 Fire devoured His young men, And His virgins had no wedding songs. 64 His priests fell by the sword, And His widows could not weep.

God brought judgment on his people as shown by the nations that afflicted them. He disciplined them. He gave vent to his wrath. After centuries of showing them his provision and his grace and they continued to rebel, they met with punishment, they met with judgment, they ultimately met with exile. But the Psalm doesn't end there. That brings us to our third point this evening: the grace of God. The grace of God. Even in his judgment, God did not abandon his people completely. Even then, even after centuries of provocation, God did not forsake his compassion on his chosen nation.

Look at verse 65.

65 Then the Lord awoke as if from sleep

In other words, they went through this dark period of discipline, it was like the Lord was sleeping and not providing for them, but now what happens next is,

Like a warrior overcome by wine

In the sense that the Lord awakes out of a sleep. He's no longer slumbering and what did he do? He acted on behalf of his people. Verse 66,

66 He drove His adversaries backward; He put on them an everlasting reproach. 67 He also rejected the tent of Joseph, And did not choose the tribe of Ephraim,

In other words, he did not bring back the northern tribes but, verse 68,

68 But chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved. 69 And He built His sanctuary like the heights, Like the earth which He has founded forever.

Then what did he do? He acts and he delivers them. He brings them back after their troubles. In verse 70, look at what he does,

70 He also chose David His servant And took him from the sheepfolds; 71
From the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him To
shepherd Jacob His people, And Israel His inheritance.

What he's saying here is this: after all of that rebellion, after those centuries of national disobedience, God raised up David, a man after his own heart who gave to God, though imperfectly, though pockmarked with some failure, gave to God a true worship and a true devotion and led the nation in that same way. Remember how he danced with all of his might before the presence of God when the ark was brought back? Genuine heartfelt obedience. God gave them a man like that that they didn't deserve.

So in verse 72,

72 ... he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, And
guided them with his skillful hands.

By the end of this lengthy Psalm, two things impress you. One is the unending nature of Israel's rebellion and, secondly, is the persistent patience and compassion of God. Yes, he brings judgment and discipline upon them but it's always with a view to bringing compassion again when the discipline has spent itself. He has woven through his dealings with Israel this principle of compassion on an undeserving people and with New Testament eyes, we see the subsequent history even more clearly. Think about this, beloved, this is really sweet: in the Old Testament he gave them David, in the New Testament he gave them the Messiah. He gave them Christ. He gave them himself incarnate in human flesh. Their Messiah was with them in human flesh. Their real King, their ultimate King was in human flesh before them. How great the measure of the compassion of God on his people to send their Messiah to come from heaven to walk on earth amongst them.

What did Israel do with him? What did the Jews do with him? They crucified him. They killed him. Their rebellion had found its fullest expression. God in human flesh and they grabbed him, and using Roman hands, they nailed him to the cross. And what did God do? Some say that God turned his back forever on Israel there and now the church replaces Israel in the plan of God. We don't believe that. Their rebellion only laid the foundation for Christ to show even further compassion upon them. This is unbelievable. That's a bad word to use when you're preaching. This is so totally believable. This is so unlike man, let's put it that way; that's what I mean by that.

Look at Luke 23:33. After they scourged him, after they mocked him, after they spat upon him, as they were crucifying him, Luke 23:33,

33 ... they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and
the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.

And what do we see about this grace and compassion of God?

34 But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

"Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." A short while later after the resurrection, the Father answered the prayer of his own beloved Son. Acts 2:34. We're almost done here. Acts 2:34, remembering that Christ had prayed for the Father to forgive them, Peter preaches and he says, let's look at verse 36

36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel [let you Jews] know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified."

"You crucified your own Messiah." And what did God do at that crucial point in redemptive history? Verse 37,

37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"

And in Peter's word you see the disposition of the grace of God toward even the people that crucified his Son. This is astounding. This is grace amazing.

38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." 40 And with many other words he solemnly testified [I love that, he solemnly testified. Peter was not putting on a carnival for them, he solemnly testified] and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

Wow! That is gracious! That is amazing love! You look at that and say, "How can it be that God would deal with people like that, like that?" They crucified Christ, he forgave them. What a compassionate God! What a great Savior! And we land the plane tonight by saying this: learn from Israel's history and apply it to your own heart. Mourn, I tell you, mourn the remnants of stubborn rebellion and unbelief in your heart and set your mind to put them to death, to mortify that, and then come afresh to Christ to receive his grace and mercy.

Look at the way he dealt with Israel. We see the outcome of his dealings that the Lord is gracious and compassionate. Look at how he dealt with Nineveh in the book of Jonah. He's a God of sovereign compassion. Look at how he dealt with humanity at the cross. He's a God of great mercy and compassion. Realize that even in your sin that you're

trying to deal with now, that God has a disposition of grace and mercy toward you that is beyond human comprehension. Believe him with gratitude, respond to him with repentance and let your faith be encouraged and let your faith find its fulfillment in your obedience to him.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, indeed there is a long history of grace emanating from the throne of God. You chose a people to be your own. You endured their rebellion even as you provided for them consistently over time. Yes, you disciplined them but there was always an ultimate goal of compassion and we saw at the cross the fulfillment of your compassion upon your people, your mercy expressed in our Lord Jesus Christ. So Father, thank you for the mercy that you have shown to our souls, those of us that are in Christ. We thank you from the bottom of our heart for such undeserved favor given to such undeserving people like us. With grateful and somewhat chastened hearts here this evening, Father, we offer up to you our response of trust, confidence in your purposes for us, trust for your future grace, trust for your future provision for us, trust for your continued mercy in our lives, and we ask that you would enable us to live out a true repentance that is worthy of this great salvation that you have given to us through our great Lord Jesus Christ. We pray in his wonderful name. Amen.

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