

## God's Great Ballad | The Flow of the Psalms

### *Mechanized God or Mysterious Grace?*

Psalm 44 (Communication)

6.28.20

*O God, we have heard with our ears, Our fathers have told us The work that You did in their days, In the days of old. <sup>2</sup> You with Your own hand drove out the nations; Then You planted them; You afflicted the peoples, Then You spread them abroad. <sup>3</sup> For by their own sword they did not possess the land, And their own arm did not save them, But Your right hand and Your arm and the light of Your presence, For You favored them.*

*<sup>4</sup> You are my King, O God; Command victories for Jacob. <sup>5</sup> Through You we will push back our adversaries; Through Your name we will trample down those who rise up against us. <sup>6</sup> For I will not trust in my bow, Nor will my sword save me. <sup>7</sup> But You have saved us from our adversaries, And You have put to shame those who hate us. <sup>8</sup> In God we have boasted all day long, And we will give thanks to Your name forever. Selah.*

*<sup>9</sup> Yet You have rejected us and brought us to dishonor, And do not go out with our armies. <sup>10</sup> You cause us to turn back from the adversary; And those who hate us have taken spoil for themselves. <sup>11</sup> You give us as sheep to be eaten And have scattered us among the nations. <sup>12</sup> You sell Your people cheaply, And have not profited by their sale. <sup>13</sup> You make us a reproach to our neighbors, A scoffing and a derision to those around us. <sup>14</sup> You make us a byword among the nations, A laughingstock among the peoples. <sup>15</sup> All day long my dishonor is before me And my humiliation has overwhelmed me, <sup>16</sup> Because of the voice of him who reproaches and reviles, Because of the presence of the enemy and the avenger.*

*<sup>17</sup> All this has come upon us, but we have not forgotten You, And we have not dealt falsely with Your covenant. <sup>18</sup> Our heart has not turned back, And our steps have not deviated from Your way, <sup>19</sup> Yet You have crushed us in a place of jackals And covered us with the shadow of death.*

*<sup>20</sup> If we had forgotten the name of our God Or extended our hands to a strange god, <sup>21</sup> Would not God find this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart. <sup>22</sup> But for Your sake we are killed all day long; We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. <sup>23</sup> Arouse Yourself, why do You sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not reject us forever. <sup>24</sup> Why do You hide Your face And forget our affliction and our oppression? <sup>25</sup> For our soul has sunk down into the dust; Our body cleaves to the earth. <sup>26</sup> Rise up, be our help, And redeem us for the sake of Your **lovingkindness**.*

We're looking at the Book of Psalms...and most Bible readers know it's the longest book... some can tell you how many Psalms there ARE... a few can tell you that the whole collection is made up of five books.

In this Second Book (42-72) the Psalmists are communicating to the nations around them to say, "Our God is THE God..."

This Psalm is dismal. In fact it's a Psalm of Lament – a bold and broken, honest complaint before God. And it's quoted in one of the brightest passages in the entire Bible... there's mystery embedded in that!

This lament articulates for us a certain dynamic that spiritually alive people actually experience and it's very painful... To give it an impressive label: when a believer comes to rely on his/her sanctification for justification... gradually you put your faith in the progress you've made in the spiritual life.

When people get a sense of assurance that God accepts them and that assurance rises from their sincerity, their past experience of conversion, their recent religious performance/success, or even from “things going my way” – when life is sweet or especially good... Then when that DOESN'T happen... I feel like, “Wait! God is apparently NOT blessing me right now – what did I do to deserve this and how can I shape up so the blessings will return?”

That's the dynamic I want to address today.

- 1. The Dynamic Described**
- 2. The Dynamic Illustrated**
- 3. The Dynamic and the Final Word**

A believer in Jesus looks back on the history of God's people (in SCR and in more recent days) AND she looks at her own walk with God and ...sees, gets, knows, understands and even EXPERIENCES that GRACE RECEIVED BY FAITH IS THE BASIS FOR GOD'S DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE. AND wanting to have some sign or proof or evidence or assurance that “I am still favored by God” he/she looks around at the trappings of his life and doesn't see what he hopes to see (in fact the OPPOSITE!) and is DEEPLY troubled.

In vv 1-8 --- the sons of Korah remember how God has worked in the lives of His people from the start: GRACE, GRACE and more GRACE! It was never because we tried harder or were better. Our Father's told us: You drove out the enemy WITH YOUR OWN HAND. YOU planted our ancestors in the Land... NOT BY THEIR OWN SWORD...but YOUR right hand.”

And this isn't only a history thing – WE have actually experienced this way of grace: v. 6 “I will not trust my bow/sword but YOU save us...in God we boast!”

AND then this believer (a person who IS what he IS by God's grace received passively by resting and receiving [faith]) he then experiences a deep disruption in his life (for the Psalmists it could be defeat in a battle, war, sickness, failure, shame!!) And they reason within themselves, “God met me by grace...and everything went well... but now it's going badly (even catastrophically!) so something is wrong with the apparatus! Am I not putting the right coinage in the machine? OR is the machine broken?”

And checking his coinage...and convinced there's NOTHING wrong with the coins... he concludes that something's wrong with the machine itself.

ASK YOURSELF: if I put the right coins in the machine and the machine did NOT deliver what was advertised – then WHERE'S THE TROUBLE? If God says, "Do this and live!" But I DID that and got cancer... then something's wrong with the promise!"

Now before I try to show how this dynamic MAY show up in the lives of modern people let me try to illustrate this dynamic from the Bible itself... This notoriously difficult Psalm is a corporate miniature of another book of the Bible that's 42 chapters long... Some say it's the oldest book in the Bible.

This Psalm is the Book of Job in miniature. The Book of Job was about one man's experience with "the dynamic" and this Psalm is about the whole church and its experience with the same inner distortion of the spiritual life.

Job, as you may know, was a grace man – he could say all the things we find in the first 8 verses of this Psalm. He enjoys the spiritual favor of God and also a lot of gifts, possessions, successes and standing in the community. He knows God and has a good life.

Then the adversary ("ha shatan" – the satan – the adversary) a supernatural being appears before God and accuses Job of loving God ONLY for what STUFF he can get from God. And the adversary asks permission to take away all the stuff – like his business and his social standing and his children... and finally his health.

And when Job is left childless (7 sons and 3 daughters die). He's bankrupt and covered in painful sores... His "friends" come to "help" him... but end up accusing him – so that Job could say everything you'll find in today's Psalm vv. 9-17 – "you've rejected me... brought me to dishonor... like an unprotected sheep... you sold me out and got nothing in return I'm a laughingstock (Job 12.4 et al) ...humiliated ... overwhelmed... because of the enemy (BTW Job never does learn about the adversary's little experiment!)

And his friends make it clear: "Job... God is just. He rewards the righteous and smites/humiliates the un-righteous ... AND YOU are as SMITTEN as it gets – worst case we ever saw! So... Job, why not come clean, so God can forgive you and maybe even restore you... tell us what you've been doing to make God treat you so badly. We wanna help."

And Job...goes along for the ride. He's willing to search his heart but in the end... he can't think of anything he's been doing wrong. And after being really pushed...pushed and badgered...badgered and pressed...pressed and "crushed in a place of jackals and covered with the shadow of death" (v. 19) and accusations... Job feels forced to defend himself!

In CHs 26-32 Job comes out swingin' (in a righteous way!) and shows that he really is a righteous man... and HE CAN NOT discover any hidden pollution that would render him undeserving. God requires a certain coinage (the currency of righteousness and a close and careful examination of his life will reveal that Job has the goods, the currency; HE PUT THE RIGHT COIN INTO THE MACHINE BUT INSTEAD OF BLESSING – out came cursing..... “and frankly boys... the machine is broken... God is unaware/asleep at the wheel ...NOT who we thought He was!”

AND you can hear how the words of vv. 17-25 so aptly summarize Job's lengthy defense of his coinage his currency, righteousness; he always gave what God required: “my steps haven't deviated from Your way, yet You have crushed me in a place of jackals and covered me with the shadow of death. If I had forgotten the name of my God or raised my hands to a strange god, wouldn't God know this?”

In fact WHEN Job is finished with his closing arguments and has presented such an airtight case for his genuine integrity, we read, “Then these three men ceased answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.” (32.1)

And then God counsels Job... and God basically says... “So the machine is broken, huh? You're going to tell me how to build a better machine...how I can be a better God... Let Me ask YOU, Job, where were YOU when I created the earth?”

And the kicker for me is when God poses a question for old Job, (40.8) “Will you discredit My justice and condemn Me just to prove you are right?” (NLT)

And like a deer in the proverbial headlights... Job freezes...he's totally exposed and broken and he gasps these climactic words, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes." (42.5-6)

BUT what WAS it about God and about God's arrangement/deal/plan...the machine... what did Job see about the coin he was using and the machine into which he was dropping that coin? AND If Job was “blameless” (4x) why should he have to repent?

And the answer is... Job's coin did not fit the machine because THERE IS NO MACHINE! God is not a machine! And we can never, ever approach God on the basis of our having the right currency...

Job had somehow started off a grace man and gradually became a deserving man (Gal 3.3) ... a righteous man... a man who worked hard for everything he ever got... and when you go all the way to the core of the onion and peel back all the layers, Job saw himself as righteous and deserving and he saw God as a broken machine...that needed to be fixed.

Job the Blameless... when God got all the way inside... Job was so fixated of his own rightness and worthiness and merit... that he would rather kill God than admit that everything he had...everything he was... it was all and only by God's unmerited, undeserved generosity and grace.

Psalm 44 begins with the words, "O God we have heard with our ears..." and the book of Job culminates in those words, when Job says, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You..." What did Job see? That God is not a machine! God is NOT a tame lion that can be safely domesticated by our being nice people...by becoming deserving and giving the Divine Vending Machine just the right coin...so I can get on with life!

Job realized... after great pain...after crushing loss and humiliation and confusion and inner turmoil ...after loss of his social standing and enduring the chiding and harassment of fellow church members ...he realized that God loved him... because of God... not because of something Job gave to God.

And this is where I want to land the bird today.

You think... and I think... that God is a man. That like people, God does for us after we have given Him what He wants and requires. When life is going well it means that we are doing what God requires. "Our steps have not deviated from Your way..."

But when we have a flat tire... when we can't find a parking space (even after we've prayed) and when we get a bad diagnosis or a crushing loss... a big financial setback (and I realize – I kept my job and some of you have NOT... and it's easier for me to talk this way... because I have my job...for now) but when we get in a jam... and when the jam turns to a circus... and into a calamity... IT'S HARD TO REMEMBER: the blessings I received from God were NEVER because I dropped the right coin into the right slot... it was always, ONLY because of GRACE.

Jesus Christ said, "Apart from ME you can do nothing to please God and merit His favor" (John 15.5)... It all depends on HIM.

I don't get a parking place because I read the Bible in the morning four days in a row. I don't get good health because I tithe or because I'm a man of integrity... I get all these things because of God.

He loves me...not because I deposit the right currency... that ship has already sailed and I will never have that currency of perfect righteousness... Job didn't have it...the sons of Korah (who wrote this Psalm) didn't have it...

Only one Human Being can really read this Psalm and mean it – "All this has come upon Me, but I have not forgotten You, and I have not dealt falsely with Your covenant. My heart has not

turned back, and My steps have not deviated from Your way, yet You have crushed Me in a place of jackals and covered Me with the shadow of death.”

The blessings that Job enjoyed were paid for by Someone else... the Promise Keeper...the Law Keeper ...the Covenant Keeper...who like Job was accused by the adversary, and accused by the Law (even though He alone actually DID the Law and fulfilled it!) who was covered by the shadow of death in order that we might enjoy LIFE.

And so this Psalm ends...with one final word...(last word in Hebrew) that really is the BOTTOM LINE...a cry for help, “Rise up, be our help, and redeem us for the sake of Your lovingkindness.”

It’s the Hebrew word...so crucially important...the word HESED...the Covenant-Loyalty of God...sort of untranslatable but it really means God’s grace – whereby He makes an arrangement with us ...there’s a God-side and a human-side of the arrangement and then He does the God-part, and, in Jesus Christ He does the HUMAN-PART too!

Hesed – like Hassidic – if the Hassidic people only knew...that only a perfect righteousness would suffice and only Jesus Christ HAD it...and He credits it (His righteousness) ONLY TO THOSE WHO ARE MESSED UP... When you see your need and when you see God’s willingness to meet your need in Jesus Christ...that really IS an eye-opening, “I’ve heard of You with the ear but NOW MY EYE SEES YOU...”

And when you’re fixated on the bottom line and the final Word, God’s hesed...God’s love for us in Jesus Christ... when You look at that...at HIM... then it doesn’t matter if you have to park a mile away and walk... because every step of that walk you are accompanied by the One who was covered by the shadow of death (v.19) and who (last verse) rose up to be our help, redeemed us for the sake of His lovingkindness.

Wanna know whether God loves you...don’t look at your successes... don’t look at your failures... look only to the cross of Jesus.

It’s astounding that this dismal Psalm (v. 22) is quoted in that NT passage - Phil said it was maybe the best/brightest chapter in the entire Bible: Romans 8.

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." (35-36)

Even when everything crashes around us...even if God (who’s NOT a Tame Lion!) even if we are slaughtered and undergo really, really, really tough stuff... our lament always leads us to Jesus – HE is the embodiment of God’s lovingkindness. HE IS ALL THE PROOF WE’LL EVER NEED THAT WE ARE LOVED AND CHERISHED BY GOD – parking space or not!