

Prayer of an Afflicted Saint

By Mark Fitzpatrick

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Psalm 102

Preached on: Sunday, August 31, 2008

Arann Reformed Baptist Fellowship

8 Hillview Grove,
Ballinteer, Dublin 16,
Republic of Ireland

Website: www.markbarryfitz.blogspot.com

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/arann

Well, we turn back to Psalm 102 for our meditation. And, really, we are going to do a brief look at the whole of the psalm. So we will be brief and, as I said before the reading, this is the prayer of an overwhelmed saint, a prayer of the afflicted when he is overwhelmed and poureth out his complaint before the Lord.

There is no doubt there are going to be times in our Christian life when we will experience times that will literally overwhelm us, when we will not know where to turn, when we will find ourselves alone even though people are around us. And this psalm teaches us the place to go. It shows us the example of where the psalmist went to when he realized that there was no one else that could deliver him at a time like this.

It is not important to know all the details even though there is some indications in the psalm of what caused his trouble. But it really doesn't...that is not the point. The point is and the main point of the psalm is where we look or where we should look to in times of trouble.

In Psalm 130 we have a similar idea. "Lord, out of the depths to thee I cried."¹ So when we are in trouble, when we are overwhelmed, whatever comes upon us or, indeed, we bring upon ourselves the place to go to is to the Lord.

The first thing we want to know is as we look at the passage itself is that it is because, in verse one, it is because of God's dealings in the soul that we do cry to him. "Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee."² We can't come to the Lord unless we have an assurance that God is in our life. We don't, like the world, come to God just in trouble. But when the believer is in trouble, because he has that relationship he is not introducing himself here to God. He already has a relationship with the Lord. So therefore he comes and cries to the one he knows personally.

In verse 10 we read the words, "Thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down."³ Like Job he recognized that the good things and the bad things are in the hand of God and that God was in control of them all. He was not like so many today who when bad things happen

¹ See Psalm 130:1

² Psalm 102:1

³ Psalm 102:10

almost try and excuse God from involvement, almost try and say, “Well, now God is not really responsible for that.”

Amos 3:6 and Isaiah 45 verse seven, in your own time look at them and those verses clearly show that even the calamities and the evils and the troubles that come into our life are all in the hand of God. So therefore the psalmist acknowledges that God is in control of this situation and God himself has lifted him up and God himself has cast me down. It is so important as believers that when we get into these situations—whatever the cause is—that we don’t look horizontally, we don’t look just at the human aspects of it, but that we look up, that we see God in the situation.

Looking back to the twin towers—and, again, these are really...I’ll have some less time on all the rest of the verses, but just these are some of the main things that are in my mind. When the twin towers happened some of the main religious leaders in the world just overstretched themselves to try and say that this was nothing to do with God, this was nothing to do with him. And yet as you read the Scriptures, as you read even this psalm, the book of Job and so many other places, it is the Lord who is in control of all these things.

Psalm four verse one says, “Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.”⁴

Just turn over for a moment to Psalm 61 and just the first four verses.

Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever: I will trust in the covert of thy wings.⁵

“When my heart is overwhelmed will I cry unto thee.”⁶

Is that our response when we feel the waves of tribulation coming in upon us? Do we turn immediately to the Lord? For that is one of the key purposes in the Lord allowing trouble and tribulation into our life, that we might cry to him, turn to him, look to him.

“Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”⁷

You see, when we look at the life of the Lord Jesus and obviously that is what Psalm 61 is talking. When it says, “Lead me to the rock...”⁸ it is speaking of Christ. And when we look at Christ we are not meant to stand back and admire Christ.

⁴ Psalm 4:1

⁵ Psalm 61:1-4

⁶ See Psalm 61:2

⁷ Psalm 61:2

⁸ Ibid.

I was watching a documentary during the week and the people—and most of them were unbelievers, if not all who were talking—and they were admiring Jesus. We are not meant simply to admire Jesus, we are meant to come to him and to rest on him and to have fellowship with him, especially when the Lord brings these situations into our life.

So we don't stand back and just gaze upon Jesus like the world and say how wonderful he is. But we come to him and we have close fellowship with him.

You look in the gospels at the people who are most commended by the Lord Jesus and they were those who got the closest to him, mainly women who reached out and touched him that they might be healed or that they might have mercy. And he commended them for their faith. They didn't stand back like the religious leaders or like the...maybe some of the important people of the time and admire his sermon or admire his miracles, but they came to him because they saw in him the answer to all their needs.

Do we just admire Jesus or do we come to him?

Now this [?] we have lent. Up to that point some of you will be much more quickly in some of the other verses.

In verse two he seeks a speedy response from God. How like us. Sometimes we give the impression, don't we, that when we pray we should be patient forever and a day and that can be true. But here the psalmist wants an immediate response. "When I call answer me speedily...In the day when I call answer me speedily."⁹ He wants to hear God's answer and cannot wait for any length of time.

I think sometimes part of the problem with our prayers is that we are so lacking in faith that we don't even believe God will answer. But here the psalmist wants not just an answer, but a speedy answer.

Psalm 27 verse seven, "Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me."¹⁰ A child of God knows in his heart that God will answer his cry. You see, it is that cry of faith, it is not just that God will answer me, but it believes that God can and will answer me speedily.

Do we have that faith? Or are we overwhelmed with doubts, overwhelmed with a lack of faith? Well, if we are what is the answer? Come back to the Lord.

No matter what brings us down the answer is: Come to the Lord. That is why as we looked two weeks ago at Matthew 11 the Lord Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour [or are weary] and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."¹¹

⁹ Psalm 102:2

¹⁰ Psalm 27:7

¹¹ Matthew 11:28

When we are feeling the weight of this world and the weight of our sin upon us and in us we come to the Lord for his blessing.

Psalm 86 verse seven. “In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee.”¹² And the idea here is “I will call upon thee alone.” And he says at the end of that verse, “[And] thou wilt answer me. “[And] thou wilt answer me.”¹³ A prayer of faith.

James reminds us that the man who prays doubting should not think he shall receive an answer. It is so important that we pray believing prayers. That is a challenge. It is a real challenge. It is not easy to pray believing prayers and believing prayers flow out of a relationship with the Lord. They flow out of a relationship with the Lord.

In verse three God brings us to realize how weak and helpless we are of ourselves. This is part of the work of God in us. “For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth.”¹⁴ God brings us to the end of ourselves that we feel emptied of strength, that we feel weak and helpless.

And Paul rejoiced in Corinthians, writing to the Corinthians says...and he writes, “For when I am weak, then am I strong.”¹⁵ When I am weak.

And God works this sense of weakness into us and makes us realize how frail and empty we are in and of ourselves. Whereas modern generation in which we live in tells people to think really good things of yourself and think well of yourself and build yourself up and don't be so negative on yourself. And yet when we have dealings with God we are reminded of the Scripture, “Turn your laughter into mourning.”¹⁶

This world is for self pleasure, self seeking, self advancement and the opposite. Someone has said—it is a bit of a modern catch phrase, but I think it is helpful—God's way up is down. They who think they are something when they are nothing deceive themselves.

Man's life, according to this verse, is nothing but smoke in the nostrils of God. There is a word in the Hebrew is the word עָשָׁן (aw-shawn') vapor or dust and in Psalm 37 it says, “But the wicked shall perish... they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away.”¹⁷

James reminds us, “or what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”¹⁸ The word in the Greek here, ατμίς (at-mece') is similar to the word from which we get air, the English word air. So we are just like air and we can't even see air. You can't even see the thing.

¹² Psalm 86:7

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Psalm 102:3

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 12:10

¹⁶ See James 4:9

¹⁷ Psalm 37:20

¹⁸ James 4:14

Verse four, or I should say verses four to six. God causes the psalmist a concern over his soul to such a degree that even bodily food was not important to him. “My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread.”¹⁹ Have you ever been in that sort of situation, that you are so overwhelmed with a situation that food becomes an irrelevance? You forget to eat. It is not that you decide not to eat, but it becomes unimportant to eat, something you forget.

And Psalm 42 verse three, “My tears have been my meat day and night. My tears have been my meat day and night.”²⁰

How empty much today that passes for biblical Christianity, but the [?] is the reality of these things and the importance of these things and the reality when we are in the fellowship with the Lord that these should be part of our experience.

In verse seven when a soul seeks God it will bring a separation from men and will result in much of the time in loneliness. Verse seven, “I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top.”²¹ There is a sense of loneliness like Elijah feeling alone.

Now we are not alone. But we feel alone. We feel that there is nobody with us.

What an encouragement it was this morning to see the rest of you arrive, arriving, the encouragement that we are not alone.

An example for you in the life of Job, Job chapter seven. “Let me alone; for my days are vanity.”²²

And the Lord Jesus in Matthew 26:31, “Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.”²³

The Lord Jesus lived quite often a lonely life and especially as he approached the cross. And the closer we get to God and the closer we get to obedience to God the more lonely we will be at times in our lives.

Those around, according to verse eight—maybe even family and friends—shall become enemies of our soul. Verse eight, “Mine enemies reproach me all the day; and they that are mad against me are sworn against me. “Mine enemies reproach me all the day; and they that are mad against me are sworn against me.”²⁴ And I think we need to ask ourselves the question sometimes. If we don’t feel we have any enemies in this world, how close am I to God?

¹⁹ Psalm 102:4

²⁰ Psalm 42:3

²¹ Psalm 102:7

²² John 7:16

²³ Matthew 26:31

²⁴ Psalm 102:8

Let us remember the words of our Lord to the apostles.

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.²⁵

In verse 10 the psalmist acknowledges that all this is the work of God in his life. He has already made reference to that. “Because of thine indignation and thy wrath...”²⁶ It is because of God. He is the cause of all these things.

In verse 13 the psalmist changes focus. In the first half of the psalm it is all the trouble. But then we come into verse 12 I should say, not 13, but verse 12, “But thou, O LORD...”²⁷ It is not, “But I will overcome,” but, “thou, O LORD.”²⁸ Yes, all these troubles are in my life. All these things are overwhelming me, but my confidence is that “...thou, O Lord shalt endure for ever; and thy remembrance unto all generations.”²⁹

And what is our greatest desire? You see, many people in the world want to be remembered, don't they? They want people to remember them. So they erect big grave stones or they open libraries or do all sorts of stuff so that things will be named after them, so that they will be remembered. But the psalmist does not take consolation in the idea that he will be remembered, but that the Lord shall endure forever. That and that alone is the confidence of the child of God, that the Lord, that the Rock shall endure, that his name will last throughout all generations because if the Lord endures, then all his promises remain steadfast and sure.

Look up when you are in trouble. Do you look up? Is this your experience? Is this your hope? Is this your focus? Is this my focus this morning as I and as you experience different trials and tribulations in your life is it to the Lord?

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD [of hosts], which made heaven and earth.³⁰

But then in verse 13 not only will the Lord be remembered, but the Lord will arise. “Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come. Thou shalt arise.”³¹ And there is no doubt that this is prophetic of the Lord Jesus and God coming in the flesh to bring salvation to Zion, to bring salvation to his people that Jerusalem and the walls of Zion and the walls of Jerusalem will be built up for all eternity, that the Church might grow and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

²⁵ John 15:18-19

²⁶ Psalm 102:10

²⁷ Psalm 102:12

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Psalm 121:1-2

³¹ Palm 102:13

Our confidence is in us. Our confidence is not that we can do it right, that we can achieve it, that we can have something happen. Our confidence is that God has the ability to do his work. That is our confidence this day.

Thy servants [verse 14] take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof. So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth thy glory.”³²

But then in verse 16 a tremendous promise. “When the LORD shall build up Zion...”³³ Do you see the connection between verses 15 and 16? “The heathen shall fear the name of the LORD.”³⁴ When? “When the LORD shall build up Zion.”³⁵

And when the Church builds and when the Church grows and when the Church prospers—we saw it in the book of Acts, don’t we? Or see it in the book of Acts that people even fear to join themselves unto the Church because they saw God a moment. They saw the greatness of God in their midst and they feared God and his Church.

And our prayer...pray for the prosperity and the peace of Jerusalem. Pray for the peace and prosperity of the Church. That is what we were meant to do, to pray for the...And the Lord Jesus and he has gone to the cross in John 17 prayed for the whole Church, the Church present and the Church future. He prays for all his people. And that is what we are to do, pray for all saints the Scripture tells us. Pray that the Church might grow not even so much numerically, but in the strength of its God, in the strength of its God.

Our prayer, first and foremost, as we are small in number should be that we would grow in the strength of our God and in the glory of Christ.

Verse 17. “He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.”³⁶ You see the devil would seek, wouldn’t he, he would seek to come in and say, “Ah, you have really messed it up this time. You have really failed with everything. You are destitute and God doesn’t like destitute people.”

Oh, hear that promise to destroy the devil’s argument. He will not despise the prayer of the destitute. He will regard. He will rend his ear as we read down further on.

Then in verse 18 we have the foretelling of the Church as it spreads throughout the world. “This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD.”³⁷ And here the Gentile Church is like the Church made up of the Gentiles, a generation to come. And they shall praise the Lord. And here we are as a little

³² Psalm 102:14-15

³³ Psalm 102:16

³⁴ Psalm 102:15

³⁵ Psalm 102:16

³⁶ Psalm 102:17

³⁷ Psalm 102:18

fulfillment of this prophecy. We often hear much about different prophets and prophetic books. Well, here is a prophecy that we must take and should take encouragement from that we in the working of God and his fulfillment of these very words.

“For he hath looked down,” verse 19, “from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the LORD behold the earth.”³⁸

Why? Why? Isn't it wonderful? Look at verse 19. Why did he look down?

Verse 20. Not to see the great people, not to see the important people, but, “To hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those that are appointed to death.”³⁹ If we don't live in a country that has the death penalty, but quite often the first time people really come to God is when they are faced with imminent death and they know. And that applies not just to the death penalty, but to people who get terminal illnesses.

And the Lord is looking down to hear that groan, to hear that cry of those who are doomed to death, not only those, but what an encouragement for those. And when we feel at the end of ourselves, when we feel that the Lord could never listen to me again, that the Lord could never answer my prayer again. Read this psalm. Sing this psalm because this psalm will be a bulwark and a defense against the devil and all of his ways and all of his accusations and all of his falsehoods and all of his seeds of doubt, but the Lord looks down. Listen. He bends his ear to hear the groaning of the prisoner and to loose those that are appointed to death.

Then we see the result of this work in the soul of the redeemed in verse 21. “To declare the name of the LORD.”⁴⁰ When the prisoner cries out, the one appointed to death, when he cries out to the Lord and the Lord converts him and the Lord saves him the purpose is that he might “declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem.”⁴¹

Paul could say to the Corinthians, “When we came to you we preached Christ. We proclaimed Christ to lift him up, to declare his name.” And that is the great call of the Church.

The Jehovah's Witnesses could give us an example—even though they are heretics and they are not believers—but they have this goal to proclaim the name Jehovah. I am not even sure if that name is correct for the name of God. There is great doubt upon that fact whether that is even the correct name. And I won't get into the debate over that now.

But we are confident that the name of the Lord Jesus is to be proclaimed. And that is why the apostle in Acts four, “There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”⁴² None other name, no other name. That is the importance.

³⁸ Psalm 102:19

³⁹ Psalm 102:20

⁴⁰ Psalm 102:21

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Acts 4:12

There is only one name. That is not in the physical letters or word of the name, but of whom the name represents, the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

And then God is gathering his elect from the four corners of the earth, verse 22. “When the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD.”⁴³ And, again, this is being fulfilled in our...in this day of grace when people from every tribe, every language, every nation, every kindred, every tongue are gathering together to serve Christ.

You see, when these words were written there was one nation, one people and the rest of the world was in relative darkness and the psalmist here looks to a time when people from all over the globe would gather together and kingdoms—and for the sake of Joel we will emphasize kingdoms—to serve the Lord.

And what should be our prayer? Not just that individuals would be converted, but that nations would be converted. We don’t just believe in individual salvation. We do believe in the salvation of families and the salvation of nations. And we should pray for that and we should seek that and we have the foundation of the Word of God to pray for such things.

In verse 23 God works in us to not rely on our own strength, but to fully rest in his strength. “He weakened my strength.”⁴⁴ God actively weakens the psalmists strength. “He shortened my days,”⁴⁵ to strip him of any self confidence.

The Lord Jesus says, “I have not come to call the healthy and the wealthy and the righteous, but the sick and the destitute and the sinners. They are the ones I have come to call.”

And God actively works in us to strip us, to empty us of self reliance.

In verse 24, an honor and godly fear is generated in the heart of the saved soul, godly fear in verse 24. “I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: thy years are throughout all generations.”⁴⁶ Godly fear, godly honor.

Verse 25 to 27 we have an acknowledgment of the unchangeableness, the immutability of God, that God doesn’t change. How important it is. I have said this before. To me the most important characteristic and attribute of God is his unchangeable nature. For if God could change, none of the Bible would be relevant, none of the Bible would be relevant, none of the Bible would be something we could stand upon.

Verse 25.

⁴³ Psalm 102:22

⁴⁴ Psalm 102:23

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Psalm 102:24

Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.⁴⁷

And that was the confidence, the great confidence of the psalmist was that God was unchangeable, that all creation would wax old, that they would just be rolled up like a garment, but God would never change.

And then, finally, in verse 28 the great assurance for the child of God in view of his unchangeable attributes, “The children of thy servants shall continue.”⁴⁸ Why? Because God shall endure, because God will not change. “The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.”⁴⁹

It is amazing. The whole of the psalm leads up to the reason for confidence in the very final verse. We don't start in verse 28. But that is the ultimate conclusion of all that we have looked at throughout the first 27 verses of the psalm. Because of all that we have considered very briefly, we have just done an overview. The psalm which we could have said as we could have opened up these parts, but the great end conclusion of the greatness and the work of God and the unchangeable nature of God is that, “The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.”⁵⁰

We, as God's people shall be the most confident, the most assured people in the world. We have no reason to lack faith. A lack of faith is sinful. It is a result of sin. We have no reason in the Bible given to us. All the promises in the Word of God we read are yea and amen in the Lord Jesus Christ.⁵¹ And Christ has proven to us his love and his devotion to his people. We have no reason to doubt him. His children, his people will endure, will be established because he has promised and he does not change.

Amen.

We will sing just some more verses from that psalm, Psalm 102, before we turn to the Lord's table. Psalm 102. Just the last three verses, two stanzas.

They perish shall, as garments do,
But thou shall; evermore endure;
As vestures, thou shalt change them so;
And they shall all be changed sure.

⁴⁷ Psalm 102:25-27

⁴⁸ Psalm 102:28

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ See 2 Corinthians 1:20

But from all changes thou art free;
Thy endless years do last for aye.
Thy servants, and their seed who be,
Establish'd shall before thee stay.

We will stand to sing verses 26 to 28.

[singing]

They perish shall, as garments do,
But thou shall; evermore endure;
As vestures, thou shalt change them so;
And they shall all be changed sure.

But from all changes thou art free;
Thy endless years do last for aye.
Thy servants, and their seed who be,
Establish'd shall before thee stay.