

Psalm 102

By Joel Wood

Bible Text: Psalm 102

Preached On: Sunday, September 2, 2018

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... on this Psalm: "[\[Psalm 102\]](#) *A Prayer of one afflicted, when he is overwhelmed and pours out his complaint before the Lord.*" Historically, that is all we are told about this Psalm. We do not know the exact author or era of this Psalm. Some consider it to be Psalm of the exile, that time in history when the church, God's people, were in far flung Babylon. They were not able to worship as they desired and as the Lord required. In fact, they could not even sing. Their captors would spur them on, "You guys are good singers, sing!" And no, they whether literally or figuratively hung their harps on the willow trees. The joy of their music was gone from their hearts. Whether it was a mere personal sense of affliction or a corporate sense of affliction, there are some pretty wonderful answers to that affliction. But first we want to not skip over the anguish over Zion that is present in this Psalm.

And perhaps you have experienced a Babylonian captivity in your life. That time where you felt locked far away from the joys and the mysteries of the gospel. A time when the joy of singing to the Lord was gone from your heart. Perhaps you have anguished over Zion, whether it be that church universal and its various manifestations that is experiencing great persecution, trial, and trauma on one hand and on the other hand is experiencing great spiritual languishing and laziness usually those two things aren't happening in the same spot at the same time. It's amazing how persecution brings zeal for the house of the Lord. We've gone through a difficult season as a denomination. A couple of very intense court cases in our Synod this year. Painful moments with people that we love that have resulted in a breaking of fellowship with individuals within our Synod. Perhaps you look at our denomination and you anguish over those things or you anguish over the struggling church plants or the church plants of 150 years ago that are now struggling in their smallness, in their frailty. Seeming that they will soon wither and blow away off the map. Perhaps you look at our own congregation, perhaps you experience anguish over, I don't know, hurting friendships, frustrations in the ministry here, evangelism and outreach not going as quickly or wholeheartedly as we had hoped. Perhaps you experience anguish over that. Or perhaps you look at the littlest flock, that church in your home, that group of gathered saints and sinners that meets for family worship in the halls of your home. Perhaps you have an erring child, a spouse that's struggling with the realities of the gospel, a young one who seems to be Hell-bent on destroying every devotional moment that you try to create for your family. Perhaps there's anguish there. Perhaps there's anguish over your own heart, perhaps you feel lost, confused, alone, broken, like your name is a swear word to the godly. Anguish is real, sadness is real and I would ever encourage you away from the gospel preached by that other Joel down in Houston that would say "That's not real, just speak against it. God wants you to only be happy all the time." Well, if that's the case He's doing a horrible job.

No, anguish is real. If we deny it or redefine it, we won't find the godly answer and remedy for it. That's why it's so important to acknowledge it, to even appropriately dwell in it and with it in a proper

way. We hear some of the words of the Psalmist, he begins by crying out and asking the Lord to allow his cry to come unto Him. To not hide His face from him. That He would incline His ear to him in the day that he calls. He feels as if he is about to burn up and blow away. His heart is withering within him so badly that he forgets to eat. I've faced some severe depression in my life, I can honestly say, rarely do I forget to eat. Now ,young moms can identify "Why am I-- oh I haven't eaten since last Tuesday. Been so busy feeding everybody else I forgot to eat and to take care of myself." But when you're so hungry yet you almost can't eat because the depression, the anguish, the frustration, is so great. You know you should eat but you are ill. In fact, he says later that he's "[\[Psalm 102:9\]](#) ...eaten ashes like bread" --almost like sitting in the mourner's heap has become sustaining "--and mixed my drink with weeping." There's that old country song "There's a tear in my beer because I'm crying for you dear." When I go to the very place that'd supposed to make me feel okay, I'm still anguished over this. "[\[Psalm 102:6-7\]](#) An owl of the wilderness, a screech owl of the desert. I stay awake and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop." The loneliness, the darkness. And he senses God's indignation and wrath "[\[Psalm 102:10-11\]](#) for you have lifted me up and cast me down. My days are like an evening shadow that vanishes, and I wither away like grass." Not very hopeful at all, is it? Not very hopeful at all. There's great fear, there's great anguish, there's great turmoil.

One of the reasons Psalm 102 is so timely for us is yet again a political message has come through that we as Christians need to step up and act politically because we're on the verge of losing all these things that we have. We can begin to feel like the church is persona non grata, that no one cares about us or what we do and so when somebody seems to care a little we start to say "Well, we'll do whatever you want us to do." We don't want to be kicked out of the club, have our jacket taken away from us. And we can start to turn and look to all these different remedies for what we think will address the need in the church. Whether that be the church worldwide, the church in America, our own denomination, our own presbytery, our own congregation, or even our own family. But verse 12 exposes for us the root of comfort for those who are anguished in Zion. "[\[Psalm 102:12\]](#) But You, O Lord, shall endure forever enthroned and Your reputation to all generations." That is the base reality that addressed our greatest anguish in this life. As we have come to say it: "The Lord is on the throne." The Lord is on the throne. Some have sought encouragement, and I don't think wrongly so, in saying "You know, God is sovereign over this situation." "What's wrong?" "Oh, my job is just really frustrating, I feel persecuted by my coworkers because I'm a believer and they're not." Then we say "Well, don't worry. God is sovereign over your job." And that is true, but the greater comfort comes in understanding that Christ sits enthroned forever over everyone and everything. You might find comfort in thinking "God is sovereign over my marriage. God is providential over my marriage." And yes, that can be comforting, but did you ever stop to think about all the providential steps that had to take place for you two to even meet? He was providential over all of those and all of the things that were required for those things to happen, and all of the things that were required for those things to happen, and all the things that were required for those things to happen. Way back to the garden of Eden. God is providentially, authoritatively, enthroned forever over every moment and over every situation. That is the answer to the anguish of this life.

We see a turn in the Psalmist's tone in this Psalm. "[\[Psalm 102:13\]](#) You shall arise, and have mercy upon Zion, for the time to favor her, indeed, the appointed time has come." Notice also that that the comfort for the anguished Psalmist is not strictly personal, it's corporate. He doesn't start singing of God's mercy upon him, he starts singing about God's mercy and favor upon the church. "[\[Psalm 102:13b-14\]](#) ...indeed, the appointed time has come. For Your servants take pleasure in her stones, and have pity on her dust." We take joy when she is built up, we are wearied when she is torn down. "[\[Psalm 102:15\]](#) So the nations shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth Your glory." It is wonderful when we see missions spreading the gospel, when we see churches established.

It is great to see more people praising and worshiping God, but all of it is for naught if verse 12 isn't true. What makes that joy of evangelism and mission and worship so great is that it is true that Christ is enduringly enthroned forever, and His reputation is to all generations. "[\[Psalm 102:16-17\]](#) the Lord shall build up Zion;" -- we're promised the growth of the church -- "He shall appear in His glory." -- we're promised the return of Christ -- "He will regard the prayer of the destitute and will not despise their prayer." We are promised Christ's intercessory ministry before He returns. Verse 18, "[\[Psalm 102:18\]](#) Let this be written for the generation to come, that a people who shall be created shall praise the Lord." We are promised, generation after generation in the church. We are promised it. I understand the hypothetical [statement] that the church is only ever one generation from extinction. I understand the concept but it's not a valid statement. Why? Because God's word is sure. God has promised that generations we haven't even thought of yet will stand in God's courts and sing praise to His name.

We have some in our midst who can stand and testify to that because just last week they were meeting and falling in love and getting married. And now, week by week, they get to sit with their grandchildren and worship God. Time flies, tempus fugit, and the generations come, and the generations are redeemed, and the generations stand to worship our God. We see God's providential eye here: "[\[Psalm 102:19-22\]](#) For He has looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from heaven the Lord looked down on the earth, to hear the groaning of the prisoners and to set free those who are appointed to death, that they may declare the name of the Lord in Zion and His praise in Jerusalem; when the peoples are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the Lord." Not only will Christ build His church generation to generation covenantally, He will also build His church through conversion. Through those who are condemned to death and are set free by the gospel to worship Him. Now, the Psalmist cries out to God for the establishment of the earthly throne: "[\[Psalm 102:23-24\]](#) He has weakened my strength in my midlife; He has shortened my days. I said, 'O my God, do not take me away in the midst of my days— Your years endure throughout all generations.'"

The Psalmist goes on to find comfort in the works of God's hands: "[\[Psalm 102:25-28\]](#) From before You have laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They shall perish, but You shall endure; indeed, all of them shall wear out like a garment; like a robe You shall change them, and they shall pass away, but You are the same, and Your years shall have no end. The children of Your servants shall be secure, and their offspring shall be established before You." Turn on National Geographic or flip through its pages and we see these wonderful pictures of space and satellite images and if you haven't seen the new 4k video of the surface of the moon where they zoom in on the landing module that's there, uh, it's amazing what we can see in space. It's amazing what we can see in nature. As far out as we can see, we can see as far in. Cellular, microbiology, it is utterly amazing but it is nothing, nothing compared to their maker. All it does is serve as a little mirror to reflect the glory of God. All of it will pass away. All of it is fleeting, all of it is a vapor. But, God never changes. He never changes. He is enthroned forever. Nothing can unseat Him, nothing changes that. "[\[Psalm 102:27\]](#) Your years shall have no end."

And so then, verse 28, this promise again of generation after generation: "[\[Psalm 102:28\]](#) The children of Your servants shall be secure, and their offspring shall be established before You." God promises that generation after generation will turn to Him and be saved. They will be established and secure. Why? Because He has spoken, because He has promised, because He makes it a reality. He's the one that can turn the sinful heart, He's the one that can change the erring child, He's the one who can restore the broken relationships, He is the one who can protect the suffering at the hand of the oppressor for the sake of the gospel. He is the one. There may be much that you are anguished about in your life. This Psalm encourages us to pour out our hearts, to pour out our anguish, our prayer before the Lord. It calls on us to focus on the Lord, on who He is and encourages us to pray with confidence to Him, knowing

that He is on the throne forever. We'll never knock on his office door and find someone else sitting there and find out He was fired and replaced. No, He is always on His throne, He always hears our prayers, He always answers our deepest cries and needs. He is the same, and His years shall have end.

Stand with me as we pray.