

# Though He Slay Us

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The story of Job is one of the more familiar stories in the Bible. Even those who have no acquaintance with biblical truth, biblical Christianity, would know something about the phrase "the patience of Job," and the sense that he was a man who suffered greatly under the trials that God brought into his life. Job was a blameless man who nevertheless suffered under the hand of God. God himself testified to the blamelessness of Job's character as the story of Job opened, and so we have a divine attestation that Job was suffering apart from sin that was in his life. And Job, however, did not know this, Job did not know the background to his suffering and so he was left in a position of great perplexity, of uncertainty, "Why is God dealing with me in this manner when there is no guilt on my hands?" And as he struggled through that, as the narrative of Job unfolds, he said this in Job 13:15, speaking of his unending confidence in God, he said, "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him." "Despite the loss of my ten children, the loss of my fortune and the loss of my health, I will trust in God. I will trust him even if he kills me. I will not stop trusting him in the midst of these setbacks."

Well, friends, there is something important for us to see in that. The Bible says that there will be times often of unexpected setback for the people of God, and it is not an indication that God is angry, it's not an indication that a man is necessarily being punished for sin or anything of the sort, it's simply a matter of the fact that there may not be any visible explanation whatsoever for the reversal of the prior sense of outward external blessing that you had experienced in life. This is a common theme of Scripture. The question is or the thing that we do is that when that happens, when that comes, we still maintain our trust and we don't need or demand explanations for the trials, we don't have to know why in order to maintain and continue and walk in the trust that we have in God because he has made his character known supremely at the cross of Calvary.

Now, in two weeks, we are going to launch a critical study of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 through 7. I know everybody likes to know, "What are you going to preach on next? We just finished Philemon and now what's coming next?" Well, what's coming next in two weeks, starting in two weeks on September 11, is a sustained study of the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5, 6 and 7. Beloved, I'll tell you now without fear of contradiction or being stoned for being a false prophet, not that I'm making a prophecy here, that study over several months will change our church. It will change our lives. There is no doubt about that. And it's so critical that I wanted to delay it and to

postpone it just long enough to let everybody get back from summer travels and to get through the Labor Day weekend so that we can all start and be on the same page when we start this very critical study in two weeks. What that does is it left me with a two week window on Sundays, "Well, what are you going to do with those two Sundays in order to set up the study of the Sermon on the Mount?" What I want to do, which will be familiar territory for those of you that have been with us on Tuesdays, perhaps introducing the rest of you to another aspect of the ministry of Truth Community Church, I'm going to take the opportunity to do a couple of the Psalms that we're studying through systematically. We're going to do a couple of Psalms today and next week and just continue in our systematic study of the Psalms. What I'm hoping is that there will be a handful of you that'll say, "Wow, this is what I've been missing on Tuesdays? I want to be there for that," and that you'll join us as we continue on Tuesdays and as we study through the Psalms. The way it works out and the timing of everything is that we have come to Psalm 44. We've done Psalms 1 through 43, we're now at Psalm 44 and Psalm 44 is going to be our text for today. It has that same kind of theme that Job expressed, "Though He slay us, we will trust Him." And that's what we're going to look at.

Psalm 44, I invite you to turn in your Bible and actually I'm going to ask you to stand as we read the Psalm. I realize that this is not a familiar Psalm. I have never heard a sermon on Psalm 44 and I'm guessing that not many of you have either. So I want to read the text, even though it's a little bit extended, so that we can have it fresh in our minds and then we'll study it together here this morning. So please stand with me as we read Psalm 44 together to set the stage for what lies ahead. Psalm 44,

1 For the choir director. A Maskil of the sons of Korah. 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. 2 You with Your own hand drove out the nations; Then You planted them; You afflicted the peoples, Then You spread them abroad. 3 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. 4 You are my King, O God; Command victories for Jacob. 5 Through You we will push back our adversaries; Through Your name we will trample down those who rise up against us. 6 For I will not trust in my bow, Nor will my sword save me. 7 But You have saved us from our adversaries, And You have put to shame those who hate us. 8 In God we have boasted all day long, And we will give thanks to Your name forever. Selah. 9 Yet You have rejected us and brought us to dishonor, And do not go out with our armies. 10 You cause us to turn back from the adversary; And those who hate us have taken spoil for themselves. 11 You give us as sheep to be eaten And have scattered us among the nations. 12 You sell Your people cheaply, And have not profited by their sale. 13 You make us a reproach to our neighbors, A scoffing and a derision to those around us. 14 You make us a byword among the nations, A laughingstock among the peoples. 15 All day long my dishonor is before me And my humiliation has overwhelmed me, 16 Because of the voice of him who reproaches and

reviles, Because of the presence of the enemy and the avenger. 17 All this has come upon us, but we have not forgotten You, And we have not dealt falsely with Your covenant. 18 Our heart has not turned back, And our steps have not deviated from Your way, 19 Yet You have crushed us in a place of jackals And covered us with the shadow of death. 20 If we had forgotten the name of our God Or extended our hands to a strange god, 21 Would not God find this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart. 22 But for Your sake we are killed all day long; We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. 23 Arouse Yourself, why do You sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not reject us forever. 24 Why do You hide Your face And forget our affliction and our oppression? 25 For our soul has sunk down into the dust; Our body cleaves to the earth. 26 Rise up, be our help, And redeem us for the sake of Your lovingkindness.

You may be seated.

Psalm 44 is a national lament by the nation of Israel following an unexpected and seemingly unexplainable military defeat. We don't know the exact setting. We're confident that it was not something that occurred as a Psalm that was written in the exile because the exile was a clear stated punishment for the sin of the people. It seems like it was probably something that preceded that, a time not recorded in Scripture where they had suffered at the hands of a foreign army that had defeated them on the battlefield, the losses were great and they was no seeming explanation for it because God had promised to be a God who would go before them in their battles if they were faithful, and here they are facing loss, suffering defeat, in the midst of fidelity to God, in the midst of loyalty to their covenant responsibilities, and yet they were defeated on the battlefield and Psalm 44 is a cry that says, "God, why? You are our help. We need your help. There is nothing to keep you from helping us and yet you've not helped us. So help us." It's kind of the theme of this Psalm.

We don't know, as I said, the exact setting but we can understand enough to see as we go through the Psalm what is going on and we can trace the response of the people of God to this calamity and find food for our own soul. Even though it was written as a national lament, the spiritual principles that are at stake and that are at play in this Psalm are the same principles that can sustain you in the midst of your trials and, in that sense, I know that it's a very timely Psalm for our church both corporately and individually and so I thank God once again for the marvels of his providence the way that he brings Scripture to us, the right Scripture at the right time, to meet the right need of our soul. I trust that as you listen today, it will be with a sense of expectation that God will minister to your own heart in what is said here today.

Now, the Psalm breaks down roughly in three sections. You could negotiate where the exact breaks are but basically let me just give you a little overview, knowing that this Psalm is not familiar. In the first eight verses, what you see is the Psalmist talking about the past success of the nation of Israel under the hand of God; that God had blessed them and given them the land and now the people of God are still maintaining the faith that

carried those people into victory in the Promised Land. There was success in the past and the people were self-consciously identifying with that lineage, but now, the second section here, now in the present, there is suffering that they cannot understand. There are losses that have been painful and have made them a laughingstock to the nations around them that defeated them; that goes from verses 9 through 22. Then in verse 23, they look to the future and they renew their trust in God even though there is nothing circumstantial to support them in that turn of trust once again to their God. So the past, the present and the future is really the way this Psalm breaks down.

Let's look, first of all, at the success in the past. The success in the past, and one of the great challenges for Christians as they move deeper into their Christian life, many Christians, not everyone but most Christians have a time of spiritual, let's say, euphoria where everything is well. There is a time of blessing. The newness of conversion is a great joy and it is exciting and there is just blessing all around, and then something happens. A trial strikes of unexpected severity that seems to have no explanation. A family relationship goes south. Death or injury or physical affliction intervenes. There is a financial reversal, a fraud committed that no one saw coming and all of a sudden the world is turned upside down and the very issues of life are at stake and the natural question is, "Why is this happening to me? What happened to the place of blessing that I had been in?" People start to ask, "Have I sinned? Is something wrong?" Well, Scripture understands all of that and one of the things that you're going to see from Psalm 44 and that you see from the book of Job and from the life of Christ and from the life of the Apostle Paul, is that sometimes in direct contradiction of the false theology of the health and wealth and prosperity movement, sometimes God brings trials of great difficulty into the lives of faithful believers and we're not able to discern any purpose for it whatsoever. This is God's sovereign prerogative. It's his sovereign pleasure to do that and we are to trust him anyway.

So let's look first as we go into the Psalm now, Psalm 44, let's look at the success in the past and just kind of follow what's going on in this Psalm. The Psalmist as he writes this is recalling past times of God's favor to the nation. Look at verses 1 and 2 and believe it or not, those of you that haven't been with us on Tuesdays, I'm actually going to get through all 26 verses of this Psalm today. I know that you're used to seeing me go through two verses on a Sunday, this is something completely different. That's part of the reason why I wanted to do it also, to show that I am actually capable of doing that. Sometimes you need proof, not just assertions.

In the opening two verses, the Psalmist is recalling the national history of Israel and how God blessed them in the past. He says in verse 1,

1 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.  
2 You with Your own hand  
drove out the nations;  
Then You planted them;  
You afflicted the peoples,  
Then You spread them abroad.

What do we see from these opening two verses? This is being written by someone who is a member of the nation of Israel. They belong to the covenant nation, the nation that God had favored with his revelation, the nation that God had made his own people, and he is recalling, he is rehearsing how in times long ago, God had delivered his people from slavery in Egypt and how God had delivered them from the oppressive hand of Pharaoh with miraculous deeds at the hands of Moses. God led them out from a great nation though they were slaves, led them out powerfully and delivered them from slavery after 400 years of affliction. In the course of their deliverance, God leads them through the Red Sea, they go through with walls of water on either side safely into the land that God had promised them. They get into the land, nations are there with armies, with fortifications as in the fall of Jericho, and God systematically dispossessed those nations of their land and brought his own people into the land and settled them and planted a nation there by his great power. What the Psalmist is doing as this Psalm opens, is he is remembering in summary fashion that miraculous deliverance that gave birth to a nation. We studied this on Tuesday nights, 2 to 3 years ago. And he's remembering that and he says, "God, it was by your power that that happened. God, it was by your strength, not by the strength of our fathers, that they were established, that they were delivered and that you brought them into their own land and you planted them and they grew. God, this was an act of you, not an act of man. Our fathers have told us, we have heard it with our ears, we believe it with our hearts, we identify with that spiritual lineage that we come from." That's what he's saying.

As you go on in verse 3, you see him giving a brief recitation of the fact that God gave victory under Joshua and established them in the land and he says, "It wasn't by the strength of our fathers." Look at verse 3 with me. He says,

3 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.

He says, "God," and this is a matter of prayer that we don't practice nearly often enough today, I suppose. What he's doing in this Psalm is before he gets to the nature of the problem that is afflicting his heart, he is recalling history. He's setting a context for the prayer that is yet to come and he says, "God, I remember in this time of national difficulty that in the past by your power, by your strength, you delivered our fathers. It wasn't their military expertise that did it, it was the fact that they were under your guidance, under your grace, under your love, and by your miraculous power you manifested to them your strength and you secured them in victory and established them in the land. God, I remember that. I praise you and I thank you for it."

That's not a bad place to start in prayer if you're struggling here today, you're in a time of affliction as a Christian, to just go back, to set your problem aside for a moment and say, "God, I remember. I remember how you've blessed me in the past, how you've blessed others that I know, perhaps others who were in my biological lineage who were Christians and you blessed them or other Christians that I've known. You've blessed them. Father, I've seen how you have acted strongly for your people and I thank you for

that and I thank you for how you've done that in my past." That's a great place to start when you're in affliction is to remember that your life hasn't always been one of affliction and trial. You've had times of God's blessing, haven't you? Well, remember that and let that frame the way that you pray. God had favored this nation in the past with his power and his grace.

Now, as you follow through in this Psalm, let me say one other thing about the Psalms. I understand that for those that are just very superficially acquainted with the Bible, you know, there is an expectation I think that is sometimes brought, an unspoken assumption, an unrecognized presupposition that says, "Every time I go to the Psalms, I'm going to find something written that is in the spirit of Psalm 23, something that speaks of security and faith and trust in God"; and you try to read every Psalm from that perspective of the particular need that you bring to it as you read it, but the Psalms aren't like that. There is a broad variety of experience reflected in the Psalms. Just like in your own life, there is a broad nature of experience in your life: sometimes happy, sometimes sad; sometimes difficult, sometimes peaceful; sometimes you're concerned about what's happening at a national level in your country; sometimes it's deep spiritual anguish, confessing sin perhaps, trying to find your way through trials. There is a broad breadth of experience in your own life. Well, the Psalms are like that too and it's important to realize that to let the Psalm speak and to let it be received on its own terms rather than trying to force it to speak immediately into the need that you think you're bringing to the text. What we need to do here today is to realize what the Psalmist is saying, let it speak for itself and then draw lessons from it rather than just forcing, "This is what I need today," and trying to force it into saying something that it wasn't meant to say.

Now, with that said, he opens up in these first three verses and makes this historical framework, "God, you blessed our fathers in the past." As you go on beginning in verse 4, he identifies himself and his nation with the fact that, "That's our faith too. The faith that our fathers had, that's our faith too. We're not separated from them. We're not distinguished from them. We self-consciously identify and place ourselves in the lines of the faith of our fathers, the fathers that you blessed in the past."

Look at verse 4, he says,

4 You are my King, O God; Command victories for Jacob. 5 Through You we will push back our adversaries; Through Your name we will trample down those who rise up against us.

Notice just as a matter of observation how he switches from first-person singular and first person plural. Sometimes he says, "You're my King," sometimes he speaks in the plural, verse 5, "they rise up against us." This is perhaps indicating that maybe this was written by a king, perhaps by a military general who is speaking both on his own behalf and as a representative of the people at large. You know, it's as when a president speaks on behalf of our nation, he speaks in his own capacity, in his own person, in one sense, but also in a representative capacity for the people that he leads. Well, that gives you a sense of something like what's happening here in Psalm 44. This Psalmist is saying, "You're my

King, O God." Remember what he's saying, "God, you're the God who blessed our people in the past and led them to victory. You're that God and you, that God, you're my God." He brings that past experience and says, "Lord, that defines my perspective of faith in you as I pray here today," and he affirms that he and his people are trusting God as they go.

He says in verse 5, "Through You we will push back our adversaries. You'll give us victory on the battlefield." Verse 6, he disclaims any confidence in self. Look at verse 6, he says,

6 For I will not trust in my bow, Nor will my sword save me.

He says, "God, I am not trusting in my own strength. We are not trusting in our own military prowess to bring us victory. Our eyes are fixed on you. We are looking to you for help. We are not trusting in ourselves." So he's clarifying in his own heart and in prayer where his faith is. That's another good place for you to go, beloved, as you're going through those deep waters, to just simply, clearly, unambiguously affirm your faith in God and say, "God, I am not trusting in my own abilities to deliver me from this affliction. I am looking to you." You say, "I don't have any control over the attitudes of this person, I don't have any control over what they do, Father, therefore I'm trusting in you who are sovereign over all to help me."

As the Psalmist expresses that, he goes on and recognizes that God has helped them in the past in verse 7,

7 But You have saved us from our adversaries,

There's a contrast. "We're not trusting in ourselves and as we look back at the past and we see our success, Lord, that came from you. You have saved us from our adversaries. You have put to shame those who hate us." And in verse 8 he says, "We are full of gratitude as a result."

8 In God we have boasted all day long, And we will give thanks to Your name forever.

What's he saying there? He's saying, "God, our faith and our confidence is so completely in you. I want you to know that we recognize that our success in the past came from the blessing of your hand and I want you to know that we recognize that. We are full of gratitude. We thank you for how you've blessed us in the past and we give thanks to you. Our heart is inclined to gratitude. We have not forgotten your blessing. We have not forgotten all that you've done. We give thanks to you. We recognize your supremacy and we bow humbly before you." That's what he's saying. In your time of affliction, that's what you do, you affirm the centrality of the goodness and the character of God. You recognize that any blessings that you have had in the past have come from him and not by your own skill or wisdom and you thank him and you express that gratitude toward him.

Look at the end of verse 8 there over in most of your Bibles, probably separated out a little bit in the margin is the word "Selah." That's a call to stop, to meditate, to think about what has just been said. And what he's saying is this in this first section, it's this, beloved, this is so important to understanding the direction of this Psalm. He says, "God, we identify with the faith of our fathers. We confess that you are our God, that our past blessings have come to you. We are inclined toward obedience, toward faith, toward thanks. We are unconditionally committed to blessing your name forever and ever." He says, "That's the condition that we bring. That's the posture of faith with which I approach you here today." So you stop and you think about that.

Now, remember a couple of things. As he wrote this Psalm, he was writing under the influence of the Holy Spirit who was guarding his heart from error, guarding what was written from any sense of error or misrepresentation. What we have in these first eight verses is an accurate reflection of the condition of the people and the condition of the Psalmist when this was written. They are in a position of spiritual trust, not disobedience. They are in a position of gratitude, not complaining and murmuring. And so based on the character of God and the way he has acted in the past, you would expect their life to be flowing out with external circumstantial blessing, but that's not the case and you see that as you move into the second section of the Psalm.

Their experience was actually just the opposite and I would love to preach this Psalm to a health and wealth prosperity congregation. I know that that is almost certainly never going to happen, but if it did, I would embrace the opportunity with gladness because it turns all of those assumptions on their head and exposes it for how unbiblical and wrong it is because in this condition of faith, identified with the people of God, section 2, what do you see? You see the suffering in the present. The suffering in the present. They are positioned spiritually where they should be but life does not match up with what you would expect if it was simply a matter of the simple equation: obedience leads to external blessing; faith leads to prosperity. If that was the case, then everything is upside down for them. Rather than sharing in the victories of their ancestors, they were in the throes of a humiliating military defeat.

Look at verse 9 with me and look at that key word "yet." Here we are a trusting thankful people and yet something different. It alerts you that something unexpected is about to come, and what does he say? Let's look at verses 9 through 12 together here. He says,

9 Yet You have rejected us and brought us to dishonor, And do not go out with our armies. 10 You cause us to turn back from the adversary; And those who hate us have taken spoil for themselves.

Stop right there for just a minute. You see the core as he gives a literal description of what is the occasion of the Psalm. He says, "God, you have not gone out with our armies. We have experienced a humiliating defeat. Rather than advancing in victory, we are in retreat. Those who hate us have taken our spoil. We are rejected and there is nothing but shame and dishonor to show for our efforts on the battlefield. God, this is not the way it's supposed to go." Have you ever thought that in your trials? "God, I'm a Christian. I've



been in your word. I've been in prayer, this is not how it's supposed to happen!" That's what he's struggling with here.

In verse 11, he begins to describe it in a metaphorical sense. He says,

11 You give us as sheep to be eaten And have scattered us among the nations. 12 You sell Your people cheaply, And have not profited by their sale.

He says, "God, it's like you have handed us over as sheep to be slaughtered and why would you do that when we are your people? And yet there is nothing to gain from this in your honor. God, what's the value to the honor of your name when your people are humiliated on the battlefield? Those who have trusted you that have gone out in your name find defeat and shame and they are spoil for their enemies. How does this honor your name, God? There is nothing in this result for you, let alone for us?"

And beloved, here's what I want you to see as we grow together, maybe some of you are new and this will be helpful to you. You know, there is a tendency among weak, those who hold to weak teaching, that when trials come, they say, "Oh, Satan got me here. You know, and this is the devil that's doing this," and all of that and, "I need to pray for God to intervene and stop the work of Satan here." Notice something really crucial here: that is not at all the perspective of the Psalmist. Look at verses 9 through 12 with me again. He attributes their defeat to the sovereign action and plan of God, not to their military prowess, those who have defeated them.

Look at what he says in verse 9. Remember, he's praying to God here. "Why are we in this position? God, it's because you have rejected us. You have brought us to dishonor. You do not go out with our enemies." Look at verse 10, "You cause us to turn back from the adversary." Verse 11, "You give us as sheep to be eaten. You have scattered us among the nations. You sell your people cheaply. You have not profited by their sale." He's saying, "God, I recognize that your hand is in this setback to me." He's not blaming it on other forces, he realizes that his circumstances are what God has given to him, what God has brought to him and his nation, and he is attributing it to the sovereign work of God. James Montgomery Boice says this at this point in his commentary on Psalm 44 and I quote, he says, "The people's defeats are no accident. God is behind them. Although it makes the situation puzzling, the realization that God is in control is still both the proper way to approach such problems and the only possible way to find a solution to them."

Beloved, let me help you a lot when you go through trials with what I'm about to say right here. First of all, it is theologically incorrect to separate God from the trials the come into your life as though they have happened to you apart from the hand of God. That is an utter denial of the providence of God. It is a denial of his sovereignty. It is a denial of the fact that God is always working out his purposes, especially in the lives of his people, and so it is a serious mistake to somehow stop thinking about God when you are in the midst of your trials and to say God allowed this or something like that. No. No, God has brought this into your life in one manner or another.

Why does that help? Why does that help? It helps you for this reason: first of all – oh, you've got to write these things down, you have got to imprint them on the heart of your mind so that you bring this to mind again and again and again. Beloved, here is something really crucial for you to recognize, to recognize and acknowledge and submit to the sovereignty of God in your trials means this, first of all, first of all, it means that there is a purpose in them, even if you can't see them right now. If a sovereign God is bringing trials into your life, a wise God is at work, it means that there is a purpose to them. It's not something random, something that has happened to you as a result of hostile forces. It also means that there is hope going forward in the midst of them. If God is sovereign over your trials, it means that the same good God who saved you in Jesus Christ has the power to bring you out of them and to deny that, to forget that, is to let the whole purpose, the whole meaning, the whole significance of the deepest trials in your life collapse into meaninglessness. Don't do that. Renew your confidence. Renew your trust, your belief, your assertion that somehow God's sovereign hand is in this even if I don't understand. That's what the Psalmist is doing here. "Lord, you have brought this into our lives. I can't understand it but I cannot and I will not compromise the basic fundamental principle of your sovereign reign over your universe in order to account for what's happening in my life." And he says, "You've done this."

And what's the result of it? Remember that he's working on the front side of the cross. The result of this is it is a demoralizing time of national disgrace for a people who are trusting in God. Look at verse 13. "We're defeated. God, you have rejected us. Now let me tell you, God, here is what the outcome of it has been." Verse 13,

13 You make us a reproach to our neighbors, A scoffing and a derision to those around us. 14 You make us a byword among the nations, A laughingstock among the peoples. 15 All day long my dishonor is before me And my humiliation has overwhelmed me, 16 Because of the voice of him who reproaches and reviles, Because of the presence of the enemy and the avenger.

Imagine your worst enemy defeating you on a field of battle and taunting you, mocking you, "Where is your God?" as he raises his bloody sword in conquest over you; as he takes your goods, your people away from you and leaves you humiliated, and you're left asking the question, "God, I trusted you going into this battle and here I am defeated. God, we belong to you, we look to you and what has happened? Loss, humiliation and disgrace instead." Surely there are some of you in here today, some of you watching over the live stream who can identify with that. "God, this is not the expected outcome. This is how you deal with your loyal people? God, I'm not..." In the Psalm he's not claiming sinlessness, he's not claiming a sense of merit that obligated God. That's not like that. He's simply saying, "We've been loyal. We haven't turned to other gods and yet here we are in shame and defeat in the midst of a battle with our enemies taunting us, 'You loser. Where is your God?'" And the discouragement of that is great.

And he goes forth, as it were, he protests their blamelessness and the innocence of the nation. Even in the midst of the battle they have not stopped looking to God, in the midst of the defeat, I should say, they have not stopped looking to God. Look at verse 17 with me now.

17 All this has come upon us

All this what? All this defeat, all of this disgrace,

17 All this has come upon us, but we have not forgotten You, And we have not dealt falsely with Your covenant. 18 Our heart has not turned back, And our steps have not deviated from Your way,

He's saying, "God, in the midst of this suffering, in the midst of this defeat, we're still here looking to you. God, we're still loyal, we're still calling out to you and yet despite our faithfulness, you have handed us over to a dark defeat."

Look at verse 19,

19 Yet You have crushed us in a place of jackals And covered us with the shadow of death.

"We're in a position of desolation. Wild animals roam about in the midst of our defeat. The shadow of death, deep darkness has come upon us both in a physical sense, there were lives lost in the battle; in a spiritual sense, there seems to be nowhere to go forward in the midst of this." And beloved, what I want you to see in this, that which you can identify in your own trials is this: is that the inconsistency of this situation is painful. "God, we've been loyal. I'm not saying we've been sinless, that's not the point but, God, we haven't dealt falsely with your covenant. God, we haven't turned away. God, we have looked to you in faith and yet look at the circumstances here, God. This is not the way it is supposed to be. God, there is nothing else that we could have done to show our loyalty, to show our faith, to be obedient to you."

He goes on in verse 20 and he sets up a hypothetical that would explain this result. He says in verse 20, he says,

20 If we had forgotten the name of our God Or extended our hands to a strange god, 21 Would not God find this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart.

He says, "I could understand it, God, if we had been disloyal to you, if we had turned to idolatry, if we had denied your truth and pursued false idols in the process of this, I could understand a loss like this, but there's nothing like that. God, we're here blameless and we are here in pain, and what you have done is you have withdrawn and stood in silence and abandoned your people in the midst of it."

It's a very powerful statement of lament, of complaint, and the Psalmist says in verse 22, "The only explanation for this, God, is that you have sacrificed your people for reasons that are known only to yourself." Look at verse 22, he says,

22 But for Your sake we are killed all day long; We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.

He says, "God, we are your people. Somehow for something that pleases you, for something known only to you, for your sake, we are treated like sheep to be slaughtered," and there is a great sense of resignation in what is said here. Beloved, sympathize with his dilemma, sympathize with a man of God. Remember what he said from the beginning, "We share the faith of our forefathers. You helped them. Why are you silent? Why are you inactive when we have not forsaken you? Why this difference of treatment between one loyal people compared to the way that you blessed and helped loyal people in the past? Why are you dealing with us differently?" is his prayer, is his dilemma.

Beloved, faithful Christian walking through deep water, do you find yourself in a similar position? A time of life where it seems like with one wave of trial crashing down upon you, upon another, upon another, driving you into the sand, beating you down as you're trying to cling to God, and it seems like God has turned against you even when to the best of your ability you've been faithful and you suddenly find yourself in the midst of a raging storm that is not of your own making? Beloved, take heart. Other saints have walked that same painful path with you. Good men of God even recorded for us in Scripture, have walked down that path and know exactly what you feel. You find their Spirit-inspired words recorded for you in Psalm 44.

Beloved here's the thing, let me make this as simple as I possibly can, as simple as I possibly know how to say. Let this strengthen you in your own trials, let it shape your perspective and the way that you view people going through their own trials because we all share that tendency, "Oh, I wonder what's wrong in their life? Look at their life, look how bad it is, you know, I wonder what they are hiding?" That's what they said to Job, wasn't it? No, that's not the way we think. That's not biblical thinking to let that be the only explanation that you have to offer in the midst of a faithful person of God in the midst of their suffering. Here's the truth of the matter: sometimes God's people suffer greatly even when they are innocent in it. Suffering is not always a direct consequence of personal sin that brought it upon you.

Multiple illustrations I want to give you here right now. Let's start with the supreme one, did not our Lord Jesus Christ suffer greatly during his earthly life but he was innocent? Didn't the Apostle Paul, though not sinless, faithful, did he not suffer greatly? Read his epistles and hear him describe the beatings, the nights in the deep, the hunger, the cold, the sleeplessness, the pressure of the concern that he had for all of his churches. Suffering in the plan of God. Is not church history a mark of faithful martyrs shedding their blood rather than denying Christ? Rather than turning over the Scriptures to be burned, they said, "No, crucify me, gouge out my eyes, I'll be faithful to Christ instead."

You see, beloved, we need to expand our view of suffering. We need to understand that the purposes of God far transcend simply arranging our circumstances so that we are good and comfortable all the way into heaven. That's not the purpose of God for many people. Can't help but think of our sister Brooke Higgins, lying in her bed in Cincinnati suffering from what appears to be terminal brain cancer. When did it come to her? Did it come to her in a time of sin? No. Brooke's testimony is that she came to faith in Christ maybe six months ago, started to grow, started to love you, the people of this church, growing in Christ, and then all of a sudden her body is not working right and one thing leads to another and she is diagnosed with brain cancer that the doctors expect to take her life before long. Are we to look at that, a conversion and a happy growth in Christ followed by that and say, "Oh, she must be punished for sin"? No. No, we don't even let our thoughts go there. What we do is we put our hand over our mouth and we say, "Who can understand the sovereign wisdom and the sovereign purposes of God, that he deals with one in such a way and deals with another in a different way?" We recognize the sovereign prerogative of God to deal with his people as he sees fit and to realize that everything that he does, he does in his wisdom, he does in his goodness, and he does in his love, and the fact that you and I cannot see the purpose in it as it is happening does not mean that we either accuse innocent people of sin or that we accuse God of unrighteousness. We accuse ourselves of having a lack of wisdom and a lack of ability to understand and we renew our trust in God all over again. That enlarges your heart to have sympathy on those that are suffering. That enlarges your heart to avoid false accusations when trials come. That enlarges your own heart to patiently submit to suffering in your own life when it comes and say, "God, I trust you in the midst of this even though I don't understand because Scripture has laid out for us the pattern, the example, that there are times when God's people suffer even though they are in comparative innocence in the midst of it."

And if that's you today, I would encourage you, you don't have to do it in the same animated way that I do when I'm in a pulpit, but to let your heart latch onto that and say, "Oh, thank God there's an explanation here, an explanation that transcends me; that helps me see that the hand of God has not abandoned me, that sometimes he allows his people, sometimes he brings them into hardship and that what I'm going through is consistent with the way that God sometimes deals with his people. Nothing has changed. I'm still in a position of security as I go through it." And Brooke if you're watching, I'm confident that that is the work of God in your life.

Now, let's come back into the present, come back into the midst of the howling storm. What do you do in the midst of the howling storm when there is no explanation? Well, that brings us to our third point, the final section of this Psalm: the supplication for the future. The supplication for the future. In the midst of this time, it seems like God has fallen asleep. Do you remember that that actually happened to the disciples when they were with Jesus out on the boat? Jesus fell asleep and the storm is rousing and raging and they go down and they wake him up, they say, "Lord, wake up! Don't you care that we're perishing!" This is an Old Testament example of that. The Psalmist in the midst of his suffering, in the inactivity of God, urgently prays and tells God to wake up and get to work.

Look at verse 23. He says,

23 Arouse Yourself, why do You sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not reject us forever.

Now, of course, God is not literally asleep. He hasn't literally stopped watching and superintending his creation. The Psalmist is speaking from his perspective. The inactivity of God, the prolonged nature of the suffering indicates God is not acting. It looks like he's asleep. So in verse 24 he says,

24 Why do You hide Your face And forget our affliction and our oppression?

"Surely, God, you see that we're low, don't you?" Verse 25,

25 For our soul has sunk down into the dust; Our body cleaves to the earth.

As often happens in the Psalms, a simple prayer defines the request and gives the need. Verse 26, the simplicity of this,

26 Rise up, be our help, And redeem us for the sake of Your lovingkindness.

He says, "O God, for the sake of your loyal love, act and help us. Manifest your covenant faithfulness to us. Show to us your loyalty by interceding, by waking up, by starting to act in a way that you haven't before in order to relieve this affliction that we find ourselves in. Be our help."

Now, beloved, notice the profound depth of faith that is reflected in that last Psalm, not the last Psalm, the last verse of the Psalm, and understand why you in your affliction, in the midst of your suffering, in the midst of your fears, understand why you can still continue to pray. Why is it that you can still trust God even though it seems like he is slaying you? It's because, Christian, he is a God of unchanging love to his people. What seems like abandonment in the moment could never be the true explanation of what you're facing because God's love does not change. God does not stray from his people. There is purpose, there is love, there is grace in the midst of your trials, even if it is not visible to your eyes, even if it is not apparent to your understanding.

In fact, beloved, turn over to Romans 8. Your innocent suffering in life is simply you have a benefit that the Psalmist didn't have. Your innocent suffering in life is actually a down payment on your eventual victory. Look at Romans 8:35, the Apostle Paul quotes from Psalm 44 in this great familiar passage that you know so well. Psalm 44 points you into the eternal realities of Christ. Romans 8:35, "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," and he quotes from Psalm 44, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." "In your loyal love, Lord, you brought us to a place of great suffering and hardship. It's like we were sheep to be slaughtered. Is that the end?" No, verse 37, quite to the contrary, "But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from," what? "From the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Nothing of these earthly circumstances can sever the bond of loyal faithful love that God has set upon you in Christ. Nothing of your worst circumstances, not the worst surprises, not the worst afflictions, not the worst actions of man ever break that unbreakable bond that God has set upon you in Christ.

Beloved, whatever the momentary reversal, God will not abandon you. Christ loves you even if you are suffering without blame. Your position in him is utterly, completely secure. God rules over all. His love never fails. He will always bring us to the victory in Christ.

Let's bow together in prayer.

*Father, we ask that in your loyal love you would bring us through the hardships of the present. We ask that in your great faithfulness you would sustain us. Though you slay us, we'll trust you. Yes, Lord, though you slay me, I will trust in you, is the prayer of our hearts today as we close. Give encouragement and grace to those who are suffering greatly. Give those of us who are in positions of relative ease and peace sympathy and compassion on those that are suffering. Ground all of us in the certain hope of our ultimate victory in our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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