

Psalm 102 • A prayer of one afflicted

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Psalm chapter 102 is called, a prayer of one afflicted when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the Lord. This is obviously somewhat common to the Psalms. It's one of the reasons why I, well, I know that the Psalms have been such a source of comfort for people over the years.

For people who have walked through affliction and difficulty and trial and stress, the Psalms have been a constant companion, a constant reminder that suffering is part of the way of living in this fallen world.

But there is a purpose and a satisfaction in the midst of suffering that comes from drawing near to our Lord in the midst of it and that He hears us. That we can cry out to Him and that He listens and He responds. And that's such a beautiful thing.

In Christian liturgy, you guys, some of you may have been raised in more traditional church backgrounds. We don't do liturgy in Calvary Chapel, but some of you may have been raised with liturgies. I actually was. But in traditional Christian literate liturgy, this Psalm is regarded as one of the 7 penitential Psalms. What that means? Well, the word, penitence refers to a feeling of sorrow or regret, and it is closely connected with repentance. And when people are longing to draw into that sort of attitude, this is one of the Psalms they naturally go to.

And as we go through this Psalm, I want you to take special note of the language that the psalmist uses in it, because he uses or makes great use of the, what we call the language of similarity.

And this is the same thing we see in the Book of Revelation, where John is describing things for which he really doesn't have the ability to put into words. And so he uses the, like, phrase and he talks about seeing the Lord. And he says, and His body was like, and His face was like. And the throne upon which He sat was like. And there was a something around Him like, and then I heard a sound like.

Well, the Psalmist does that here? Not so much because he can't find the words, but because he's using that language of comparison to help us to understand the

depth of his affliction, and how he is crying out to the Lord. And you'll see that as we go through here. I'll point out the first ones and then I know that you'll see them from that on.

Verse 1 says, *“Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry come to you! (and he says) ² Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress! Incline your ear to me; (which is to say, lend an ear) answer me speedily in the day when I call!” (ESV)*

I think all of us can relate to this whole idea of being in such a place in our lives where we're asking the Lord to respond quickly to our need for relief. And that's what the psalmist is doing here and then he explains why.

And you can tell that it's pretty desperate here in verse 3. He says, *“For my days pass away like smoke, ...”* There's the first comparison word, and he says how smoke, when it goes up, it just quickly dissolves and we don't see it anymore. He says, that's the way I feel like my life is going right now. And he says *“...and my bones burn (and here's that like reference again) like a furnace.”*

And these are things that we can relate to. And the psalmist is literally speaking to the Lord as if his life is ebbing away, as if his life is literally being dissolved and his physical body is enduring great suffering here, as he describes his bones burning. Interesting sort of a phrase, isn't it?

Verse 4. He says, *“My heart is struck down like grass and has withered; I forget to eat my bread.”* He says I forget to even eat a meal. I'm just, I'm not, I've lost my appetite.

And then in verse 5, *“Because of my loud groaning my bones cling to my flesh.”* I think you and I would probably say that the other way around. We'd say, my flesh clings to my bones. But he says, *“⁶ I am like (again, here's like, like) a desert owl of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places;”*

He says, *“⁷ I lie awake; I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop.”* And again, this is just poetic language to describe the inability, when suffering is so bad that you can't sleep at night. Have you ever been awake during the night just because of suffering?

You wake up in the night and there's just, whether it's emotional suffering, or physical suffering, or spiritual suffering, or whatever, and you wake up and you

just, you can't sleep. And you know that everybody else in the house is fast asleep and you're the only one who's awake, and it's a very lonely feeling.

And the psalmist describes it as a sparrow up, in a solitary way “*up on the rooftop.*” He says, here I am, I'm awake, and there's no one else around, and I'm, I feel very much alone.

And to make matters worse, he says in verse 8, “*All the day (or all day long) my enemies taunt me; those who deride me (and the word, deride means to ridicule, to speak with contempt. And he says, they) use my name for a curse.*”

Now you and I may not understand how somebody could do that in our language. I think of, I think myself, well, how would somebody use Paul as a curse word? Well, you got to understand that Hebrew words or Hebrew names rather, can be shortened. And many times the shortened version, because their names are so full of meaning, a Hebrew name can easily be shortened to take on a negative connotation.

In fact, do you know that our Lord's name, which in Hebrew is Yeshua can actually be shortened and it takes on a negative connotation. I won't recite it for you, but the enemies of the Lord will use it sometimes. And the psalmist here is talking about that idea of using my name to conjure up negative thoughts, negative ideas, and so forth.

He says in verse 9, “*For I eat ashes like bread and mingle tears with my drink,¹⁰ because of your indignation and anger; for you have taken me up and thrown me down.*”

And this is the point in the Psalm where the writer recognizes that whatever is going on in his life is for whatever reason, we're not told, a product of the Lord's discipline and judgment. And again, we don't know what's happening here.

This could be written after the time or during the time of the exile of Israel to the Babylonian Empire. We don't know. We don't know exactly what's happening. All we know is what we read here in the Psalm. And this, the psalmist is aware of the Lord's indignation for whatever reason.

Verse 11, he says, “*My days are like an evening shadow; (and again, this is a similar reference, he says) I wither away like grass.*”

Now, as we come to verse 12 in this Psalm, you're going to see a marked change in tone as for the majority of the rest of this Psalm, the focus is turned away

from his suffering now, and onto the glory of the Lord, and the deliverance that God can bring in the midst of a difficult situation.

Look at verse 12. He says, “*But...*” And I always, I’ve told you this before. I always love it when the Psalms, they talk about the rough stuff and then they start with a, but. I always like the but(s) because that tells me there’s going to be a shift. But, and that, and you know what, that is such an important word. That is such an important word for you and I to get into our vocabulary as it relates to the Lord.

To say, Lord, I’m going through a hard time, but. Lord, this is scary that I’m facing, but this is a really challenging thing, but. Lord, my marriage is in rough shape, but. Lord, my thoughts are just jumbled, but. And that but begins that change of attitude and tone that says, but You oh Lord are able. You Lord are my deliverance. You are my hope, right?

And that’s where that shift or that change in direction takes such a significant course in our lives, and you’ll see how it plays out even in this Psalm. “¹² *But you, O LORD, (what does he say?) are enthroned forever; you are remembered throughout all generations. ¹³ You will arise...*”

And notice people, the declaration of faith that is made by the psalmist in the midst of what we’ve read previously, which is great affliction, and great sorrow, and great difficulty. Even recognizing that the problem that the psalmist is going through is because of the indignation of the Lord.

We’ve talked about this before in the Psalms, but when you have a sense that what’s happening in your life has been allowed by the Lord, does that cause you to go to Him in prayer? Or does that cause you to withdraw? You know what I mean?

If you have a sense that he’s angry or that there is a response of the Lord that is negative, does that draw you to Him or away from Him? I think for most of us, if we were going to be honest, we’d say, well, it probably pushes us away most of the time.

But I love the fact that the psalmist recognizing as he does, the indignation of the Lord, he goes to God. And not only does he go to Him, he goes to Him in faith believing that there’s mercy there. That there’s mercy to be found. You know that there’s acceptance there in the midst of that difficulty and the things that are going on. And he says, I’m, in the midst all the things that I’m going through, I’m going to just make a statement here.

First of all, God, You're still on the throne, and that's what he says in those words, you "*are enthroned forever.*" And we like to say that when we're going through hard times. Somebody's going through a rough patch and we say, well, good thing God's still on the throne. That's not a bad thing to say.

That's what the psalmist is saying here. Well, God's still on the throne and we need to say that to one another. And we need to say it to the Lord in prayer in the midst of our challenges. But, Lord, You're still ruling and reigning, right? And even though this situation is a big fat drag, You are still on the throne and this thing has not dethroned You in any way. Boy, I think that's an important thing.

He says verse 13 again, "*You will arise and have pity on Zion;...*" And this is where we're wondering, or this phrase leads us to believe that perhaps the prayer is for all of Israel and perhaps because they have been taken into captivity at this time.

He says, "*...it is the time to favor her; the appointed time has come.*"¹⁴ *For your servants hold her stones dear and have pity on her dust.*" Meaning essentially that, and that's again poetic language, meaning that the people of Israel love Jerusalem. Because remember, Jerusalem is the center of their collective understanding of the presence of God in their midst. God chose Jerusalem for His presence to reside within the temple.

Isn't it wonderful, though, Christians, that He's not in, He's not centered in a city today? I have to tell you, I like that. You and I—the Jews used to travel to Jerusalem in order to enjoy a unique sense of the presence of the Lord. And at feast times, if they were able to make that journey, they would. And if they couldn't, they had a saying. They would say to one another, well, they'd say, next year, Jerusalem. In other words, next year, we're going to do our best to get there because it was centered there in Jerusalem. Because that's where the temple was, remember?

Where's the temple today? It's in your heart. The temple, you are the temple of the Holy Spirit. You are a temple and what a glorious thing that is that you and I don't have to travel to some city. I'm really pleased about that. But at this particular time he speaks of Jerusalem and Zion and says that the Jews hold very dear the place of God's presence.

Verse 15. He makes another declaration of faith saying that, "*Nations will fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory.*" And that's a prophetic statement.

“For the LORD builds up Zion; he appears in his glory; ¹⁷ he regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise their prayer.” Those are statements of faith you guys. In the midst of very trying circumstances, declarations of faith.

How good are you at doing that when you're going through a hard time? Can you do it? Can you declare faith? Can you make faith statements? But Lord, but Lord, You are good. Your mercy endures forever. Your mercies are new every morning. You're still on the throne. Boy, those are important.

And I love what he goes on to say in verse 18 because this is for me and you. Look at this. He says, *“¹⁸ Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD: ¹⁹ that he looked down from his holy height; from heaven the LORD looked at the earth, ²⁰ to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die, ²¹ that they may declare in Zion the name of the LORD, and in Jerusalem his praise, ²² when peoples gather together, and kingdoms, to worship the LORD.”*

Do you know that this statement here is, it's an amazing statement? But it's a challenging statement because the psalmist is essentially saying, he's saying, I'm going to make a statement here that not only has God not rejected Israel and rejected Zion, but I'm going to make a challenge here.

He says, let my statement be written down, let it be written down for the generations to come. That when it happens that God has shown favor upon Israel, and favor upon this place, and when it happens that not just Israel comes back to worship here, but all the nations of the world come back, let it be written that God hears the prayers of His people. And you know what? That is going to come to pass.

I have no doubt about the fact that at the conclusion of the Great Tribulation, when Jesus returns, and all nations of the earth stream to Zion, because Jesus is there on the throne, that this very Psalm will be brought to remembrance. And this very statement will be brought to remembrance.

And the Lord will remind us when the psalmist boldly said, hey, test me on this. I challenge you. Let this be written down. Go ahead, write it down because this will come to pass. God is going to do this. And when He does, He says it's going to, then the people are going to declare their praise because God was faithful. I just, it's powerful.

And then he continues on verse 23. He says, *“He has broken my strength in midcourse; he has shortened my days.”*²⁴ *“O my God,” I say, “take me not away in the midst of my days— you whose years endure throughout all generations!”*²⁵ *Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.*²⁶ *They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away,*²⁷ *but you are the same, and your years have no end.”*

Those are powerful words, aren't they? Because again, the psalmist is speaking now by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And he's speaking to us about things that the rest of the scriptures speak of. And that is the fact that there will one day be a new heaven and a new earth. And that this one will truly *“wear out like a garment.”*

And he says, and you're just going to change it. Then you're going to change it like somebody would put on a new robe. You're going to create a new heaven and a new earth. Even though they perish, even though they are changed, and pass away, and recreated, He says, You Lord have no end to Your years.

And then he concludes this Psalm with one last prophetic statement of faith concerning the Lord's goodness. He says, *“²⁸ The children of your servants shall dwell secure; their offspring shall be established before you.”* And so he ends with this buoyant declaration of God's goodness in the days to come when the people of Israel, and the people of God, together will enjoy the goodness of the Lord.

He says, Your *“offspring shall be established...”* which is a word of stability. Isn't that a great word, established? I like that. Because we're living in a world where everything is just so flimsy and unstable. And yet the Lord gives us the stability of our lives. He establishes us. He establishes us in our homes. He establishes us in our gifting. He establishes our hearts and minds in His grace and power.

And one day he will establish us to dwell securely in a way that we haven't even known security before. I truly believe the Lord gives us an unprecedented security living in this world, which is so insecure, so temporary, so transient. And yet He is our security, isn't He?

And yet one day, can you just think about it? One day you and I are going to enjoy a security, a level of security that is heretofore unknown, completely unknown. But we're going to enjoy it and it's going to be a wonderful thing when the Lord brings it to pass.