

Psalm 31

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[0 : 00] If it wasn't evident already, I hope it is by now, over the last few weeks, that the Psalms are not thoughts for the day. And I do mean the BBC Thought for the Day. As much as I like the two to three minute measured segment, it's very inclusive, it's very thoughtful, it's very brief, it's to the point, it's well-rounded, it's understanding.

The Psalms are not thoughts. The Psalms cry and they shout. The Psalms compel. The Psalms in a way are most often alarmist.

And the Psalms get right to the point. This Psalm included Psalm 31. I never want you to have it in the sheets, but Chris read the whole thing so he won't deal with all of it.

And it wants its readers to do one thing. Trust the Lord and trust Him now. Trust the Lord and trust Him right now. It wants us to get to a place where we can say, into your hand, over the Lord, I commit my spirit, I commit my whole self into the protective hand of God.

To get us there, it's going to take us through a few stages. The first is that it looks back. The first eight verses are really of remembrance, they're memories.

[1 : 24] Times and events with God. And then in verse 9, the Psalms turns to his present situation. He says, Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress right now. And then starting in about verse 19, we have really the end. It isn't really the future, but it's what's always the case.

It turns attention towards the congregation. And we join in, really, into the Psalm fully, as a corporate body. So it takes us through the past, it moves through the present, and it looks at what is always the case.

The past is sort of like a photo album. The first eight verses are really images of God, their times and memories spent with Him, events when He was involved in the Psalmist's life.

And it really is sort of like looking through a photo album, images of people we know, or we remember. Times that are long gone, or times that were very recent. And it brings back all of the qualities of those people, and the events and the times that we share with them.

God is a strong fortress. This is one of the images that the Psalm uses. This is in verse 2. This is in verse 2. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.

[2 : 47] A strong fortress is about as good as it got in the ancient world. So we have all sorts of things now. You can have a nice security detail, you can have an armored car, you can have a safe house, which isn't really fortified at all, it's just secret.

Right? So you can have some elaborate compound with all types of security. But in the ancient Near East, you just had a strong fortress. That was as good as it got. And the point of all of those, actually, and a strong fortress particularly, is that it's protected.

It's a place of security. It's a place where the Psalmist can go for refuge. God is a strong fortress. But God is also godly.

Look at verse 1. And the final line, in your righteousness, the liberty. And verse 5, you have redeemed me, O Lord, the faithful God.

And verse 7, I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love. God's righteousness, His faithfulness, His steadfast love.

[3 : 54] These are, in a way, the sort of fortresses that we've been made out of. So God is a strong fortress. And He's strong because He's righteous. He's strong because He's faithful. He has steadfast love.

He's jealous for His people. He's strong. And in all of these qualities, the psalmist is pulling them up to mind. He's calling them to mind. He's calling God to act based upon them.

There's a final aspect here, but it's really brought out by thinking again about family photo albums, and actually non-family photo albums.

So I really don't know how we acquired this book, but we have a large coffee table book of photos of Barack Obama in his presidency. And it's photos taken from his presidential photographer over the course of his time in service.

And he, yeah, the big glossy pages, right, really nice photographs. And I look through those, and I enjoy looking through those, and I admire the person I see.

[5 : 00] I see Barack Obama. I see him with his family. I see him serving the country and so on. I'm even impressed in some ways. I think maybe I would like him if I met him.

But I don't love him. And I don't depend on him in any personal or direct way. And it's very different when I open my family photo album.

Because then I see people that I do know. Yes, I admire him. And sometimes I'm impressed by things in my family photo album. But really I see people that I know and I love, right, and that I can depend on, that sort of thing.

And the psalmist isn't going to leave us just in the Barack Obama photo album. No, it's going to take us into the family photo album. Verse 7. I will rejoice and be glad that you have fed the vast love because you have seen my affliction.

You have known the distress of my soul. You have known the distress of my soul. God is not just powerful. He's not just faithful, as if we can say just about those things.

[6 : 05] God knows us in our struggle. He is familiar to us. We can depend upon him. We can love him. And he loves us. God knows us. And the greatest way to say this really is, into your hand I commit my spirit. That's a poetic way of saying I trust in the Lord.

Into your hand, the Lord, I commit my spirit. This word commit really is a bit strange or kind of rare to be here. There are two examples of this word in the Old Testament actually. One is in 1 Kings 14. An Egyptian king has taken away the people of Israel's golden shields. Okay, so after battle, then the golden shields have been taken away from the people of Israel's army.

And so the king at that time, Rehobo, replaces the gold shields with bronze shields. And he committed them into the hands of the guards. He committed those shields into the hands of the guards.

Those shields are now in the protected custody of the guards. The other time is Jeremiah 37. And throughout this chapter, Jeremiah has been bringing a prophecy to the people.

[7 : 25] And they don't like it. And they put them in prison. And he goes in the prison. And the prison he's in is actually a sort of a house that's converted into a prison. And the rooms he was in sounded pretty, yeah, pretty dingy. They're not a place that, they're damp. They're not a place you want to be in. You don't want to be in prison to begin with.

But these rooms particularly, he really didn't like it. And he thought actually he was going to die. And so King Zedekiah actually comes and visits him in prison. And he says, Jeremiah, tell me more about the prophecies. What's going to happen? And so they talk about this.

And at the end of the meeting, Jeremiah stops him and says, listen, I don't think I'm going to make it if I stay in this prison. Is there somewhere else I can go? And the king says, yes. So he puts him in the court of the guard. He puts him in the court of the guard to another prison, guard location.

But he didn't just put him there. King Zedekiah committed Jeremiah to the court of the guard. He committed him there. He was, yes, really imprisoned. But he was really in custody, in the protective power of the hand of the guards.

And that is what verse 5 is telling us. Into your hand, O Lord, I commit my spirit to go into the protective power of the hand of God.

[8 : 47] One thing about it is going into the custody of the Lord. So these are memories. We're looking back. We're remembering God, who he is, what he's done, and so on.

And it may not be clear based on the verses that you read. You might think, well, I would say you passed those words there. But if you get to verse 7, it becomes a little more clear. Right?

You have seen my attention. You have known. Verse 8, you have not come bitterly into the hand. You have set my feet in the broad place. And in verse 9, we get into the present moment.

Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress. My eyes wait to fill grief. Okay? So now the psalm is turning us to the present moment. And the psalm is distressed.

And what sort of distress is he talking about? Right? Is he on the run from enemies? We will see that. That's certainly a part of it. Is he downcast with sorrow? Yes, that too. But really, it's much more than that.

[9 : 52] In verses 9, only 9 and 10, really, we get a whole scope of this distress that the psalmist is going through. Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress. My eyes wasted from grief. My soul and my body also.

Is this good as a body also? For my life is spent with sorrow and my years with sigh. My strength fails because of my iniquity. There is also a level of guilt going on. There is a spiritual kind of long-doing aspect.

And my bones waste away. What sort of distress is he talking about? Tired, guilt, grief, shame, danger, physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, if you want to make those distinctions. It's a little bit of everything. So what sort of distress is the psalm talking about? Every sort. What kind of problems can we and should we come to God with? Every problem. Every problem. It's the times and it's not just the external things in life. It's the internal things in life. It's the things that are our fault. The things that aren't our fault. The things that we think, is that really my fault? Is that what it is? Maybe it is. I don't know. I don't know.

[11 : 11] It's all of these. All these problems. All the distress. Sorrow, grief, sigh, physical ailments we bring to God. And now we have a slightly different hand or a slightly different image of the hand.

If you look at verse 14. But I trust in you, O Lord. I say, you are my God. My times are in your hand. This is an absolutely wonderful line. My times are in your hand. It's not just the final time either. It's my final power. It's not just that. It is that. It's not just that.

But it's all of my times. All of my times are in your hand. One commentator from a long time ago said this.

Having no power to secure myself, I commit my soul and consequently my whole person into your hands, as confidently relying both on your almighty power and wisdom and fatherly care over me, and additionally as willingly resigning myself to be disposed of by you as you are pleased.

[12 : 28] This in a way is how we talk about conversion. I give my whole self over to God. Don't keep anything back from God. Go to Him fully independent of all aspects of our lives.

We give over to the Lord. And it's an ongoing thing. Really, it's easier to be all in. It's easier to go all in. It's easier to entrust all of our times and our whole self to God.

One of my colleagues is a swimmer. He swam across the English Channel several times. He's even gone there and back. Back again.

And he likes to do this thing where anyone is welcome. And at 6am, he goes into the wrong foot river scene in Windsor. And you walk in and you go waist deep for 30 seconds.

And you go neck deep for 30 seconds. And then you go all the way under and you go for a 10 minute swim. And when it's, you know, the 20th of January, this is a really unpleasant situation to be in.

[13 : 30] But what's the best part about that progression? What's the best part? When your head is all the way in. And you know, even if it's kind of a chilly day or the wind is biting and you're in a lake or in the ocean or something like that.

You just have to go sort of head on earth. And then you're going to be okay. And then you get used to the water. Right? It's easier to go all in. It's easier to go all in.

And now, that initial go in made it really difficult. Right? God, as we know, God brings some people into the kingdom kicking and screaming. But in terms of the Christian life, we can relinquish everything to God.

And in a way, it just relieves us totally of these things. We depend totally on God. Into your hand I commit, my spirit, my times are in your hand.

So we've seen the past. We've seen the present. And we've experienced the present. And now we're going to sort of break out into what's always the case.

[14 : 33] What's always the case. God was faithful. God is faithful. God will always be faithful. That is the scope of the song. And I've seen it's not a problem today.

It's really not a problem today. Now, if you didn't like the photo album illustration, you probably won't like this one either. But it's, it's, it's, it's, the song is kind of like God's radio.

The song is like God's radio. And what it's doing is it's playing us the hits. It's playing us what we ought to listen to. It's playing us what God defines as good music. Right? And that's not always happy, clapping things.

It's not always the pop hits. Right? It's, it's, it's really, really difficult stuff sometimes. And sometimes it's not where we are at all. It's where God thinks we need to be.

And that's sometimes when we, it's the same thing. We come into church, I don't really feel like singing a happy song right now. But we sing a happy song. And that's training us, that's, that's getting us into the mindset of what we need to experience in the life of God.

[15:38] Or the other way around. I'm not really feeling that kind of thing when I am. So in here it is. And it's, it is the way that God gets us to be in effect and to understand the church where everyone is at some point throughout the day, throughout the week, throughout their lives.

It's an immersive experience. Now in the last few verses of the Psalms, the Psalms, the Psalms starts to bring up these, these qualities of God, right?

The kind of stones that are used to put together the fortress. How abundant is your goodness. The Lord has blessed it for just wonderfully showing his steadfast love to me.

This is God's character, right? So we don't like to talk about attributes, but he's, he's, yeah, the, you know, personal God. And this is who he is.

Now, let me finish on this, on this note of kind of what is difficult to do in Christian life. I think one of the most difficult things is when we're crying out to God, when we want to respond to anything, and we don't seem to be able to know the response.

[16:51] We say things like, I prize the Lord for mercy, but I don't know if he heard me. Those sorts of things. Well, it's remarkable that so many of the Psalms are laments like this, and so many of them are associated or attributed to David.

David is the anointed one, right? David is the person in the Bible who's now responsible for all of God's people. He's directly chosen by God.

He has probably one chapter that we heard about this morning in the Bible dedicated to how he's gone wrong. And I mean only one chapter, and the rest is, is, is, is pretty incredibly positive.

The king of Israel, God's chosen one, and anointed one, responsible for the people, responsible to the body of God's law to them.

And he's saying things like, be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress. My strength failed because of my anointing. My bones wasted away.

[17:59] My years were spent with sighing. The circumstances don't fit. They don't fit with David the anointed one. And of course, this, this, this, this, of course, is even, even more true for Christ.

And you may have bumped this immediately into your hand, O Lord, I commit my spirit. That's Luke 23. Jesus cries out once on the cross, into your hand, O Lord, I commit my spirit.

I entrust myself entirely to the Father. Right? And David has done things wrong. David can say, my life is in distress, even if it kind of doesn't match or doesn't seem like it.

It ought to go for the anointed one of Israel to have so many songs of lament as if life should be that hard. But Christ, on the scale of innocence, absolutely not. Finding himself on the cross, into your hand, O Lord, I commit my spirit.

He cries and he has heard him. And why does Christ cry out into your hand, I commit my spirit, O Lord? Well, I think for two, at least two things.

[19:04] The first is that he's obeying God. He's on the cross because he loves the Father and he's obeying what the Father would have to do. And, of course, secondly, because he loves us.

And God has love him. The Father has love there. Because the Father loves us. And Christ is going the way that the Christian life will go on this side of heaven.

He is the first fruit. And the first fruit, of course, when someone runs outside, if I said go outside and get the first fruit, you would run outside and you would get the first sample from the harvest. A sample. You get the first sample of the harvest.

You run back in and say, this is what the crop is going to look like this year. This is what we should expect. This is how it's going to go. And the life of Christ is like that. It's the first fruits.

But not just in the suffering. Not just in his death. It's when God responds. And God responds in the resurrection. And what's, I think, referred to most as the first fruits is the resurrection of Christ.

[20:05] And he's brought back in new life. And he's raised from the dead. And that's what we expect. And so we don't cry out, oh Lord have mercy upon me.

Or I cry to the Lord in distress and I don't know if he heard my crying. We cry out and say, I cry to the Lord and maybe, I'm not really sure when or how it's going to do something.

That's something that we can't say. And I don't really know what his response is going to do. But not, I don't know if he's going to respond. God will respond. He will respond.

And sometimes, God responds now. Sometimes we can see it, we can name it. It comes quickly. And other times it takes a long time. And sometimes, and the ultimate guarantee we have is that God will answer all of these things in a life's calendar.

And at the throne of God, we will have a perspective back on life. Now, that's the perspective where we look back on all those times when God did respond. We'll look at it and wonder.

[21 : 13] And all of those times when God didn't respond or it didn't seem like he responded, but not in the way that he thought or not in the way that he wanted him to respond, will look so, so wonderful. Both of those will look wonderful from the throne.

And we will be able to say, Blessed be the Lord, for he has wonderfully shown his steadfast love to me. Let's pray.

Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray.