

Psalm 44

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[0 : 00] If you have a Bible with you then please turn with me to the 44th Psalm and follow with me as we reflect together on the Word of God.

One of the striking features of the book of Psalms is their unsettling honesty. Many of the Psalms, as you will know, are straightforward songs of praise, of adoration, of thanksgiving and of petition. Some Psalms are memorable, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Or Psalm 46, God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in times of trouble. Many of the Psalms, the Psalms probably that we know best, are Psalms that speak to us of the greatness of God, the goodness of God, the unfailing faithfulness of God, the promises of God, the kindnesses of God.

But some of the Psalms express perplexity, fears, anguish, discouragements and even hostility and anger to God himself.

[1 : 30] In this 44th Psalm, we find one of God's servants expressing his bewilderment with God.

He cannot fathom God. God seems bizarre to him. Why are you sleeping, O Lord?

Verse 23, why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? God seems to have hidden himself and left his people at the mercy of their enemies who are God's enemies.

This is what puzzles the Psalmist. And maybe that's where some of us are in our lives tonight. You know what God has told you and told his church about himself in the Bible.

You know all about God's many great and precious promises. But your experience contradicts your theology. Your personal circumstances, your family circumstances or perhaps your church circumstances seem to mock God and his promises.

[2 : 52] Where is God when you need him? Now if that's not your experience tonight, or it's never been your experience, and you're living in a fantasy world, Psalms like this are inscripturated for us.

Not least to tell us that the believing life is not an even life. The believing life, if I can use this metaphor, the believing life is horticultural and not mechanical.

It doesn't proceed by even forward processes that are unhindered. It's horticultural. There are times of progress, but then there appears to be stagnation and even regression.

The cold, bitter winds of opposition form. Life becomes hard. And this is the reality here.

Life has become hard. The experience of God's people contradicts their theology. They would be the first to confess that the Lord is God.

[4 : 16] That there is no other beside him. That he is the living one. From everlasting to everlasting, the Yahweh, the I am. They would be the first to say the Lord is rich in mercy, slow to anger, abounding in covenant love.

They could confess it with their lips. But their hearts and their lives are screaming. But where are you? Where are you?

Why are you sleeping? Oh Lord. What I want you to notice, just as we begin to consider the psalm as a whole, is to notice that the psalmist's perplexity did not drive him to despair, but to prayer.

He brought his perplexity, his bewilderment, even his, and I think it might be true to say this, his anger with God, he brought it to the Lord in prayer.

He didn't sublimate it. He didn't pretend that all is well. He didn't think, well, let me just place my circumstances to the side because this is the Lord.

[5 : 39] He is deeply honest, unsettlingly honest with God, but he brings it to God in prayer. And he unburdens his heart and soul before the Lord.

You have behind me and above me an outline of the psalm. I thought it might be helpful. I wasn't sure many of you would be overly familiar with the 44th psalm.

And hopefully that will be helpful as we think through. Briefly touching on the first section and spending more time on verses 9 to the end, verse 26.

Notice, first of all, the spiritual continuity of genuine faith. And this really is the first eight verses of the psalm. Look how the psalm begins.

O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us, what deeds you performed in their days, in the days of old. And he begins to recite what the fathers had told their children of the mighty acts of God in history.

[6 : 46] And he in particular is thinking, you'll notice from the language, about the mighty acts of God at the time of the Exodus. And the planting of the people of God, God's covenant people, in the land of promise.

With your own hand you drove out the nation. Remember the seven nations who occupied the land of promise. But then, that is your people you planted.

You afflicted the peoples. But then, your own people you set free. For not by their own sword did they win the land. Our fathers have told us this, that they didn't gain these victories by their own ingenuity, by their plans, and by their power, and by their might, and by their weaponry.

It was your right hand and your arm and the light of your face. For you delighted in them. Our fathers have told us. You are my king, O God, ordained salvation for Jacob.

Through you we push down our foes. Through your name we tread down those who rise up against us. For not in my bow do I trust. Nor can my sword save me.

[8 : 00] But you have, in the past, saved us from our foes. You have put to shame those who hate us.

In God we have boasted continually. And if the psalm ended there, we go away happy. But, verse 9 begins.

But notice just briefly the spiritual continuity of genuine faith. Here is someone who is saying, Lord, I know you are great. I know you are powerful.

I know you are the God who is for your people. Our fathers have told us. I love that phrase. Years ago in Cambridge I was speaking to the children.

I would usually speak to them in the morning preparing them for the sermon. I was speaking that Sunday morning on the inspiration and sufficiency of Holy Scripture. And I said to the children, how do we know the Bible is the word of God?

[9 : 13] Little Hannah Knight puts her hand up. I said, Hannah, my daddy told me. And everyone laughed. Except me. I said, that's a wonderful answer.

That's a glorious answer. And then I said, but how did your daddy know? What the writer is saying, Lord, the theology I have concerning you, the truth I know about you, I have because of the faithfulness of our fathers.

He's highlighting the spiritual continuity of faith. He's not speaking about borrowed faith. He is speaking about the covenantal responsibility that fathers in particular have to tell their children about the Lord.

Their fathers told them. Now church history can be a wonderful source of encouragement. I think fathers and mothers should be telling their children, let me tell you about what God has done throughout the ages after the close of the canon of Scripture.

How God raised up men like Irenaeus of Lyon and Athanasius of Alexandria. And then you've got Augustine of Hippo. And you go right through the history.

[10 : 37] Anselm of Canterbury. You come to Luther and Calvin. And then the Puritans and Jonathan Edwards and the mighty acts of God in the 19th century.

Charles Spurgeon and our children hear about what God hath wrought. And our children discover that God is great.

That God is powerful. That God is glorious. That God is for his people. But then comes a difficulty. Daddy, you've told me all about what God did then. 1859, 1906 in Wales. 1948 in the island of Lewes.

But what about today? What about now? What about now? And so after he highlights the covenantal continuity of faith, the spiritual continuity of faith, he comes to the heart of the psalm.

[11 : 56] The first eight verses are not the psalmist expressing simply his evangelical credentials. He is really saying, Lord, I know there is none like unto you.

I know that. Your mighty acts in history that my fathers, our fathers have told us of. Shout that out. But you have rejected us and disgraced us.

And so from verse 9 to 22, he speaks about the inevitable perplexity of genuine faith. He compares the past history with the present tragic state of God's people.

And what perplexes the psalmist, what anguishes the psalmist, you can't miss surely the anguish of the language of the psalmist, is the contradiction between what God did then and what he is not doing now.

Where is God when you need him? You cannot but be struck by the searing honesty of the psalmist.

[13:16] Verse 10, You have made us to turn back from the foe. Verse 11, You have made us like sheep for slaughter, scattered us among the nations.

It's possible, we're not told, but it's possible that the psalm is written during the Babylonian captivity, middle years of the 6th century before Christ. You've sold your people for a trifle.

You've made us the taunt of our neighbours. People look at us and laugh. That's the church of God, of Yahweh, Yahweh, the living one, who is neither beginning of days nor end of life.

That bedraggled remnant is the people of God. You've made us a taunt to our neighbours, derision and scorn for those around us.

We're filled with shame and disgrace, saying, You have made us a byword among the nations. In other words, there is public shame and humiliation to belonging to the covenant people of God.

[14:25] All day long, my disgrace is before me. Shame has covered my face at the sound of the taunter and reviler, at the sight of the enemy and the avenger.

He is searingly honest with God. He is acknowledging and recognising the sovereignty of God. He knows that God isn't a bit player. He knows that God is not peripheral to history. He knows that the hand that ultimately shapes, determines and styles and progresses history is the hand of the covenant God of Israel.

He knows that. And it's that divine sovereignty that leaves him gasping with anguish and bewilderment.

But that anguish and bewilderment is inevitable.

[15:36] It belongs to the very nature of faith in a fallen world. because we are not God.

Because his ways are higher than our ways. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. Because we see through a glass darkly. Because we see partially.

We can't even see around the corner. Never mind what lies ahead in the coming week. Because we see only the reverse side of the tapestry with its tangled mints.

and not the side that God is seeing weaving perfectly his perfect design and sovereign will that is an inevitability to perplexity and anguish in the life of faith.

We can't escape it. We might want to escape it. But we can't escape it. We have to learn to live with it. This is part of the tension of being believers in a yet fallen world with yet corruptible bodies where sin yet indwells us.

[16:53] He's perplexed with God. But he's honest in his perplexity. And it's accented you notice in verse 17 all this has come upon us though we've not forgotten you.

We've not been false to your covenant. Maybe you're thinking ah he's overstating the case here. No he's not. He's not saying we're sinless. He's saying Lord we've not forgotten you but you seem to have forgotten us.

We've not been false to your covenant. Again let me say he's not saying we're sinless. He's saying Lord we have been true to you. That's why we can't really understand why all this has happened.

Then in verses 23 to 26 we notice the familial boldness of genuine faith. Awake.

Why are you sleeping oh Lord? Rouse yourself. Do not reject us forever. The first imperative comes with a shock.

[18:14] He's commanding God to awake. He's not saying Lord will you please come to me and help me to perhaps understand why this has happened and why you're doing what you're doing or not doing what you're not doing.

He says awake. There are four imperatives four commands. Awake. Stop sleeping on the job. Rouse yourself.

Do not reject us forever. That's the familial boldness of authentic genuine faith. remember in the in the boat our Lord Jesus is crossing Galilee and a storm breaks out and he's asleep in the stern of

the boat and the disciples come terrified by the wind and the wind they were seasoned fishermen but they were terrified and they say wake Lord do you not care that we're in danger of perishing? You see there are times when it seems as if God has gone away and what you have here is this familial boldness of genuine faith.

You find the same thing in the book of Habakkuk chapter 1 O Lord how long shall I cry for help and you will not hear or cry to you violence and you will not save why do you make me see iniquity? [19:59] Why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me the law is paralysed justice never goes forth the wicked surround the righteous justice has been perverted and you're asleep in the job you're idle you're passive you're inert I wonder if you've ever been that bold with God maybe you're thinking well this was out of place this was just a step too far this was this was really not how a creature speaks to the creator this is not how a redeemed forgiven sinner speaks to the one who at infinite cost has redeemed them why do you think it's in the Bible in part it's to confront us with the anguished nature of genuine faith

I think sometimes we still believe the lie of the serpent that if we were really men and women of faith boys and girls of faith we would always be trusting the Lord a smile would always be in our faces life with its hardships we would take in our stride difficulties would come and we would just sail through them people would say how has your week been praise the Lord it's been glorious and you're thinking are you serious how kind the Lord is to give us psalms like psalm 44 to show us that even the pen men of God the pen men of God those men raised up by God to pen the Holy Scripture could be so searingly honest with God awake awake why are you sleeping oh Lord rouse yourself do not reject us forever be real with God be honest with the

Lord but then fourthly and this really is the burden of my heart this evening notice the supportive theology of genuine faith the psalmist almost without knowing it gives two clues that first help to explain the churches and his desperate perplexity and second that help believers to stand firm and not turn back number one notice what he says in verse 22 yet for your sake we are killed all the day long we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered now Paul quotes those words you will know that in Romans 8 verse 36 in the middle of that glorious chapter where he expounds for us the privileges and blessings that belong to those for whom there is no longer any condemnation because they are in

Christ Jesus he speaks of the blessed ministry of the Holy Spirit he speaks of God's electing purpose he speaks of God being for his people and not against them he speaks of God not sparing his own son but delivering him up for us all how will he not then with him freely give us all things he speaks of Christ being at the right hand of the majesty on high interceding for us and then in the midst of that he says ah let me quote to you these words he doesn't say that Psalm 44 yet for your sake we are being killed all the day long we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered and when you read through Romans chapter 8 you are struck by this surprising turn in the flow of the blessings that the apostle Paul is expounding and explicating and you think well why is it there why is it there it was there to tell these Christians in Rome that what they were suffering was not

God's punishment but battle scars for the saviour's sake and that's what the psalmist doesn't yet get in the the hinterland of redemptive history he sees but dimly in shadow lands if you like yet for your sake we are killed all the day long why has all this come upon us he's actually told us for your sake the church's trials and sufferings were battle scars they were not signs of God's anger or punishment they were battle scars in the cause of the kingdom of God in this world you see the subtext of Psalm 44 is Genesis 3 what Paul was speaking to the children about that divinely instituted cosmic conflict between the seed of the serpent and the seed of women now there are times of course when the trials of the church is the result of unbelief and disobedience and rebellion and faithlessness but there are times when it's because we are standing against the world the flesh and the devil and all hell is being let loose upon us

[26:23] I wonder how many people looking at Job would have concluded this there is a righteous godly man not many I would think not many when God unites you to his son he initiates you in union with him into a cosmic conflict and we need to reckon with the reality of the devil our warfare is not with flesh and blood ultimately but with principalities and powers with the hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places for your sake we're killed all the day long you almost feel the

Lord would want to pause the psalmist and say do you get it do you get it even out of your own lips why this has come upon you you are sharing in an anticipatory prototypical way in the sufferings of your saviour the promised messiah Jesus Christ but then secondly do you notice the psalmist ends

his complaint with a confession of faith he finishes the psalm rise up come to our help redeem us for the sake of your chesed not latin but hebrew chesed your covenant love your unfailing pledged in blood covenant love where does he ultimately rest his hope in the chesed of yahweh in the covenant love and in the covenant faithfulness of god and what those closing words say to us is that in the deepest extremities of our lives personal extremities familial extremities congregational extremities we are to rest the weight of all that we are on the character of god and on the grace of god as he has pledged it to us in his covenant love in jesus christ you see this ultimately is the triumph of faith not that life is easy and sweet and uncomplicated and unhindered and even but that we say lord in the midst of all the perplexities and bewilderments and trials and troubles i want to tell you this my hope rests on your steadfast love on your pledged and promised covenantal secured love that's where my hope rests i can still remember the day i think i was about 23 years of age but i remember the day i was preparing a bible study for a house group in falkirk in central scotland i was a student at edinburgh university studying theology i'd been asked to go along and the passage i'd been given was the second half of romans chapter 4 and i have a default when i'm preparing john calvin is my default calvin says it must be right well i don't mean that but i always go to he's my go to and i remember yet reading these words calvin is commenting on the faith of abraham abraham god had promised abraham a son and an heir who would be the one in whom the covenant promises of god would continue but the years passed no heir or son appeared and paul says against hope abraham believed in hope he trusted god and then calvin wrote these words thinking of abraham as the years passed when his circumstances seemed to contradict god's promise calvin wrote all things around us are in opposition to the promises of god he promises immortality we're surrounded with mortality and corruption he declares that he counts as just we're covered with sins he testifies that he is propitious and kind to us outward judgments threaten his wrath what then is to be done calvin asks we must with closed eyes pass by ourselves and all things connected with us that nothing may hinder or prevent us from believing that god is true!

I've never forgotten those words they were electric to me when I first read them you know what he's simply saying not bury your head in the sand but he's saying when your circumstances seem to mock god and his promises place them alongside who god is you see that's what our lord jesus christ did when he endured the desolation and curse of the cross he is the prototypical man of faith and yet perfect man of faith as he was his life was engulfed with darkness he is the one ultimately that Isaiah 50 verse 10 points to when it says that when we walk in darkness and have no light I don't know what that means I occasionally know what it is to walk in darkness but to have no light no pinprick of light

I remember a friend of mine once saying to me he envied the lampposts of Glasgow because they had light he felt darkness just shrouded him and it was for our saviour darkness enshrouded him engulfed!

[33 : 19] And he said why why why have you forsaken me but he said more than that didn't he he said my God my God why have you forsaken me the sense of the fatherhood of God had been eclipsed but not the personal pronoun was it Martin Luther who said genuine Christianity is all about personal pronouns you see you and I have a saviour who knows by personal experience spiritual darkness we have a saviour who knows from experience the deep sense of the absence of the presence of God we have a saviour for whom all the lights went out there wasn't a pinprick of comfort in the cosmos not a pinprick but I want to say this even as the face of the father of

Jesus Christ was hidden from him even as the righteous wrath of God was being poured out upon him I have little doubt that the father was saying to the hosts of heaven and to his son if ever I loved thee my Jesus tis now for even in the cross as the darkness engulfed him he never never let go the my my God if ever I love thee my Jesus tis now the life of faith in Jesus Christ is a life of perplexity sometimes the perplexities are few and slight sometimes they are many and engulfing and the psalm ends with no answer did you notice that there's no quick fix at the end oh let me tell you psalmist let me tell you actually

I'm about this and I'm about that you get that in the book of Habakkuk in a sense where the prophet begins! by saying Lord rouse yourself wake up why have you deserted us and forgotten us and the Lord somewhat explains his ways with his servant but not here not here sometimes there are no answers this side of glory sometimes we'll have to wait for the answers but we wait in faith maybe with many tears maybe with Satan subtly!

insinuating into our minds and hearts curse God and die do you think he cares look what's happened to you look at your hopes that are smashed curse God and die just forget him Lord redeem us according to your covenant love that's where faith places its anchor you see the great thing about faith is not its quality but its object the reformers were always using two little words to highlight what true faith is extra nos you better laugh to finish it's outside of ourselves the glory of faith is not its quality because the quality of faith rises it falls it comes and it goes one day you could climb a mountain and leap a wall and the next day you can hardly get out of bed but the glory of faith is not its quality but its object

Jesus Christ who knows what darkness is and who is at the right hand of God interceding for us so be of good cheer be of good cheer God loves you he will never desert you you may yet have to die many deaths!

[38 : 46] please God they will all be for Jesus sake let us pray father we bless you tonight that our salvation even our very lives is hid with Christ in God we thank you Lord that troubles may disturb us harm us hurt us even at times overwhelm us that they can never separate us from your love we want to be better than we are we want to trust you Lord even in our tears because you are the God who spared not your only son but delivered him up for us all bless this congregation for good Lord enrich their life together bless above and beyond all his and the congregations asking

Paul's ministry may those who serve and labour with him do so in humility in concord bless this congregation Lord enrich it with your presence and the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit and we ask it in our Savior Jesus Christ name Amen