

Psalm 31:1-8

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[0 : 00] Turn to Psalm 31. I'm going to look at verses 1-8 this evening.!

And then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. And he breathes his last. Those words are words from Psalm 31. They supplied the words to the Lord Jesus as he hangs on the cross.

They are the words that he lifts up and speaks to his Father in heaven before he dies. He adds the word, Father, into your hand I commit my spirit.

He doesn't quote all the words if you look at Psalm 31, verse 5. He doesn't say, you've redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God. Some people are a little bit troubled by that. Because, of course, Jesus didn't need to be redeemed.

[1 : 18] He had no sin. But the word redeemed can mean rescued. And the Lord does indeed hear the cries of the Lord Jesus. And as the Lord Jesus commits his spirit into his Father's hands, the Father does indeed rescue him.

And the word of God makes that clear, doesn't he? Jesus dies and then he is buried. And three days later he rises again and he is exalted to the highest of places, the highest honour of heaven above.

And the Father appoints the Lord Jesus to be the judge of the living and the dead, the judge of all the earth. And so as we read Psalm 31, we spend time in it this week and next week, we are hearing words from the cross.

And that should encourage you. Because these are words that come from the Lord Jesus himself. David probably didn't understand these words fully.

And yet this cry of David into your hands, I commit my spirit, it's the cry of Jonah as he's thrown into the belly of the whale. It's certainly the cry of Jeremiah who loves Psalm 31.

[2 : 30] And it's the cry of the Lord Jesus. And when you look through the history of the church down through the ages, it's been the cry of many, many people who've been martyred for the gospel, who've given their life for the Lord Jesus.

And they've picked up these words, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit, and it has brought comfort and encouragement. The Lord Jesus, as he walks down into the dark valley, he walks down into that dark valley crying out to God.

And in the darkness of it all, and rising out of the darkness, is this joy, a joy in God. And in a certain sense, as we read these words in Psalm 31, into your hands I commit my spirit, the word of God is telling you and I tonight that the way that the master went is the way that you and I should go.

It's a bit like Psalm 42 and 43. They're psalms of lament. The Bible expresses what it's like to be discouraged and to be disheartened and to be downcast.

It's called an individual lament. Sad songs say so much, don't they? Says the philosopher Elton John. And you know what it's like, don't you? Those of you going to YouTube, you can get stuck, can't you, on the sad songs playlist.

[3 : 52] And you sit there listening on the playlist, and the songs get sadder and sadder. I guess that's why they call it the blues. The words of Elton John again. But as you listen to these sad songs, you mustn't think that the psalms of lament are like that.

Because I think, as you understand Psalm 31, you cannot come away from it, apart from being encouraged. That even while you sing sad songs, there is joy to be found in God tonight.

This is no ordinary sad song. This sad song receives a beam of light from the future, from the cross of Christ.

And it lights up to the glory of God, and it shines this light on the face of Jesus Christ. And it tells all the saints in the Old Testament that sang this song, that a saviour will come, one who will be a

redeemer of Israel, who will commit his spirit into the hands of his father.

And the father will honour him. And then from Jesus Christ onwards, it shines forward to tell us tonight that in the midst of all your discouragements, that you too can pray this prayer, into your hands I commit my spirit.

[5 : 09] This is the way that Christ went. And you don't have to wait until your dying day, until you pray this prayer. I think if you think that, that's a grave and great mistake.

To think that these words are only for martyrs. That these words only come on the edge of the shadow of death. Into your hands I commit my spirit. They're words for living. They're words for a new year.

They're words for life. They're words for today. They're words for now. They're words for while you have health and strength. Now is the time to commit your spirit into the hands of God. Because this is what Christ has done for you.

He's opened up that way. And he is the saviour of sinners like you and I. Here is a sad song for saints that are discouraged, but it is so full of joy for us too.

Four things that I want to talk about tonight. I think firstly that these verses are an acknowledgement that when we're discouraged, it's often because we feel trapped.

[6 : 12] That's the word, firstly, trapped. And you can feel trapped for a number of reasons. You can feel trapped by your life tonight, that there's no way out. Trapped by the people that are around you.

Trapped by all the circumstances that are bearing down upon you that you fear are going to hit you tomorrow morning when you get into work. And do you know that when the Lord Jesus Christ picks up these words, there's a certain sense in which he is trapped.

We probably wouldn't use that word. It's not kind of theologically precise enough. But the Lord Jesus, he is caught by the will of the Father. And he must do it.

I must be about my Father's business, he says. And he's also trapped, isn't he? And caught by the trap that the sinners have set for him. He was betrayed.

Even though he was an innocent man. And as the Lord Jesus says these words from the cross, he is certainly trapped physically. He speaks these words with nails, holding his hands to the wood, suspending him from the earth in the agony of crucifixion.

[7 : 24] He is, in a sense, isn't he, the only one who knows what it's like to be trapped between heaven and earth. To be trapped by the mighty hand of God, to be trapped by sinners, to be trapped in the jaws of death itself.

And tonight, you might feel the intensity of pain in your life. Or you may feel the intensity of the discouragement that falls upon you, hemmed in, boxed in, for all kinds of reasons.

And here, in Psalm 31, there's lots of examples given to us. There's the example of being afraid of people getting their hands on you.

Look at verse 8. You have not delivered me into the hands of the enemy. There was a fear of that. And in a certain sense, that is what happened, isn't it?

He was delivered into the hands of the enemy. The Lord Jesus, they laid hands on him. And by cruel hands, they crucified him. Here he is, and the enemy has laid hands on him.

[8 : 26] Laid hands on his hands by driving nails through them. And yet, here he is at the end of it, saying, you haven't actually delivered me into the hands of the enemy.

How can he say that? Well, he's trapped by their hands, and yet he knows that he's not trapped by their hands, because he is in the hands of God.

Many of us have a physical fear of people. Sometimes that can mean the result of trauma that happened a long time ago, or traumas that even continue. Maybe you have physical fear of people laying hands on you, using hands to hurt you.

And here, I think, is what is being expressed. You may be afraid and discouraged by the threat of violence.

You may be afraid and discouraged because what people are saying against you, or they're plotting or planning against you. Look at verse 13. He says, Prophet Jeremiah quotes Psalm 31 sometimes, and Jeremiah picks up these words in his prophecy, and people are using them to mock the preacher Jeremiah.

[9 : 43] Here comes the prophet of Jeremiah. They say, watch out. Terror on every side he preaches. It's what he's always preaching. And here comes the man preaching terror on every side.

We're all scared, but he feels it. But here's the Lord Jesus Christ too. And here is David knowing what it is to have people around you saying things which are cruel and cutting. Are the discouraging power of speech? You know it, don't you? The words that people use, the way that they plan and they plot against you, the way that they stop talking maybe when you enter the room.

Look at verse 18 as well. Let the lying lips be mute, which speak so insolently against the righteous in pride and contempt. Or what about verse 20? In the cover of your presence, you hide them from the plots of men.

You store them in your shelter. Look at this line. From the strife of tongues. It can be so discouraging, can't it? When the strife is the strife of tongues. It destroys workplaces.

[10:46] It can run amok in a family. Somebody says something, or somebody hears that someone has said something. And everybody is at odds against each other.

And sometimes those things are so discouraging. Sometimes the strife of tongues can destroy churches and destroy families and cut people apart. And you may be discouraged, even by the way people look at you.

Look at verse 11. Because of all my adversaries, I've become a reproach, especially to my neighbours. And an object of dread to my acquaintances. Those who see me in the street flee from me.

He's talking about the way that people look at him. They see him coming down the road. And they say, Do we have to talk to him now? What's he going to say? Terror on every side?

Or something like that. And it can be discouraging, can't it? To see the way that people look at you. The rolled eyes. The contempt. The looking away. The pretending not to see you.

[11:50] And they don't want to see you. Because every time they see you, you're so discouraging to them. Because you talk about terror all the time. And maybe they're discouraged. And they just don't know what to say to you.

All these forms of discouragement, the Lord Jesus Christ knew. And more verse 1, he talks about it, doesn't he? He says, Let me never be put to shame.

But they heaped shame on him. Verse 4, talks about casting a net for him. You take me out of the net.

They have hidden for me. In verse 7, he talks about his affliction. Because you've seen my affliction. And you've known the distress of my soul. And when he cries these words, Into your hands I commit my spirit.

His hands are fixed and fastened to wood. He's in the net. He's hemmed in. He's trapped. Do you feel trapped in your sorrows and your griefs? And so can I say to you tonight, That what you feel is nothing compared to Christ's suffering really.

[13:01] To what he endured on your behalf. But we're discouraged. And sometimes this is the way we feel. When we're discouraged. And these are the kinds of things that we say and think when we're discouraged.

So the second point, I think this passage helps us to learn. That sometimes in our discouragement, we're not only trapped, but we panic. That's the second word. We panic. Jesus doesn't panic.

When you hear these words, Into your hands I commit my spirit. And when you hear the whole tone of the prayer. Though it's classed as an individual lament, Psalm 31.

I don't just hear it in Christ's voice as being sad. When you hear Psalm 31 in Christ's voice. It is almost every moment of triumph.

When we panic, we start often saying things about God that are not true. We sometimes start to say things about other people that we know are not true.

[14:14] But in this particular Psalm, although there's the intensity of being trapped and hemmed in. Of people plotting and looking and saying. And people casting nets around him. And laying hands on him. He doesn't panic.

And he keeps his eyes fixed on the nature of God. Our panic theology is usually wrong. But the Psalmist panic theology is spot on.

Why do I say that? Well look at verse 1 with me. It says, In you, O Lord, do I take refuge? Let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me.

See that little phrase? In your righteousness. His grasp of the nature of God is that he understands that God is righteous.

And God is always just. He always does what is right. And God is holy and pure. And whatever is happening in your life tonight. God remains holy and God remains just. But you don't really believe that.

[15 : 23] And maybe you sit there tonight thinking, well sometimes he's not fair. It's not fair that this is happening to me. He's not good. At least he's not being as good to me as he should be.

No, the Psalmist says, isn't it? Let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me. He responds to your cries for help and mercy because he's righteous. He is good.

He is holy. And if you will come to him tonight for refuge in Christ. There's the promise, isn't there? That all who come to refuge in Christ, none will be cast away.

None will be refused. Over and over in this Psalm, he speaks of a rock and a fortress and a refuge. Think of those great stone towers or castles.

And we go on holiday to Fermanagh. It's an amazing place. It's like the Lake District, but there's no one there. And it's an amazing place. And you've got to go, you can go to Loch Hearn. And there's a little island where monks have been for centuries.

[16 : 27] A Dhamonish Island. And as you go there, you get off this boat and there is this straight tower. You can Google it later. Straight tower that goes right up. And the door to the tower is halfway up the tower.

No steps. It's bizarre. Why is the door halfway up? Well, because if the Vikings are coming, you want to get into that ladder. You get into that tower. So you get your ladder.

You get up to the door. And once you're through the door, then you pull the ladder up and they can't come in. And you're safe in that tower. You can imagine the scramble to get into it.

Imagine someone thought, well, sorry, there's no more room. Yes, it'd be devastating. But God is righteous. He is a refuge. He is a castle. He is a stronghold. The defense, the fort, the keep.

And all who run to him, none are locked out. All are gathered in and kept safe. Why? Because he is righteous. And so do not panic in your discouragement.

[17 : 35] Don't you think that the Lord Jesus knew that his father was righteous? That he was always doing righteousness? That even what he was suffering on the cross, the father in his righteousness would use it in righteousness to save sinners?

The other way which you see he doesn't panic is in verse 3. He prays there. He says, you are my rock and my fortress.

And for your name's sake, you lead me and you guide me. What is your name? What is my name? That God would lead us and keep us for our name's sake. And does he look at you in your distress or in your weeping and we're crying?

And he says, well, that's Paul Levy. He's a very important person. I must rescue him. Paul Levy might be a very important person. In his own mind, Paul Levy is an absolute legend.

[18 : 39] But that's of no consequence to God. It is for his own name's sake. So when he looks at Paul Levy, he sees there is one who is covered by the blood of Christ.

There is one who is covered by the name of the Lamb of God. He sees Paul, but he sees Paul as bought by the blood of the Lamb and called by God's own name.

He sees Paul called by his own name, the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And so no wonder he can turn knowing that God is leading him for his own name's sake.

No wonder he can turn and say, okay, into your hands I commit my spirit. For it is your name's sake that is important here. No wonder that he ends this psalm with these words.

Can you see how he ends the psalm? There it is.

[19 : 47] Waiting for the Lord. That's the key to all the psalms of laments. And there it is right there. Wait for the Lord. Stop worrying about your own name.

Wait for the Lord. Don't panic. God is righteous. God is doing all things for the glory of his Son. And for the glory of his own name and his Son.

Don't panic. Here's the third thing when you feel trapped and you're tempted to panic. The third thing to remember is that there's only one thing to do. And that is to turn to the Lord Jesus and to trust him.

To cry and to cry to God to keep looking to him. And not look at the discouragement or the darkness or the disconsolation that may be around you.

Isn't that what the Lord Jesus does actually on the cross? Running through all the words of the cross of Christ. Isn't it true that somehow they're all related to God?

[20 : 56] They are all related to the glory of God and the grace of God and the goodness of God. I was really impressed as I read through these eight verses how directly the psalmist speaks to God.

Let me show you that. I want you to notice every time he uses the word you. Or the imperative is you in it there. So let me read it to you. In you, O Lord, do I take refuge.

Let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me. Incline your ear to me. You rescue me speedily. You be a rock of refuge for me.

A strong fortress to save me. For you are my rock and my fortress. And for your name's sake you lead me and guide me. You take me out of the net. They have hidden from me.

For you are my refuge. Into your hand I commit my spirit. You have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God. I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols. But I trust in the Lord. I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love.

[21 : 52] Because you have seen my affliction. You've known the distress of my soul. And you have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy. You've set my feet in a broad place. The more times you read it, the more you realize this is all about God.

To God. Calling on God. Crying to God. Naming God. Looking to God. He speaks directly to God. And he only refers to himself in terms of what God is doing.

Or what he's asking God to do. It's not simply just a person crying for themselves. Or weeping for their own pain. Or grieving. He openly speaks of himself as being in the hands of God.

Which is why he says, Into your hands I commit my spirit. I suppose that many of us are willing to do that when it comes to the point of dying. It's why these words have become associated with a martyr's death.

But these words are for living. And these words are for today. Not just for dying. And I say that because of the fourth thing.

[22 : 55] You're trapped. You're panicking. But let me remind you the words of this psalm. What this faithful, glorious God does.

And you feel trapped and you're worried. Maybe that people are going to get their hands on you. Verse 5 he says this. Into your hand I commit my spirit. And more than that, more than that he says verse 15.

My times are in your hands. Trapped. Panic. Look to the Lord Jesus. Recognize that your times are in his hands.

You're afraid of people's hands. Afraid of people shaming you. Afraid of people treating you, being violent to you, humiliating you.

And Samuel says you are actually in God's hands. Do you know that? The Bible says it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But it is a wonderful thing to be in the hands of the loving God.

[24 : 06] It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But it is a wonderful thing to be in the hands of the loving God. Do not ever forget that. And so if you're afraid of hands, remember whose hands are already on you.

It was Jesus, as he hangs on the cross by his hands, that he himself is in the hands of his Father. To pull us into the hands of the Father.

To put us into the hands of the Father. So that no one can pluck us out of the Father's hands. And so I remind you of this faithful, glorious God.

You are in his hands. And you might be afraid of what people are saying about you or to you. And they use words and they plot the things they say. But look what he says in verse 20.

In the cover of your presence you hide them from the plots of men. You store them in your shelter from the strife of tongues. Blessed be the Lord. For he's wondrously shown his steadfast love to me.

[25 : 10] When I was in a perceived city. Verse 22. I had said in my alarm, I'm cut off from your sight. But you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy. When I cried to you for help. Love the Lord. All you his saints.

You're afraid of what people speak to you or about you. But what words does God speak to you and about you tonight?

Do you hear his words when he speaks them? Is he speaking words to you now? Words of comfort. Words of encouragement.

Words that take your attention off yourself and show you the Savior. What words do you hear Jesus saying in this psalm? Into your hands. I commit my spirit.

And those words were spoken, weren't they? Because he was dying for you. He was taking our place. So don't be afraid of the words of sinners. Don't be discouraged by them.

[26:10] Listen to the words of God. And don't be discouraged by the way that people look at you. Here he is. He's become a reproach to them. An object of dread to all his acquaintances.

But in verse 16 he prays. Make your face shine on your servants. Save me in your steadfast love. God looks at you. And you say, I don't see his face.

But where are you looking? Are you looking in the scriptures? Are you looking as the word is preached to you? What about at the Lord's table? Do you see his face there? You do.

He comes and one of the glorious things that this psalm sets before us in this brief statement. He says, I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols.

For I trust in the Lord. And in the Bible we know, don't we, that there's always this kind of mockery and polemic against idolatry.

[27:10] The Bible always mocks idols. They've eyes but don't see. They've ears but they don't hear. They've lips but they don't speak. They've hands but they don't do anything. They've feet but they don't move.

And all throughout this psalm, what do you see? You see that the nature of our God is our God is a God who hears. And our God is a God who has hands and he takes us and he holds us.

And our God is a God who sees. He sees your affliction. And our God is a God who knows. He knows the distress of your soul. Our God is a God who is so loving and powerful that he will envelop us round about.

In a great castle, in a fortress, in a refuge of love. And all the idols, they look so stupid. And so, into your hands I commit my spirit.

For you've redeemed me, O Lord. As I've thought about this psalm this week, you know, past weeks. And stepping back from it and in a sense kind of being overwhelmed by it.

[28:10] I've done a job. Jonathan Edwards. You know, Jonathan Edwards. The Puritan, he made resolutions. I resolved. He probably made resolutions this week. New Year's resolution. And as I've looked at the Lord Jesus praying, Into your hands I commit my spirit.

And having heard all the words that are around that. And seeing how much the Lord Jesus loves me. I step back today and I say I'm resolved that I will rejoice and be glad.

Because Jesus loves me. Will you do that? As we come to the Lord's table. We look to the Lord Jesus who said, Father, into your hands.

I commit my spirit. Will you resolve to rejoice and be glad? Because Jesus loves you. Let's pray.