

Psalm 44 • When life is disappointing

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Psalm chapter 44. I would have to say before we get into reading these words that without a doubt, I think, one of the most challenging things for believers is to go through a time in their life where they are enduring great difficulty and cannot find a way to explain it. It never ceases to amaze me how we do that. It's just something about our human nature.

When life is bad and things are challenging our first default thought is to say, why is this happening? And we'll try to come up with all kinds of different potential reasons. Everything from, God is mad at me and he's punishing me, or any number of other possibilities. And that is largely what this Psalm is about.

The Jewish people were accustomed to singing praises to God after a time of great victory. But this Psalm is about a time of crushing defeat that they can't explain. They can't understand. As we get into this Psalm, you're going to see that the writer acknowledges the fact that they're going through incredibly painful, difficult times, but they can't explain it.

And you see, back in the Old Testament, there were things, there were promises that Israel had that you and I frankly don't have. There were promises God gave to Israel, saying, if you keep My covenant, if you follow My law, I'll do these things for you. I'll bless you in the land. You'll never be able to..., or I should say, your enemies will never be able to stand against you. You'll prosper. You will be the delight of all of the nations, and on and on. I'll bless you. I'll bless your crops. I'll bless your children.

And when those things weren't happening, there was an assumption on their part that God was behind it. And that either they hadn't been faithful to Him, and that's why these things were happening, or fill in the blank. Sometimes we just don't know. You're going to see that here.

This Psalm begins with an expression, first of all, of remembering God's involvement in years past. And the psalmist begins in verse 1 of Psalm 44 by saying,

"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:

2 you with your own hand drove out the nations," (ESV)

Now, you and I have read all this in the Old Testament. We know how God drove out the Canaanites from the land of Canaan, which, of course, became the land of Israel. And so he's speaking there about how God drove those nations out of the land.

And then he goes on to say there in verse 2,

"but them (meaning the Jews, the Israelites, our forefathers, he says, them,) you planted; you afflicted the peoples, (living in the land, the Canaanites,) but (the Israelites, those, he says,) ... you set free;"

They're remembering, right, that God was against their enemies and He was pro-Israel. Okay? Very important.

Verse 3, he even goes on to say here,

"for not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm save them, but your right hand and your arm, and the light of your face, for you delighted in them."

The psalmist is now reminding the Lord, listen, we remember how the nation of Israel took over the land. It wasn't because they were a big strong army with great, chariots and weapons of warfare. They won the land because you were there on their side helping them to defeat the enemy. What is the psalmist doing? He's reminding the Lord, this is how this thing works.

And then in the next few verses, the psalmist expresses a personal faith in the Lord. Look what he says in verse 4 and following. He says,

"You are my King, O God; (now Lord,) ordain salvation (or deliverance) for Jacob!"

5 Through you (You'll remember God. It's through You) we push down our foes; through your name we tread down those who rise up against us.

6 For not in my bow do I trust, nor can my sword save me.

7 But you have saved us from our foes (speaking past tense) and have put to shame those who hate us. (And)

8 In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to your name forever."

Don't get me wrong, the psalmist is saying, it's not that I don't appreciate all the things that you've done. It's not that I'm saying, you've never ever helped me, because you have. You've been there. You've supported me. You've strengthened my arm. You've enabled me to do many of the things. Listen, it's not in my, it's not in my bow, and that's a way of saying, it's not in my own way of fighting battles that I'm trusting. It's You I'm trusting in. Alright.

Now beginning in verse 9, the psalmist having established that set up, he gets up to his real complaint here, okay? Verse 9. Look what he says through verse 16.

"But you have rejected us and disgraced us and have not gone out with our armies.

10 You have made us turn back from the foe, and those who hate us have gotten spoil."

In other words, our enemies have come and taken things from us. You ever feel like the enemy's doing that to you? Verse 11, he says,

"You have made us like sheep for slaughter and (you) have scattered us among the nations.

12 You have sold your people for a trifle, demanding no high price for them.

13 You have made us the taunt of our neighbors, the derision and scorn of those around us.

14 You have made us a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples."

He says.

"15 All day long my disgrace is before me, and shame has covered my face

16 at the sound of the taunter and reviler, at the sight of the enemy and the avenger."

Alright, so stop there. You can see what's going on in the heart of the psalmist. He says, he starts off by saying, Lord, I remember our forefathers told us how You did some amazing things. And listen, I want You to know, in my own life, I've seen You work. And I know that it's not by my own power that I've won victories in the past. And I thank You for all of that.

But God, I got to tell You what's going on right now. You're nowhere to be seen. I feel like You're not even working in my life. I pray and I don't seem to get any answers. I cry out to You. And what's going on?

The enemy just seems to get in and ransack at will. He takes things from us. He literally steals. And we're just helpless to do anything about it. We just sit back and watch. We've become a laughing stock. People are saying, I thought your God was great. I thought your God cared. I thought your God was able. What's the matter with your God anyway? Is He on vacation? What's the deal?

Alright, now, it starts to get even a little bit more difficult as he goes on here in verse 17. Look at this. He says,

"All this has come upon us, though we have not forgotten you, and we have not been false to your covenant.

18 Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way;

19 yet you have broken us in the place of jackals and covered us with the shadow of death."

Now stop there for a minute. I want you to understand that the psalmist is not saying that Israel has been sinless, not saying that at all. What he's saying is and what these words are meant to express, is the idea that there's nothing in their heart, or mind, or understanding that they can think of that ought to bring about this apparent disfavor from the Lord. Are you with me?

The psalmist is essentially saying, we've been crying out to you. We've been living after the law. Our hearts have been right before the Lord. And yet all this stuff is happening.

And he goes on to say, verse 20. He says,

"If we had forgotten the name of our God or (worse yet, if we had) spread out our hands to a foreign god,

21 would not God discover this? (In other words, "would you not know?) For he knows the secrets of the heart.

22 Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

You'll remember that the Apostle Paul applied that to the apostles. He said, it seems like that's our life. It's our lot in life. (Romans 8:36)

But look what he goes on to say to the Lord in verse 23. He says,

"Awake! (You and I would just say, wake up God!) Why are you sleeping, O Lord? (Obviously, the psalmist isn't saying this to suggest to us that God sleeps. He's saying, why are you not paying attention?) ...Do not reject us forever!"

He even says in verse 24,

"Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction...?"

Can I ask you a question? Do you think God ever forgets the affliction of His children? I don't think so either. But is that the way he feels right now? Yeah. That's the way they feel. It's a collective. You'll notice there's probably one person writing, but he keeps speaking "our" and "we." And it's a... he's speaking for the community. He says, *"Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?"*

And then in verse 25 and 26, he says,

"For our soul is bowed down to the dust; (and) our belly clings to the ground."

Again, these are suggesting their posture is one of groveling at this time. He says,

"Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love!"

Wow! What a Psalm, huh? It's probably not one you'd want to memorize necessarily and quote to yourself in order to lift yourself out of the dumps. There's a lot of introspection going on in this Psalm and you would expect that to be the case.

But here's the point: you'll notice there are no ready answers. There's no answers given here. This is just a big fat bummer of a prayer and we've all prayed them. And there's no answers. There's no information forthcoming to help dig us out of this pit that we seem to find ourselves in. Right?

And what this Psalm expresses for you and I is, I believe a common and potentially dangerous attitude that believers can find themselves in. And the reason I believe that it's dangerous is because what we're trying to do in times of difficulty where there are no answers.

And we've even searched our own hearts and we've said, why is this happening? And I've confessed everything I know how to confess. I have literally repented of everything I could think of to repent of. I've accepted the forgiveness of the Lord. I've put my faith in Him and so forth. And still this situation rages on and I cannot for the life of me find an answer for why this is happening.

And what we try to do in those sorts of situations, is we try with our limited understanding to grasp the actions and attitudes of an incomprehensible God. Even though we know we shouldn't, we do it anyway.

And that is precisely the error of, in the, that is recorded for us in the Book of Job by Job's 3 friends who came along, saw Job in the midst of horrific suffering, and said, I know what's going on with you. You're a filthy, rotten, stinking, scumbag of a sinner. That's essentially what they said without the colorful language.

But they were just about that mean. You're obviously a sinner, Job, and that's why you're in this situation. Repent! Get over it. Come to God. Humble yourself. But what they were essentially saying was, I know. I know. I understand this thing.

Well, we find out as we get to the end of the Book of Job, they didn't know. And they were dead wrong. And if it wasn't for Job, they'd have been dead, dead! Because he prayed for them that God would, respond mercifully and forgive them of their sin, their sin of presumption. Right? Remember we talked about that as we went through the Book of Job. We talked a lot about that sin of presumption.

That sin of presumption was not just the error of Job's 3 friends, it ultimately, it was Job's error as well. Toward... As Job went through the difficulty of his own summer, of suffering, he too came up with an attitude that God was unjust. You remember that? And he even said, if God would appear, I'd have a little talk

with him. And God did appear. And Job wished he hadn't by the time that conversation was over.

But the error again is that they believed they knew the heart and the mind of God. And they made the faulty determination based on what they thought they knew. And what they thought they knew wasn't enough. It was faulty. Right? And what's particularly interesting about the Book of Job is that you'll remember at the end, as I've already said, God ultimately responds to Job.

But did you ever notice when you're reading through the Book of Job, He never gives him any answers. He never tells him why. Never explains it! That's what the whole book is about. And God shows up on the scene at the end and all He has to do is just be God! And Job says, I want to put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I'm not speaking again, sort of a thing. And it was just enough to be in the presence of God.

And when you read the Book of Job, some people might go into reading that book and become very frustrated when they get done with it. Because they've gone through all these chapters about these yo-yo brains coming up to Job and saying, I know what's wrong with you. And they spout all their stuff and they're all wrong.

And then Job becomes dark inside of his heart. He begins to accuse God of being unjust, which we're dealing with that for chapter after chapter after chapter. And then God shows up at the end, and He doesn't answer any of it! He doesn't explain Himself, one word about what Job is going through.

Now, again, you may get to the end of the Book of Job and be very frustrated with that. But if you are, it only proves that you've missed the point of the Book of Job. Because the Book of Job is not about getting answers.

The Book of Job is understanding really it's the same thing that I think is going on here in Psalm 44. It's understanding that the situations that we go through in life: the darkness, the difficulties, the pain, in this case the defeat of the nation of Israel. And all that they had suffered and all the humiliation that they were going through, was not a sign that God loved them any less.

It was not a sign that God no longer cared for them. It was not even a sign that God was angry. If anything, it simply meant that God was permitting all of those things so that He could carry out a purpose known only to Him. And that's the point.

The point of the Book of Job. And I know we're not studying the Book of Job, but the point of the Book of Job is, you and I can't get it! You and I can't understand it. God is working in ways that are known only to Him. And guess what, guys? He's not telling. And we beg and we plead and we cry as if we could possibly understand.

Let me show you one of the most comforting passages to me in the Book of Romans. Chapter 11.

Romans 11:33 (ESV)

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!. For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has become His counselor.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and (the) knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!. For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has become His counselor. (anyway?)

It's like, I, Yes, I counsel God. And it's a ridiculous idea. Who counsels Him? That's what the question is saying. Who's God's counselor? There's no such thing. Right? God is the Counselor, capital C.

But I love what that passage says, because it says, who has known the mind of the Lord? Do you know what? There's not one of us in this room or that's not one human being on the face of the earth, save that of Jesus Christ, Himself, who has ever known the mind of the Lord without the Lord sharing that mind first.

Now, if the Lord shares His mind, which He sometimes graciously does through His Word, or through even spiritual revelation, that's a wonderful thing. Praise God!

But for you and I to simply come upon a scene without having heard from God, and saying to our brother or sister in difficult circumstances, I know what's going on in your life. I know what's happening behind the scenes. That is the height of human pride and arrogance. And that's exactly why Job's friends got rebuked so soundly.

But that is also what's going on here in Psalm chapter 44. Because, yeah, it's been rough. It's been very, very difficult. So what are we supposed to do when we don't understand? We come back to Proverbs 3:5.

Proverbs 3:5 (ESV)

Trust in the LORD with all of your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

"Trust in the LORD with all of your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding." What you can understand.

Hey, that's a broken stick. You lean on that stick, it's going to break out from under you.

I know this is either a wonderful verse, or it's one of those verses that just makes you frustrated. But one way or another, it comes down to this. *"Trust in the Lord with all of your heart, and don't lean on your own understanding."* Don't think about or consider the situation in your own mind and say, yeah, that must be what's going on.

Oh we do that though, Christians, all the time. We do it. I hear Christians doing it. Don't you? I... This has been going on in my life. Somebody tell me what's happening. And, Pastor, I think I know what's going on. No, you don't.

But listen, we take great comfort in the fact that we don't know what's going on. It means that God's plan and God's mind and heart are above our own. If I could figure out everything God was doing, that would mean my mind is equal to God. Right? If I could figure out God at all times and all seasons, that would mean my brain is equal with His. I got news for you. My brain don't hold a candle. My brain's not even equal to yours, let alone God's. We're not going there.

So, what do we do? *"Trust in the Lord with all of your heart."* All of your heart. Boy, meditate on those words. All of your heart. All of your heart. And don't lean, don't depend, don't rest on what you think is going on.

We're pretty funny as human beings. We don't ever come up with a positive scenario. It's always negative. When we're going through hard times, we don't ever come up with a scenario, I know what's going on, it's because God loves me so much. We don't ever do that. It's always, He's angry, He's mad, God's mean. I'm in trouble. I might not even, I'm, you know what? I might not even be saved! Right?

People start doubting their salvation when they go through issues as if being a child of God means you're never going to go through difficulties or suffering. The Bible says you're to consider every hardship as the loving hand of a

disciplining Father who loves you so much...(Hebrews 12:7-9) Well, let's put it this way, He loves you as you are, but He loves you too much to leave you that way.