

Seeing Trials Through Seasoned Eyes

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Bible Text: Psalm 71
Preached on: Tuesday, February 13, 2018

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Psalm 71 is where we're going to start but let me just start by reading the Psalm. I have deeply fallen in love with this Psalm in the past several weeks as I have been preparing to teach it, so much so that I'm going to spend two messages on it and I'm very delighted that you are here for what has become one of the most precious Psalms in all of the Psalter to me for reasons that I think will become clear as we study together. Psalm 71, beginning in verse 1 says,

1 In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge; Let me never be ashamed. 2 In Your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; Incline Your ear to me and save me. 3 Be to me a rock of habitation to which I may continually come; You have given commandment to save me, For You are my rock and my fortress. 4 Rescue me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, Out of the grasp of the wrongdoer and ruthless man, 5 For You are my hope; O Lord GOD, You are my confidence from my youth. 6 By You I have been sustained from my birth; You are He who took me from my mother's womb; My praise is continually of You. 7 I have become a marvel to many, For You are my strong refuge. 8 My mouth is filled with Your praise And with Your glory all day long. 9 Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails. 10 For my enemies have spoken against me; And those who watch for my life have consulted together, 11 Saying, "God has forsaken him; Pursue and seize him, for there is no one to deliver." 12 O God, do not be far from me; O my God, hasten to my help! 13 Let those who are adversaries of my soul be ashamed and consumed; Let them be covered with reproach and dishonor, who seek to injure me. 14 But as for me, I will hope continually, And will praise You yet more and more. 15 My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness And of Your salvation all day long; For I do not know the sum of them. 16 I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD; I will make mention of Your righteousness, Yours alone. 17 O God, You have taught me from my youth, And I still declare Your wondrous deeds. 18 And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to all who are to come. 19 For Your righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens, You who have done great things; O God, who is like You? 20 You who have

shown me many troubles and distresses Will revive me again, And will bring me up again from the depths of the earth. 21 May You increase my greatness And turn to comfort me. 22 I will also praise You with a harp, Even Your truth, O my God; To You I will sing praises with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel. 23 My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to You; And my soul, which You have redeemed. 24 My tongue also will utter Your righteousness all day long; For they are ashamed, for they are humiliated who seek my hurt.

You know, over the years, one of the things that I've come to just desire and appreciate the most is just the concept of just dealing with things the way they really are, dealing with reality rather than a conjured up dream or a desire that things would be different than the way that they are. I like to deal with reality. I like to deal with things as they actually exist and not the way that we would necessarily want them to be, and this Psalm is a Psalm that expresses the concerns of old age or older age, you might say, and as I've prepared for this time together in Psalm 71, it has often occurred to me that those who would sell us retirement products, for example, are masters at creating a completely false expectation of what the end of life is going to be like. You know, they are always setting you up, you've got the ocean breeze going through your hair and you have everything that you need and you're strong in life and, you know, you've got some gray hair but you've got a nice looking spouse beside you and you've got everything that you need and life is now on easy street because you've hit the retirement years. Well, that's not reality. It's a nice way to try to get people to invest and I'm all in favor of investing for your retirement, but that's not reality. It creates a sense of expectation that the end of life will somehow be easy; that somehow there is going to be a smooth boulevard ahead of you when you reach your latter years, and this Psalm, Psalm 71, helps correct us with a sense of what the reality of life actually is. It meets life where it actually takes place and what we find in this Psalm is the psalmist who is not identified at all, there is no inscription in this Psalm whatsoever, what we find is that at an age where this psalmist might have expected tranquility in his life because he had been living for the Lord all of this time, instead he found that trials were his lot.

Look, for example, at Psalm 71:9. As I like to do, I like to point out certain highlights to orient you because we go through these things rather quickly. In Psalm 71:9, he says, "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails." Then in verse 18 he says, "even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to all who are to come." What we have here in this Psalm is a man writing this Psalm who has been walking with God and serving him for a very extended period of time and he has developed over the course of that a settled sense of trust in the tried and tested faithfulness of God. Look at verse 3, for example, he says, "Be to me a rock of habitation to which I may continually come; You have given commandment to save me, For You are my rock and my fortress." Then in verse 6 he says the same thing in a different way, he says, "By You I have been sustained from my birth; You are He who took me from my mother's womb; My praise is continually of You." You see that adverb a couple of times: continually, continually. This is a man who has an established track record of walking with God and seeing God

manifest his faithfulness through different episodes in life, through different seasons of life, and he has found through each season that God has proven himself faithful in every one of them. Verse 14, you see it again, he says, "But as for me, I will hope continually, And will praise You yet more and more."

So what's happening here in Psalm 71 is this, with all of this lifetime experience of the Lord's faithful deliverances in all of his sorrows and difficulties throughout life, he has come to yet another difficulty in life that he needs the Lord's help with and so he turns again to deliverance. He turns to God again for deliverance from those who would seek his harm and would mock him for his faith. The commentator, Robert Davidson, says this and listen to this closely because it really does frame the Psalm in a very helpful way, in my opinion. He says, "We are listening to the prayer and praise of a man who nurtured in the faith from his earliest days, now in old age reaffirms that faith as he faces a crisis in his life." And just kind of opening up the door to this Psalm with a recognition, here is a man faithful through the years having seen God's proven loyal love over time and time and time again, and what's the outcome? He's not on easy street. It's not easy for him even after that lifetime of walking with God. To the contrary, he is facing another difficult crisis. He has another set of enemies that are after his neck and so he is turning to God once again, and I just think that it is so helpful to view reality from that perspective.

We're going to talk about this this week and also next week, if my intentions prove to come to fruition, is that we need to have a mature sense about what life is like, don't we? We've got some gray hair in here, not looking at any of you in particular but it's not hard to find you. We have some young people here on the front end of life looking forward with a sense of hope and expectation, full of dreams, and that's as it should be; you know, looking forward with expectation to what life might hold. Well, that's great. That's the way that it should be but as we do that, we need to have a realistic set of expectations about what life is going to be like, and as we get into older age, it is not realistic to think that that's going to exempt us from trials. And those of us that have been parents and as you watch and your kids become adults and all of that, you understand what I mean, don't you? You know, you have these hopes and expectations for your kids and sometimes it plays out well, and sometimes it's hard and it's disappointing and they bring you grief. And I'm not speaking from personal experience on that score, mind you, but just recognizing that this is the nature of life. So what we want to do is we want to ask this question: how can we, what can we learn from this Psalm? And if you want a title to write down for this message, I've titled it "Seeing Trials Through Seasoned Eyes." Seeing trials through seasoned eyes. You have a man writing this Psalm who is experienced in the faith, who is strong and confident, and yet he is still in need.

Let's take a look at it together here and we'll bring these things out as we go along. The first point for this evening is we see him in his time of need. His time of need. The psalmist opens up this Psalm with a prayer for help. Look at verses 1 through 4. He says,

1 In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge;

Using that covenant name of God, Yahweh. The name of the covenant keeping God of Israel. The one who keeps his promises. He's appealing to that covenant keeping name of God as he opens up this Psalm and he says,

1 In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge; Let me never be ashamed.

So he's speaking, here's what I you to see, there is so much here, this psalmist is speaking from a settled principle of life as he is writing this Psalm. "I have taken refuge in you." He is making a comprehensive statement that, "My life has been one of finding my strength, my defense, my comfort, my help, in you, O God, and now from that perspective, I pour out my prayer to you," because he finds himself again in the hand of the wicked.

Look at verses 2 through 4, he says,

2 In Your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; Incline Your ear to me and save me. 3 Be to me a rock of habitation to which I may continually come; You have given commandment to save me, For You are my rock and my fortress. 4 Rescue me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, Out of the grasp of the wrongdoer and ruthless man, 5 For You are my hope;

Now let's take a look at a couple of things here. Notice the confidence that anchors what he is saying and how he is praying here. He calls the Lord his refuge, his rock, his fortress. In other words, he has found security over the course of his life as he turned repeatedly to his God for help in trials.

Now, he's writing as an experienced man of the faith and I want to point out something really basic to you, especially for you young Christians starting on the front end of life, maybe your faith hasn't been tested too much by serious, difficult, heart-wrenching trials, but here's what you have to see. It's like anything else. It's like being in sports, it's like being in business, it's like raising a family, you have to deal with situations and you deal with them one by one, and the way that you come to this place, beloved, the way that you come to this place of settled trust and confidence in your later years is by trusting God through the difficulties that come one by one. Individually, they may not seem like much, or individually they may seem overwhelming, but as trials come into your life, your responsibility and the way that you grow in faith is as each trial comes, you turn to God and you trust him. You walk with him. You humble yourself under the weight of the trial and you don't run from it, but rather you patiently persevere, taking your refuge, finding the comfort and the solace and the strength of your soul in the midst of the person of God and not by trying to change your circumstances.

Beloved, you young people over to my right, if you would embrace that as a principle by which you would live, you will find yourself in this place of confidence that the psalmist writes in toward the end of his life. Strong faith is developed by walking through trials, not running away from them. That is the only way that you are going to learn that God is

your refuge, that God is your strength, that God is your fortress, and you must stay in the trial. You must not run from it but you must learn to look to God for the satisfaction of your soul when there is nothing external to prompt that gladness in your heart. That's how you grow through your trials. That's how you become a strong man or woman of faith. This is how you maintain a strong testimony for Christ, and I ask you, my beloved friends, isn't that what you want to be? Isn't that what you want more than anything when you search out the deepest depths of your heart, the redeemed heart should say, "Whatever else happens to me in life, I want to be known as someone who is faithful to my God. I want to be known as someone who is faithful to Christ. I want to be someone whose life is a manifestation that God is faithful through all of the ups and downs that inevitably come to us in life." Isn't that what you want? It's not quite rhetorical but we'll treat it as rhetorical. You don't have to answer out loud but I believe that to be true about you. I believe that that's what you want. What we find here in this Psalm is the path to be known for that is your lifelong testimony comes by one by one dealing with those difficult trials as they come and submitting in trust to whatever God brings to you in your life, and looking to him, and asking him to sustain you and help you through it all. And yes, sometimes it may seem to be crushing the very breath of life out of you because it is so hard and so grievous and so difficult, and you have that sense of pressure on you that sometimes makes it difficult to breathe.

Well, beloved, it's in that time where you most turn in trust to your refuge, your rock and your fortress, and that's what this psalmist has done. His faith was settled. His faith was not open for discussion. It wasn't open to negotiation. And it is that position of strength and that position of maturity that puts him in a position in this Psalm to ask for help in his difficulties and what you find in this Psalm, what you find from this psalmist is that he has thought deeply about the nature of God and the nature of life, as I will show you in just a moment. This Psalm opens up to us the reality that deep spiritual thinking is the key to having this kind of faith and deep spiritual thinking, beloved, does not come from always looking to have the most favorable circumstances that you can possibly have. We recognize that sometimes God brings trials into our life that are going to test us, that are going to sanctify us, that are going to purify us, that are going to expose sin in our heart, even. And through that we don't run, we don't hide. We submit to the trial and we let God do his work.

And what do we find as we do that? What do you find on the far end of that process? Well, you young people, you young adults, look, this is the testimony that you want to aim your life for. This is where you want to be 20, 30, 40 years from now, being a person who can say something like this that we find in verses 5 and 6 where the psalmist says, look at it there with me, he says,

5 For You are my hope; O Lord GOD, You are my confidence from my youth. 6 By You I have been sustained from my birth; You are He who took me from my mother's womb; My praise is continually of You.

Look at the perspective that he has on life and the way that he is thinking about life. He is thinking about more than this window of difficulty that he faces at the hands of his

enemies. He steps back, as I often do but I can't do it because I'm stuck to the pulpit mic tonight, he steps back from his problem and he looks at life from the big picture perspective, so much so that he recognizes that this God who is his God today, was God over his life when he was born. He is looking at life as a unit, as a complete big picture, and he looks back to his time of birth, he recognizes that God had sovereignly appointed him to be a man of God even at birth, and he says, "God, I look back and I see that even when I was born, you were there orchestrating my life and you were covering me and protecting me before I even knew it." That's the way to think. That's a right way for us to think, those of you that are Christians here today, to look back and recognize that even when you were first born, God had his hand on you. It's not that he suddenly took notice of you when you cried out to be saved. No, God has been sovereign over the whole thing not only to birth but extending back to Calvary and extending back into eternity past where the Scriptures tell us that he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

So with some of you, we have had this conversation in the past where you looked back and you recognized that even before you were a Christian, God was sovereignly directing and protecting you; protecting you from evil associations; protecting you from sin that would have wrecked your life; protecting you from death, even, when you were exposed to illness or an accident or a near miss in life. Well, how should we think about those things? How can we think biblically and spiritually about those things? We look at it this way and we say, "Oh, do you know what? Even before I was in Christ, God had his hand on me to protect me because God had it in his mind that he was going to work through my youth, work through my childhood, work through and bring me to a point where I would be his and I would one day be an established man of faith in Christ." So that we don't look back at the past and see it as a series of random events, rather we see the guiding hand of God through it all and recognize the surpassing supremacy of the sovereignty of our Savior; the surpassing greatness of his plan for us; the surpassing and comprehensive nature of his plan for our lives. Now stay with me here. When you have that perspective, do you know what it does when you have that perspective about all of life? Well, then that starts to inform the perspective that you have of your individual trials when they come up whether they be light or whether they be heavy. They say, "Ah, the God who guided me from birth is the God who has his hand on me here now, and maybe with a broken heart, maybe with tears streaming down my cheeks, but I'm going to look to him with a sense of confidence that he will be good to me and deliver me and help me just like he always has done."

That's how you develop into a mature person of faith and what he's doing here – I love this. I told you I love this Psalm. Look at verse 6 with me here. Well, let's go to verse 5 again. I know we have read them already but he says, "You are my confidence from my youth." He can look back with spiritual binoculars into the depth of his memory and look back at the earliest moments, the earliest memories of his young age, and he says, "You were my God back then." But he doesn't stop with his conscious memory, he looks beyond his conscious memory and says, "God, you were my God from birth. You were always my God." And what he means by that is that, "Lord, you were keeping me before I was even aware of it."

And that language reminds us of a similar, parallel but more familiar passage in Psalm 139. Why don't you turn there with me? Psalm 139, beginning in verse 13. Look how deeply the psalmists recognize the hand of God in their lives going back even to their conception and their time in their mother's womb. Verse 13 of Psalm 139,

13 ... You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb.
14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. 15 My frame
was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully
wrought in the depths of the earth; 16 Your eyes have seen my unformed
substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained
for me, When as yet there was not one of them.

"God, you have appointed my life. God, you formed me in my mother's womb. You have appointed the days in which I shall live. God, you are over it all." And we are to look at that and to see that we draw from that overall picture this sovereign care and sovereign love of God that informs our perspective as we go through day by day life. So he has a very rich and robust faith that he is expressing in what he says here.

Verse 7 and 8, going back to Psalm 71. Others have noticed this lifelong display of God's goodness to him. He says in verse 7,

7 I have become a marvel to many, For You are my strong refuge. 8 My
mouth is filled with Your praise And with Your glory all day long.

He says many have observed this. Now, that could be taken that it is a warning to the wicked. Some see it that way, some see it as he is making a statement that the faithful, the righteous, the ones who love his God also, have seen it and whatever the case may be as to who the audience of which he is speaking here is, here's the point: that God's provision for his life and his ongoing praise to this God have had a wide testimony. There has been an expansive audience to his testimony of God's faithfulness to him, and that extraordinary work calls for explanation. He says there in verse 7, "For You have been my strong refuge. I have become a marvel to many. Many have seen it. Why? Why this testimony? Because God, You have proven to be as strong refuge in my life." That sense of "For You" directs the attention away from his enemies and upward toward his God.

So what is he doing here as he talks about this testimony and expresses his faith in the midst of these difficulties? One commentator said it this way, he said, "He is looking to God to see through to a conclusion the work he began so long ago." Philippians 1:6, I often quote it off-the-cuff, says, "I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." Beloved, would you have a strong faith, would you have a sense of confident trust that would inform the sense in which you walk through trials in this life? Would you have that? Would you want that? I do. Well, here's the way that you think about it in part is that you look back and you say, "God, I recognize that you formed me in my mother's womb. I recognize that you have sustained me throughout even in my pre-conversion days. I recognize that throughout my

Christian life, I have gone through trials, the waves have covered me up, I have cried out for help, I have been cold and frustrated and awash in difficulties and wondered if I was ever going to survive and, God, each time as I look back, I see that your hand has brought me through again and again and again and again. And now God, now, having these seasoned eyes," now he looks at his present trial and says, "this is just one more example. I have seen this story before. God, we've sung this song before. This is not a new hymn from the hymnal. God, this is simply another instance where I am in difficulty and I have every reason to expect that you would deliver me like you have 100% of the times before." Right?

So he recognizes the work of God in his life and says, "God, I just expect you to complete it, to do what you have always done." And beloved, here right at that point, is where some of us really need to examine our hearts and think about what we're doing. Don't you understand, my friends, don't you understand that there comes a point where it is just settled and no longer up for discussion in your life, no longer up for debate in your heart, about whether God is going to be faithful to you or not. Maybe in your early days, your earliest days of your Christianity, and you struggle and you don't have any experience to draw on, you're not completely familiar with God's word and you don't know how it's going to come out and you wrestle with that, mature faith where we want to go from our weak faith to a strong robust faith, there comes a point where you say, "I am not going to open the question of whether God is faithful. That is not open for discussion. He is faithful. Period. End of Story. I don't know what's going to happen here but it's not a question about whether God is faithful to me or not. I do not allow that discussion to take place in my heart."

Do you have that kind of settled confidence? Have you come to that point of maturity that says, "This will no longer be open for discussion"? There are some things that we just don't go back and reopen. We don't go back and reopen whether Jesus is the only Savior of mankind. We don't go back and reopen whether his shed blood and righteousness are sufficient to pay for our sins and to reconcile us to a holy God. We don't debate those things as if there could be any other conclusion because there can't be. And watch out for those teachers who like to ask questions that would cast doubt on settled certainties of the faith and then they say, "Oh, but I was only asking a question." Well, there are times where the question itself is sinful if it is being asked in a way that casts doubt on established certainties of the faith. Well, in our hearts as we walk with God, there comes a point where we just say, "I'm not debating this anymore. I may be utterly confused, I may not know what is coming next, but one thing I know, one thing I know, great is thy faithfulness." And it's not that great may be your faithfulness, great was your faithfulness, great will be your faithfulness. Verb tenses matter. They really do. "God, great is thy faithfulness and my soul knows it very well and I'm going to stand there, come what may."

Well, this is the kind of faith that this seasoned saint is expressing, but despite his age and maturity, he's still in need. It's still a time of difficulty for him and so he says in verse 9,

9 Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails. 10 For my enemies have spoken against me; And those who watch for my life have consulted together, 11 Saying, "God has forsaken him; Pursue and seize him, for there is no one to deliver."

And what's happening here is this. Notice in verse 9 he's talking about this time of old age and his strength is starting to fail, and here's the situation for him as he's writing this, is that life in a physical way is catching up with him. He does not have the former vigor of his youth. His physical strength has diminished but he still has enemies, but he still has opposition, but he still has trials. This is why I expressed it like I did at the opening of our time together, is that here is a seasoned saint approaching the latter years, the sunset years of his life, and he sees his life and his strength starting to diminish and yet the enemies are still there, the trials are still there, and so he is living out the sense of expectation that I was alluding to earlier. You know, it's not always going to be easy. Difficulties are bound to come. Sorrows and disappointments are bound to come to us and the question is, we can't avoid them, we might postpone them but eventually they are going to catch up with us and the question is, what then? What then, beloved? What kind of man of God, what kind of woman of God are you going to be when that time comes for you? And what Psalm 71 beckons us to, what Psalm 71 lays before us as an aspiration of our heart, is to find that our trust can still be exercised and vindicated and proven rightly placed in those times.

Look at verse 12 and 13. He says,

12 O God, do not be far from me; O my God, hasten to my help! 13 Let those who are adversaries of my soul be ashamed and consumed; Let them be covered with reproach and dishonor, who seek to injure me.

So we see him in his time of need. He has prayed to God and asked for his help but he has done so from this perspective, he says, "God, your love has preceded me in this present trial. Your love has been a continual factor, a continual reality, an unbroken force for good in my life from the time I was born until now, and that love precedes this trial and, God, this love is going to endure beyond this trial." And that puts our problems in perspective. "God, you've always loved me. You've always been faithful. You were working in my life before I even belonged to you and you have promised that you are going to continue that work and perfect it until one day I stand before you face-to-face, made perfect, glorified, seeing Christ face-to-face, seeing my resurrected Lord and having been made like him. The early years of my life were an early down payment on that. That is the outcome. And God, here I am kind of in between on the other side of your early dispensations of love, still prior to the final consummation of it but, Lord, I get the picture. There is an unbroken cord of loyal love that runs through everything in my life and I cling to that cord as that which will sustain me now."

You should see something here. What you should see is that your theology and your knowledge of God matters. When you know God according to his revealed attributes as they are found in the 66 books of the Bible, when you know him like that, it makes a

difference in the way that you live. It makes a difference in your whole disposition toward life. When you know something of the love of Christ, when you have some kind of an appreciation for the fact that he stood at the cross in your place as your substitute, bearing wrath so that you might be forgiven and reconciled to a holy God, and that's who Christ is, you can rest in that even in your time of need, and when that is true, praise and trust become the controlling dynamic in your heart rather than fear and doubt.

You know, the Lord is gracious to us and overlooks what is sometimes our very weak faith. Sometimes our faltering, questioning, weak faith, and he is gracious to us in that weak faith and it does not diminish his faithfulness to us that our faith is weak in those times when that happens. But beloved, what I would have you to see is this: is that while, yes, the Lord is gracious to us in our times of weak faith, the idea is not for us to just accept that and let weak faith become the manner in which we live, but rather to grow in the knowledge of God, grow in our confidence, grow in our expressed trust in him so that your weak faith would become a strong faith and would become the kind of lasting testimony that this seasoned saint has expressed in Psalm 71. You see, it's not just about getting through life, it's about setting aspirations about the kind of spiritual person that you want to become; the kind of Christian that you want to be; the kind of life that you want to render in response to this great salvation that Christ has given to you. You say, "God, I want a faith that is worthy of the heights of your greatness even while I thank you for the times that you have sustained me and been faithful and gracious to me when it seems like doubt was the greater part of my faith." His time of need.

Well, let's move into the second section of this Psalm and take a quick look at his timeless praise. His timeless praise. So he has enemies around him. We've seen that. He has asked God in verse 13 to let them be ashamed and consumed and covered with reproach and dishonor, but now he pivots and in verse 14, he expresses this determination to praise God. Look at verse 14. He says,

14 But as for me,

He has set up a contrast. "Lord, I've talked about them, now Lord, I will give to you the response of my own heart."

14 But as for me, I will hope continually, And will praise You yet more and more. 15 My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness And of Your salvation all day long; For I do not know the sum of them. 16 I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD; I will make mention of Your righteousness, Yours alone.

And here he is, as it were, he is taking off into the headwinds of opposition and difficulty and sorrow, but what does it become? What does that resistance become except the wind under his wings that raises him up higher to praise God more and more. He says, "God, this is what my enemies are like. God, these are the people that are opposing me. I recognize they want my harm but as for me, I will not allow that to define my perspective. In the face of their opposition to me personally, God, I will praise you even

more. I will acknowledge your greatness even more. I will express my confidence in you all the more. The more that they push against me, Lord, I will push back not against them but in upraised hands to praise your name." Do you see it, beloved? Do you see how wonderful and beautiful this is? Do you see the triumph of the redeemed soul responding to God rather than its circumstances?

And there is a vertical commitment to it in verse 14. Look at this. I love this. I told you I love this Psalm. He says, "as for me, I will hope continually," and vertically speaking he says, "I will praise You yet more and more." Vertical dimension to it and yet there is a horizontal commitment that he is expressing as well in verse 15. He says, "My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness And of Your salvation all day long; For I do not know the sum of them. I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD; I will make mention of Your righteousness, Yours alone. Lord, when I am in the presence of men, I will declare Your faithfulness to them." Vertical, horizontal. "God, this opposition comes and what it's going to do is not make me collapse in fear and trembling and escape, rather Lord, what this is going to do, what the commitment of my heart is, is that I'm going to acknowledge you all the more to you in praise, to my fellow men in testimony." It's magnificent, isn't it? And this lifetime of God's faithfulness to him is now informing his proclamation. God is faithful to keep his promises and to show himself true to his servants.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, that should be the settled disposition of our heart, that there is this ever-expanding realm within your thought, within your priorities, within your perspective, that says, "I belong to this God. He is mine. I am his and he is mine, and what does this God do for me? Who is this God to me? I'll tell you who this God is to me, he is the God who is faithful to keep his promises and to show himself true to his servants. I will not serve the Lord my God with my life and have it shown to be vain in the end; that that was a wasted disposition of life. I will serve him and before it is manifested, I know in advance that he will vindicate and show that he was faithful to me, and that is not open for discussion. There is no doubt about the outcome about that," you say to yourself. And weak faith grows and becomes stronger faith as it is tested trial by trial and disappointment by disappointment and tear by tear. You look again and again and again and you say, "This seems overwhelming. I don't understand what's happening but I know this: God will show himself faithful to me in the end even if I don't see how. I don't have to understand. I don't have to see the outcome in order to be able to say that."

There were times in my early Christian life where I did not have that perspective. Life was challenging and sad and sorrowful and all that and maybe my memory is not good about those times about the people, the men who were speaking into my life with books and different things like that, but part of the reason that I preach like I do at times like this, is because I look back on those times of doubt and sorrow and coming within a mouse's mustache of apostasy from a human perspective, I look back and I wish so much that someone had spoken to me like I'm preaching to you now; to have called me to higher ground. "Don't dwell in all of the sorrow. Don't just collapse inside. Look at who God is. Look at his greatness. Don't try to figure everything out. First look to the sovereign majesty and the endless grace and love of Christ manifested at the cross and

put your trust in that even when you don't understand." I needed someone to come to me and speak to me that way because I needed someone to call me to higher ground.

Well, why do I preach like I do sometimes like this? It is because for some miserably defeated heart tonight, different times in my ministry, I just believe that there are people who need to hear that, "Leave behind your doubts and come to the higher ground of the character of God and you will find safety, security and peace and comfort there that you won't find any place else." That's why. It matters to me. I can't do anything else. I can't preach any other way, beloved. You see, this is what Scripture calls us to. This is what is true and I know by personal experience that this is right. It's not true because of my experience but I know in my own experience it has vindicated everything that Scripture has said about the faithfulness and goodness of God, and I can't diminish that, I can't qualify it, I can't sound it out less than what it is. He is great. He is good and he is worthy of your trust even now.

What we see as we go on in Psalms 71, is that that expectation is shaping the psalmist's life of faith. Look at verse 17, he says,

17 O God, You have taught me from my youth, And I still declare Your wondrous deeds.

You see, there is a sense of passage of time there. He looks back and says, "God, in my youth I was declaring your faithfulness and I'm still doing it today. And do you know why I can still do it today? It's because you have proven your faithfulness all along." He's approaching his sunset years, he may be in his sunset years, and in verse 18 he asks God for the strength to sustain him even then. He says in verse 18,

18 And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to all who are to come.

You know, he has a sense of unfinished business. He says, "God, I'm on the back end of life. I get that. Don't forsake me. Give me strength. Give me strength in this trial." He's not asking for that from a selfish perspective just because he wants to feel good about stuff. He says, "God, I need the strength to be able, I need you to give me a little bit more platform and the strength so that I could declare what I know to be true about you. I need to declare that to the next generation. I need to declare it to those who are coming up so that they would hear it too, and Lord, to give my voice over to that," that's what he's asking for, "I have to be able to tell it to the next generation. The next generation needs to know about your glory."

This is a theme in other parts of the Psalter. Look back at Psalm 22:30. It says,

30 Posterity will serve Him; It will be told of the Lord to the coming generation. 31 They will come and will declare His righteousness To a people who will be born, that He has performed it.

So you have the psalmist declaring it to the following generation that is alive at his time, and he has in mind that their time will come where they are declaring it to yet a future generation that's even yet to be born. He has this sense of a multi generational passing along of the testimony of the faithfulness of God to his people. In New Testament times, we would be thinking and talking about the glory of Christ in his death, burial and resurrection, declaring it to the next generation so that they would be declaring it to the generation to come after them. You see, there is this transcendent perspective that is animating everything that he says, looking back decades to the time of his birth. "God, you were faithful to me than. God, I see myself now. I trust you. I need your help. God, I need strength so that I can talk to these people that are coming up who are 20, 30, 40, 50 years behind me, and they need to be talking to the ones that are ahead of them." The richness, the depth of this is stunning. And you young people, your opportunity is to think now on the front end of life that, "That's what I want to do. I want to grow into the mature seasoned saint that I see writing this Psalm in Psalm 71, and I want my life to be given over so that people who are coming 30, 50 years after me are hearing the same great things that were told to me about this Christ and about his word." That's why we live. That's why we do what we do.

So the greatness of God and the transcendence of all of this commands his continued devotion. Look at verse 19. He's trusting even in the midst of his present depths. He says, verse 19,

19 For Your righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens, You who have done great things; O God, who is like You? 20 You who have shown me many troubles and distresses Will revive me again, And will bring me up again from the depths of the earth.

He says, "God, I've seen so much in my life, so many trials and distresses. You brought me through them all. I'm in one again, I know how this comes out. This is the same book, different chapter. You're going to deliver me again." And don't miss that great rhetorical question. There is so much good stuff in this Psalm. Look at verse 19 where he says, "O God, who is like You? God, the as no one like You." And this is a question that was asked repeatedly in the Old Testament in key places. In Exodus 15:11, you don't need to turn there, I'll just read it to you, but after God had delivered the people of Israel through the Red Sea and drowned the Egyptian army, in Exodus 15:11 in the song of Moses he said,

11 Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders?

He says, "God, who is a God like you?" There is no one. The answer is implied, "There is no one like you. You are alone in your glory. You are alone in your supremacy. You are alone in your faithfulness to your people. There is no one remotely like you." And in Micah 7:18, the prophet almost ends his book on that same question. Micah 7:18. Give me a moment to turn there. Micah 7:18, just after Jonah, says,

18 Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in unchanging love.

"God, who is a God like you that so freely forgives the sin of your people? That passes over them? That doesn't hold it against them? Who is a God like you that delights in the unchanging love that you show to us unworthy sinners, your unworthy people? God, who is like you? No one is like you."

So he says having known this God so well for so long, he asks God for comfort knowing that he will find a favorable ear for his request that he expresses in verse 21 of Psalm 71. Look at it with me. He says,

21 May You increase my greatness And turn to comfort me.

It seems as though he was a man of influence because he alludes to his greatness. "God, would you increase my position all the more so that I could declare your praise?" And in verse 22 he closes with musical praise. He says in verse 22,

22 I will also praise You with a harp, Even Your truth, O my God; To You I will sing praises with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel. 23 My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to You; And my soul, which You have redeemed.

He has come full circle. Having started with a cry for help in his distress, he has come full circle remembering the faithfulness of God through generations through his own life and now he comes and ends on this note of praise, and his praise contrasts with the future that awaits his enemies. He says in verse 24,

24 My tongue also will utter Your righteousness all day long; For they are ashamed, for they are humiliated who seek my hurt.

He speaks about it as so certain as if it had already happened. "This is what the outcome will be for those who seek to harm me when I belong to you."

So the Psalm comes full-circle. Look at verse 1 with me just for a moment. In verse 1 he opens up and he says, "In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge; Let me never be ashamed." And in verse 24, having begun by asking God to protect him from shame, he says, "God, I know that you will bring shame on my enemies." What he's saying is this, "God, I know that you will vindicate my trust in you. I know that it will be manifest that my trust in you was not in vain. It will be there and evident for all to see." And Derek Kidner says this, he says, "With his name cleared and his faith confirmed, this veteran can set his mind at rest and his fingers, lips and heart to the praise of God in the telling of this story."

How great, beloved, is the faithfulness of this God to his people? Can I remind you of what we say almost every single message that we preach? We've seen a lot more in the 3,000 years since this Psalm was written, 2,500-3,000 depending on who the unnamed author was. We stand on this side of the cross. We look back and we see that this God, this God of faithfulness, came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ, shed his blood as an atonement for sinners just like you and me; we've seen this God go to the grave, this God be resurrected, this God ascended into heaven in the person of Christ.

And think about it with me, beloved, I'm almost done here, think about it from the perspective which we spoke about earlier. Our Lord Jesus Christ did all of this for you before you were even born. So great was his love, so perfect were his intentions toward you that he accomplished everything necessary for your salvation before you were even born. You did not come to know that until a passage of time in your own life, but so great was his love and compassion and care for you that he had provided for everything before you were even born, and we step back and we say once more with Moses, we say it with Micah, we say it with this psalmist, "O Christ, who is a God like you?"

Let's bow together in prayer.

Lord, if you provided in that way for us before we were born, we know for certain that you will care for everything that pertains to our lives now that we are officially in your family, now that we belong to you. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress? Shall persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? Nay, but in all of these things we overwhelmingly conquer through him who loved us. God, bring us to that point where we rest fully in your sovereign love and your sovereign care for us, and our hearts echo with the praise of this seasoned saint that we have seen from Psalm 71. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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