

# TRINITY

BIBLE CHURCH DALLAS

The Sermon

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Psalm 44

"When Theology Doesn't Work"

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TRANSCRIPT

Will you open your Bible to Psalm 44? Psalm 44. The elders have asked there be some guest sermons when Dr. Lawson is away; and he's on a much-deserved vacation. So we're going to look at Psalm 44, a rich psalm that is in so many ways the book of Job in a song, and really resonates with, I think, the church's experience throughout the ages. And so, let me begin by just reading Psalm 44. And I think you'll find both familiar sentiment from your own heart and prayers and seasons of life, and you'll also find some familiar and precious truths. So let's look at Psalm 44 and read it.

It says, "For the choir director. A Maskil of the sons of Korah. O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us the work that Thou did in their days, in the days of old. Thou with Thine own hand didst drive out the nations, and Thou didst plant them. Thou didst afflict the peoples, and Thou didst spread them abroad. For by their own sword they did not possess the land, and their own arm did not save them, but Thy right hand and Thine arm and the light of Thy presence, for Thou didst favor them.

"Thou art my King, O God; command victories for Jacob. Through Thee we will push back our adversaries; through Thy name we will trample down those who rise up against us. For I will not trust in my bow, nor will my sword save me, but Thou hast saved us from our adversaries, and Thou hast

put to shame those who hate us. In God we have boasted all day long, and we will give thanks to Thy name forever. Selah.

"Yet Thou hast rejected us and brought us to dishonor, and dost not go out with our armies. Thou dost cause us to turn back from the adversary; and those who hate us have taken spoil for themselves. Thou dost give us a sheep, a sheep to be eaten and hast scattered us among the nations. Thou dost sell Thy people cheaply and hast not profited by their sale. Thou dost make us a reproach to our neighbors, a scoffing and a derision to those around us. Thou dost make us a byword among the nations, a laughing stock among the peoples. All day long my dishonor is before me and my humiliation has overwhelmed me because of the voice of him who reproaches and reviles, because of the presence of the enemy and the avenger.

"All this has come upon us, but we have not forgotten Thee, and we have not dealt falsely with Thy covenant. Our heart has not turned back, and our steps have not deviated from Thy way, yet Thou hast crushed us in a place of jackals and covered us with the shadow of death.

"If we had forgotten the name of our God or extended our hands to a strange god, would not God find this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart. But for Thy sake we are killed all day long; we are considered a sheep to be slaughtered. Arouse Thyself, why dost Thou sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not reject us forever. Why dost Thou hide Thy face and forget our affliction and our oppression? For our soul has sunk down into the dust; our body cleaves to the earth. Rise up, and be our help, and redeem us for the sake of Thy lovingkindness." This is the very word of the living God. May His Spirit apply it to our hearts even today.

"My God is so big, so strong, and so mighty, there's nothing my God cannot do," as the great hymn writer has said, or the VBS volunteer, right? "My God is so big, so strong, and so mighty, there's nothing my God cannot do for you." Yeah, good. It's the modern bridge. It's good, and it's true. We

rejoice in the omnipotence of our God, don't we? It's the most God-like thing about God is that He's strong and mighty and He can do anything.

That's what we praise about God. That's why we pray to God. It's God's absolute power and sovereignty and ability that makes us have a confidence in our lives and worship and petitions and prayers that we know our God is so big and so strong and so mighty that there is nothing our God cannot do. Amen? Except there are things that God cannot do.

A man by the name of Nick Tucker wrote an excellent, approachable, theological book called *12 Things God Can't Do and How They Help You Sleep at Night*. In the chapters, he looks at different aspects of theology and considers the godness of God and what God says about Himself and His inability. And we're already treading on unfamiliar and dangerous waters because we know that there's nothing that God cannot do. But he reminds us of realities that also because of who God is, we know there's things that are contrary to the nature of God.

He reminds us that God can't learn; and that's obvious because God knows everything. God can't be surprised because the past, the present, and the future are all under the auspices of His sovereignty and His eternal decree; and so God can't be surprised. We know that the Bible tells us that God cannot change His mind, and that God is unseen, and so God can't be seen; and there's things that God can't bear to look upon because of His perfect holiness. And God is immutable, so God can't change. And God is perfect in and of Himself, and so God cannot be lonely. And because He's God, He cannot suffer and He cannot die.

He can't be tempted. He can't lie. He can't disown Himself. And an exposition of what God cannot do has to take into account the reality of the incarnation, because our Lord, Jesus Christ, was God of very God. Yet He slept, and He suffered, and He learned, and He died. And within that is the mystery and the most difficult Christian doctrine, which is the incarnation. But to keep our theology proper in focus, we do have confidence that God can do anything, and it's that confidence and that theology that is put to the

test in Psalm 44, and it's that same theology that's put to the test in you and I's lives. In our lives, the test of what we believe about God is regularly and sometimes painfully put to the test.

Psalm 44 is a song that we don't know the exact historical circumstances of its composition. We see that it's a maschil, which there's a dozen of those or so in the Psalter, and that's a word related to wisdom; and wisdom in the Bible is related to skillful or godly living and chronicle the craftsmen that worked on the temple were remarkable because of their wisdom. And wisdom had to do with applied knowledge. It had to do with, in the Bible, a righteous applied knowledge, a godly applied knowledge.

And so whenever you're looking at wisdom, whether it's Proverbs or the book of Job or Solomon's Ecclesiastes, whatever the wisdom is in the Bible, you're looking at how godliness actually works out. And Psalm 44 is involved in in that working out. It's trying to figure out how our theology, a theology that believes in an omnipotent God and that has a handle on who God is in His character, what He can and will not do, because He can't violate His own name; a sound theology, a good theology, a biblical theology, how that works when it doesn't seem to work.

In other words, there is a time in the history of God's people, chronicled here in Psalm 44, but with examples of it all over the Bible where there is an apparent contradiction to the omnipotence of God. Our little song that is true always and forever, "Our God is so big, so strong, and so mighty, there's nothing that God cannot do," there seems to be times in the lives of individuals and of God's people where God is unable to help us, unable to rescue us; and we're so pressed down and surrounded and scorned and humiliated and reproached that the only thing we can say is it appears that God has turned against us. And whether this is because you individually are going through a strong trial or congregationally are experiencing significant sorrow and loss, there are seasons of life in the experience of God's people where the theology doesn't seem to be working.

And so I like how Dale Ralph Davis titles this psalm, and I don't think he'd mind if I borrowed it: "When Theology Doesn't Work. When Theology Doesn't Work." That's a good title for Psalm 44.

As Christians we love the truth of God's omnipotence. Passages all over the Bible like Isaiah 40 instill in our hearts and increasing confidence in the power of our God. We revel in the truth of God's absolute sovereignty. Psalm 115:3, "God is in heaven, He does whatever he pleases." We exalt in the reality of God's unbreakable covenant faith to His people that He cannot lie, therefore He will never break His word. But in the case of Psalm 44 and in the case of seasons of God's people's experiences, there's time when faith and faithfulness seem to go unrecognized and unrewarded. And that's what we're looking at in Psalm 44.

Psalm 44 is a journey, not of doubt, but a journey of faith. To follow the poem, the song of Psalm 44 is to be instructed in that *maschil* in wisdom. The sons of Korah had an experience much in line with this. I mean, their own family received the just judgment of God, and somehow the generations of Korah were able to become worshipers, not embittered, but they held on to their theology in spite of their difficult experiences. And may it be the same for us as we explore the contours of Psalm 44 and find out how to think when our theology isn't working as it were.

Robert Davidson commenting on this song, just to kind of get our minds around its overall message before we dive in and follow its progression, said this: "Whatever its original historical context, the psalm had continuing relevance in any situation where the religious community found itself facing events which it was powerless to prevent and for which it could find no rational or satisfactory theological explanation."

And so, dear Christian, you're not alone when you cannot find a rational or a theological explanation for the stew that you're in. And we've all been there. And if you're not there on this hot summer day, you'll be there someday. You'll be in a place where you do not have answers, you know who God is, you're willing to trust Him, you've confessed your sin, and

you've claimed innocence because of the forgiving power of the blood of Jesus, but you don't see your way out of it. It seems like your theology's not working. And I want you to know this is a common experience in the Bible. There's a whole book in the Bible about it, the book of Job. But Job ends without receiving an answer. Thankfully, God's people learned from time, from revelation, and mostly from the coming of Christ, that there is a way to follow this trajectory of faith. And that's exactly what we'll do in Psalm 44.

Psalm 44, you saw, has corporate language, right? It says, "We." Not corporate like Walmart, corporate like together, right, all of us. It's a song for God's people. It dips into the personal by saying in verse 6, "For I will not trust in my bow." But even its expressions of personal worship are reflective of its relationship to the people as a whole. It's a national song.

But a word of caution since we're in Merica, and Fourth of July is right around the corner, and I love the USA, this isn't a song about the upcoming election. This isn't a song about – you know, there's so many things I could say about this moment in our particular history. But I do think that there's a temptation for folks to try to make a parallel between the experiences of ancient Israel and our fine nation. And though those parallels may work at times, they're not in the Bible.

And this is not a song about national defeat when it comes to any country, this is a song that was likely composed when Israel lost a battle. The nation of Israel, God's covenant people, God's unique covenant people, had lost a battle. Or, they had been carried off into exile – a time of significant defeat, of significant trial. That's likely what's being described here as the affliction and exile and desolation of the people is described.

And so it's a corporate lament. Lots of laments, lots of mournful songs seeking for faith in the Psalter. There's less corporate laments; this is one of them. And as we follow its path of faith, I think there's five movements in this song that we'll look at big picture and quickly because I want to make it through all 26 verses. So let's just dive right in.

What do we do when our theology doesn't work? Well, watch this. Verses 1-3 is our first section, and I want to call it, "Past help. Past help." And these are familiar words, aren't they? Verse 1, "O God, with our ears we have heard, our fathers have recounted to us the work You worked in their days, in days long ago." It's an excellent start, isn't it, because it looks to the past, to the glorious past.

I have a friend who's much, much better at Hebrew than I am, which is like saying, "The Heidelbaughs are better at golf than I am." It's a gap. It's a significant gap. I can't measure it. So I have a colleague at the seminary who is a Semitic language guru, and he always takes a look at a psalm for me. We're working on a project together. And I'll send him a psalm I'm working on, and he'll give me just a page of insights right off the top of his head because I think he's AI.

So what he found most notable about this song is in this first section the author employs not just Hebrew, obviously, but ancient words, like an older form of Hebrew. Some of these words, like the word for "work" here is actually a Phoenician origin, an ancient language, older than the written version of Hebrew that the Bible's composed in. And so I find that notable because this is talking about the past.

As the psalmist sings about what happened in the olden days, he's using olden kind of words, and he says, "O God, with our ears, we have heard our fathers have recounted to us." And this is that Deuteronomy 6 transmission of the word and work of God in the past. It's what's happened in your families, and it's what's happened in God's people since the beginning. I mean, Adam and Eve had to painfully recount the story of their transgressions to their sons and daughters all throughout the history of God's revealing Himself to His people and the transmission of truth from generation to generation.

There are things that previous generations of God's people have experienced that they have passed on to the next generation. And it hasn't been an equal transmission because to experience something is different than to hear about something. But it's with that great spiritual legacy that God's people carry on the faith, remembering what's worked in the past, the work you worked in their days, in days long ago.

And so what's brought to mind is glorious history. And this is a good thing. This is why our Bibles have so much history in them. And if you have a proclivity to say, "I don't really like history," well, I bet that's different if it's history that has to do with you.

You ever been to the doctor and they have you fill out that form, and as soon as you fill it out, they apparently immediately shred it because you have to fill it out again the next time you go? It asks you about your mom and dad, "They got diabetes? Any history of scary stuff back there?" That history matters a little bit to you. You might even send a text to grandma because it's personal. We care about personal history because it affects us.

Well, that's why the Bible's so full of history, glorious history that reminds us of God's work and salvation and deliverance and provision for His people; history that is not just ancient, but relevant. It matters to us because God doesn't change. And so we recount some of that history in verse 2, "You, Your hand, drove out the nations and planted them. You crushed the peoples and made our fathers flourish."

The reference in verse 2 of "them being planted" is a reference to Israel. "The flourishings" are reference to Israel, to God's people. "The driving out the nations" is a reference to the pagan nations, the idolatrous nations that were displaced by God on behalf of His people. "The crushing of the people" is a reference to the enemies of God's people.

And so simultaneously, as he looks back through history, he remembers the great exodus. He remembers the conquering of the land in the book of



Joshua. Verse 3 says, "No," strongly. "No, it was not by their sword that they won the land." This isn't revisionist history, this isn't fake news, this is how it actually happened. The songwriters are not saying that "weren't our forefathers really good at war." Really good at war? They walked around Jericho seven times and played the harmonica and the thing fell down. I mean, that's not good at war. And he acknowledges that.

It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring their salvation or victory, "because it was Your right hand and your arm, O God, and the light of Your face," the presence of God. When you see the face of God in the Bible, it's not something you look upon, it's something that reminds you that He's toward you and for you. So the light of His face is divine favor, and that's why it says, "because You favored them at the end of verse 3.

And so he recounts in verses 1-3, past help, past help, glorious history, the faith of our fathers, "O God, our help in ages past." Joshua in his testimony in the olden days. God's omnipotence and deliverance from Abraham being sustained by God's power through the age of the patriarchs of Isaac and Jacob. And his takeaway is, "Only God could have done this." One wrong turn than Abraham could have been out, Moses could have been out, right, because they made tons of wrong turns. When you read the narrative, the history of God's people, they're hanging by a thread half the time. And you wonder like, "How did they get through all this?"

Well, the psalmist tells us in verse 3, "It wasn't because of their sword or their arm, it's because of God's power." They were slaves in Egypt, they had no way out of that thing, but God brought them out. They were wandering in the wilderness. They couldn't be sustained for an entire generation. But manna fell out of the sky. Nobody had like a great manna business plan that they came up with, this is God who did it.

The conquest, Joshua, the kingship, and those guys who were a mixed bag of devotion to Yahweh, going into exile – I mean, what people are taken out of their environs completely and drug 500 miles to Babylon and still

have a hope? Only God's people, who sustains 400 years of silence from their God and still maintains messianic hope; who watches their Lord and Messiah nailed to a cross and placed in a tomb and still thinks, "Yeah, it's going to be okay."

Well, only those who understand, "God did it all." No persons pulled this off, soli Deo gloria. That's why verse 3 is how we think about our spiritual history, all of it, "God did it." And that's the important starting point.

Where does this journey of faith go from here? Well, verses 4-8 speak of present trust. So if verses 1-3 are past help, verses 4-8 are, "Present trust. Present trust," or firm faith, a confession of faith in the here and now. So that was then what is now.

Verse 4, "You are my King, O God." This is the faith of the forefathers now made personal. "You are my King, O God; command full victory," or salvation is better. "Salvation," it's a plural of amplitude. "Command full salvation for Jacob." "Jacob" stands for the people of Israel.

Verse 5, "By You we will knock down our foes, push down our adversaries by Your name." Verse 5, "We will trample those who rise against us." And so the faith of the past is the faith of the present. The confidence of what God did in the past is active. No one here is going, "Well, God can't work anymore." They have every confidence that God can and still does work among His people as they trust in Him.

Verse 6, "Because it's not in my bow that I will trust, nor is it in my sword that will save me." This is so valuable. They're learning the lesson of the past, right? You don't see Jericho. You don't see the perseverance of Abraham, or you don't see the testimony of God's sufficiency in the lives of His people and go, "Well, I don't know if I can trust Him." I mean, you can lean on that. And that's exactly what's happening: "They didn't trust in their bow, so I'm not going to trust in my bow. Their sword didn't save them, so

my sword won't save me." It's not human ingenuity, it's not human strength, it's divine favor. That's what present faith looks like in expression, verse 6.

And then look down at verse 7, "Because You are committed to save us from our adversaries, and to put those who hate us to shame."

Verse 8, "In God we have boasted all the day, and to Your name forever we will give thanks, or praise. Selah." "Selah" is that pause word, probably a musical notation. And I like the author who says it means, "What do you think about that?"

Just pause and say, "What do you think about that?" Well, what you think about it, I hope, is there's continuity from the past to the present in our faith. There's continuity – continuity of testimony, continuity in the confession of faith that you believe the same thing your forefathers believed, the same thing your great-grandparents believed about Christ, the same thing that the apostles preached and believed, the same thing that the patriarchs held onto. Your vision clearer because of the revelation of Christ; but what was theirs becomes ours. The faith of our fathers becomes my faith.

This is why what's happening around here in these rooms surrounding is so important. That's why Vacation Bible School matters to God. It's Deuteronomy 6, leave doubt. That's why I'm grateful for youth pastors who spoke into my life when I was a knuckle-headed teenager, before I was a knuckle-headed, middle-aged person; and they knocked sense into me, and they helped me see how to make my faith my own.

You see, you can't live on the faith of your fathers, but you can possess the faith of your fathers and make it your own. That's that generational transmission that God desires to take place, and it happens both in the family and in the covenant people of God, it happens in the church. And so, "In God, we've boasted all the day, and to Your name forever we'll give praise," verse 8 says.

What was historical becomes contemporary. Lessons are learned. Faith is walked. Truth is presently articulated and confessed. You see, it can't stay in the past frozen and codified, it must be enacted and engaged in. And that's why for those of you here who are younger, you need to think of this church not as your parents' church, but as your church. And when you think about the future of this church, you need to have a sense of responsibility for your faith, for the continuity of worship with God, because the truth we confess isn't just ancient words, it's modern reality. You come to see this as you see the stabilizing faith of God's people trusting in Him from age to age the same, right, from age to age the same.

Isn't this a lovely Psalm, until it's not, verse 9. We've got past help, present trust, verses 9-16, "Perplexing plight," or just a sorry state, or what we call disaster. Verse 9, "Yet," that word needs to be there. Verse 9, "Yet You have cast us off so that You brought us to shame, and You do not go out with our armies."

After confessing the faith of the fathers and possessing the faith of the fathers, the songwriter looks at reality all around him and he sees bloody and beaten saints. He sees sneering armies. He sees retreat, battle losses. And this is Yahweh's army that's getting beat up. And he acknowledges the only reason that Yahweh's army could lose is if Yahweh pulled back, right? You can't beat the God who's strong and mighty unless the God who's strong and mighty lets you get beat; and these guys got beat. "You don't go out with our armies."

Verse 10, "You make us turn backward from our foes, our adversaries; those who hate us plunder us. You gave us up like sheep to be eaten, devoured." I mean, what contrast is verse 11 with Psalm 23 where we are God's flock under His perfect protection and care, that we are well-regarded by God under His providence, under His love. How? How do we go from the Lamb of God's regard and concern and protection to the chopping block?

Verse 11, "Among the nations You scattered us." I don't think there's just one defeat in mind, which is, honestly, kind of helpful because it makes this psalm so useful throughout the many chapters where God's people receive the boots. They just get beat down, and it happens over and over again. And it is a real discontinuity, isn't it? If we are God's people, then why doesn't everything go well for us? But they're sheep to be devoured.

Verse 12, "You sell Your people at no cost, You gain nothing from their market sale." This is a bad deal. A bad deal for God means a bad deal for God's people. And know that they're not trying to get out from under the reality of the sovereignty of God here. "Look, if you are in the stew, it's because God put you in the stew." I mean, that's basic biblical theology that there is nothing outside of the auspices of God's sovereign plan, that nothing comes into your life that has not passed first through His fingers.

The meticulous sovereignty of God is a reality, not just when you sell your house for more than you were asking for; it's when you take the loss. The meticulous sovereignty of God is not yours to claim only when the doctor says, "Tests are clear, see you in a couple years." The meticulous sovereignty of God is yours when He says, "We're going to need more tests and scans, and this is going to be the hardest year of your life." God's still on His throne, and the psalmist recognizes that.

There's a lot of blame happening here, but I don't think it's sinful blame; it's an acknowledgement that God is the one who's cast them off. If they're cast off, it's because God has cast them off. If their army loses, it's because He didn't go out with them. If they are running backwards, it's because He's made them turn. If they are hated and plundered, it's because God gave them up like sheep to be devoured among the nations. They were scattered not by foreign armies, but ultimately scattered by God.

Verse 13, "You make us an object of reproach to our neighbors, a thing of mockery and disdain to those around us." And this is a common argument God's people use, isn't it, because if you're in the stew, if somebody's putting the boots to you, if you're the one getting hung out to dry and

you've got that name of God on your lapel, "I'm a Christian. I'm a devoted follower of Jesus. I serve the true and living God," then everybody's going, "Yeesh, that's what happens to people who serve the true and living God?"

You see, we're associated with Him. And so when we take the L, by all appearances, He takes the L, right? L is what young people ten years ago called the loss. They say something else now, no cap. I don't know what that means or how to use it.

But what happens to you is associated with your God. "You make us a byword among the nations," - verse 14 - "the peoples shake their heads at us. " They go, "Look at Israel now, God's people. Ha! Look at Israel now, the covenant people of the Creator of the universe, and they're on the wrong side of the Kebar River, Babylon.

Verse 15, "I live in disgrace all day long. My face is covered with shame at the taunts of those who reproach and revile me." I mean, this whole section is a record scratch. It's the gears grinding. It's a storm cloud forming. Verse 9 saying, "Yet," says a whole lot.

Look at verse 7a, "Because You are committed to save us from our adversaries." See it? "Because You're committed to save us from our adversaries, our foes." Now put it right next to 9, first line. "Yet you have cast us off so that You brought us to shame."

This turned quickly, didn't it? But so did Job's life - a man of unparalleled piety and well-deserved prosperity who undergoes a barrage of suffering, and it remains inexplicable to the suffering for the entirety of his life. The book of Job doesn't end with God giving Job answers that articulate, "Why did this happen to a righteous man?" It's a catalog of friends getting it wrong, and then God saying, "No matter what, He's right." God is right. And the only evidence He gives Job is the world that He made.

What's powerful and profound about seasons of suffering is that they reorient our lives and test our theology. And what they're intended to show us, that faith survives loss or it's not really faith. Faith holds onto God. But there's something about belief that's unbelievable because God is proving that His worth is never dependent on our circumstances. And there are times when what we believe about God, what the true and biblical and right theology we have, does not line up with our experiences, and your option there is to keep on believing or to switch theology.

And switching theology is not on the table in Psalm 44. It recognizes that God is still God, even in our suffering. And the implication is going to be that suffering is a holy gift from God, but that doesn't change the puzzled bewilderment that we face. And so he moves to the next chapter. The next section is called, "Pleading innocence. Pleading, pleading, innocence."

We've moved from past victory to a defeat, disaster, to disgrace, and to despair. And verse 17, like Job did repeatedly for 42 chapters, claims innocence. And that may sound to our ears inappropriate because we all know that deep down, we are big fat sinners – some of us more big fat than others, and present company included. But it's hard, isn't it, to think about the sovereignty of God and divine judgment and say, "I'm completely innocent."

Job did because he was. And he wasn't saying he was sinless, because we can never say that. But we can say, "Look, I'm all confessed up here. I'm not hiding anything. I'm walking in integrity. I am covered with the blood of Christ." I mean, we, even more than them, have occasion and reason to say, "I believe I'm fully and freely forgiven." And that's exactly what the psalmist says.

"All this has come upon us," – verse 17 – "though we have not forgotten You, nor have we played false with Your covenant. Our heart has not backslidden," – verse 18 – "nor have our steps turned aside from Your path, but You have crushed us in the place that jackals and covered us with deep darkness."

What's happening? They haven't forgotten God. They haven't neglected God. They haven't betrayed God. They haven't walked away from God, verse 18. They haven't turned from obeying His ordinances, they're on His path. I mean, this is that reminder that the New Testament repeatedly makes when it addresses suffering, is some people suffer because of wrong things they've done. Right? And this is a different kind of discipline. This is the *paideia* of Hebrews 12, the discipline, the chastisement. This is the basic biblical theological principle: play stupid games, win stupid prizes, right? Like, you do dumb stuff. You might taste dumb stuff. Okay? It comes back at you. That's just operating principles of the world.

What the psalmist is saying is "our army's lost not because we're idolatrous, not because we neglected God, not because it was sin in the camp, but because God chose to crush us." Verse 20, "If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a strange god, well, they deserve to lose," right? And it would have been clear, verse 21, "Would not God search this out since He knows the secrets of the heart?" And here's the crux of the Psalm. Here's the main issue here in verse 22, "No." In other words, "No, it was none of these things. It is for your sake, or on your account, we have been killed all day long. We've been counted as sheep for slaughter."

Verses 17-21, he pleads innocence. He understands that there's covenantal curses, that there's causality. If you do the wrong thing, you could be subject to God's punishment. And so some suffering can be quite easily explained.

But that's not what's happening here. There's no easy explanation. We've held onto the truth. We've held onto right theology. We've walked with God. "But for Your sake, apparently, we've been killed all day long, counted as sheep for slaughter."

Derek Kidner says, "This is a revolutionary thought, a revolutionary thought." Verse 22 is a revolutionary thought: "For Your sake, we have



been killed all day long. We have been counted as sheep for slaughter." Kidner continues, "That suffering – this is the revolutionary thought – that suffering might be a battle scar rather than a punishment, the price of loyalty in a world which is at war with God. If this is so, a reverse or a defeat as well as a victory may be a sign of fellowship with Him, not alienation." Did you catch that?

I'm going to say it again. "The revolutionary thought" – applied in verse 22 – "is this, that suffering might be a battle scar rather than a punishment, that the price of loyalty in a world which is at war with God; and if this is so, a reverse as well as a victory may be a sign of fellowship with Him, not of alienation."

And dear Christian, this is where we hold tighter to our theology, tighter to our belief in the mighty strength and salvation of God, and we dare not let it go. We understand that the reason that we are in a season of difficulty as a people of God, a season of persecution, a season of death or sorrow or loss is because a good and holy and sovereign God has deemed it good and holy and according to His sovereignty that we be in such a season. And this drives us closer to God, not further from Him.

When it appears that He's hiding His face, remember His presence, the favor and welcome of Yahweh. When we can't see His face, it's when we must draw all the closer. Corrie Ten Boom went through so many sufferings. And remember what she said, "There's no pit so deep that He is not deeper still. No pit so deep that he's not deeper still."

And so this trajectory going through the season of despair finds itself in a wonderful resolution in verses 23-25. This is called, "Powerful prayer." If 17-22 is pleading innocence, 23-25 is a powerful prayer. And here it is, verse 23, "Awake." What a prayer. "Why do You sleep, O Lord? Wake up. Do not cast us off forever."

Remember the scriptures are clear, "God does not sleep or slumber, He watches over Israel." This was enacted in the boat on the lake in Mark chapter four, wasn't it, acted out in the Gospels where Jesus was conked out on a cushion, and the storm was coming over the edges of the boat, and the disciples had to wake God up because they thought he was going to die, they were going to die. I'm throwing stuff, I didn't mean that, that's just illustration. It's a storm, water came off the boat, it's a whole deal.

"Why do you sleep, O Lord?" The disciples said it to Jesus like this: "Do You not care that we are perishing?" It's the same prayer, isn't it? "Do You not care that we're perishing? Wake up, do not cast us off forever." And in this prayer we find petition, and we find assurance, and we find help, because divine sleep is only the way things appear.

Jesus could sleep all day, and guess what is maintained? His sovereignty over winds and waves. And that's the mystery of the incarnation because God doesn't sleep. And you see the way things appear are not the way things really are. I'm not saying confess your way out of this positively: "Well, I'm not suffering, I'm not at all. By power of positive confession, I feel great and I'm happy." That's not, that's changing your theology.

Be honest, you're in the weeds. But that same honesty finds a plea to ask for God's help in the present and continue into the future: "Don't cast us off forever," verse 23. It asks God hard questions because He can handle them. "Why do You hide Your face?" verse 24. "Why do You forget our miseries and oppression?"

Verse 25, "We are brought down to the dust." This is reality. "Our bodies cling to the ground," and it closes with these words of absolute confidence hanging on to what's most true about God: "Rise up and help us, redeem us, rescue us, redeem us because on account of Your loyal love." The very last word in Hebrew of this song, same as in your English translation, is *cheched*. It's translated "lovingkindness" usually. It's a combination of affection and commitment. It's covenant loyalty and it's love, and it's the word that most describes God in the Psalms.

They have every confidence that this season will find a conclusion, that they will be redeemed and rescued. Why? Well, not because of our strength, but because of God's loyal love, His steadfast love, His *cheched*. That's the final word of this song. And do you know how the New Testament translates to how the church read this song? Go in your Bibles to Romans chapter 8. We're going to prepare to take the Lord's Supper with this thought.

Go in your Bibles to Romans chapter 8. The New Testament church read Psalm 44 and they saw themselves in it. They saw Psalm 44 as a foreshadowing of the persecution of the earliest Christians. And the apostle Paul under divine inspiration employed Psalm 44 to diagnose the situation that God's people in the new covenant found themselves in, and he diagnoses their situation not as defeat and dejection ultimately, but as victory.

Romans 8:36, "As it is written, 'For Your sake, we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'" Those words are from Psalm 44, aren't they? And after all of the suffering that is described in light of future glory in Romans chapter 8, "What shall separate us from the love of Christ, hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword," the apostle Paul under inspiration of the spirit pulls in the message of Psalm 44 to remind the people that their ultimate diagnosis in their troubles is not defeat and dejection, but ultimate and final and unseen victory. When Paul read Psalm 44, it wasn't like persecution stopped, it was that he centered these people on the *cheched* of God as seen in its fullest expression in the coming and the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Psalm 44 and the truth that we just learned is not an obscure relic from Israel, but a powerful prayer for God's people in every single age, because continuity is found in that same God revealed to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. The same God who split the Red Sea is the same God who brought atonement for us. The same God who defeated sin and death and fear and the sameness is found in that final word: *cheched*.

The basis for God's people when we are at our lowest is to know at our core that God still loves us and that His love and salvation will never leave us. And so the final word in the face of despair and suffering is the love of God in Christ, that in suffering, we will find salvation; and these are not contradictions, this is the reality of God's people from age to age the same. Every difficulty will be found to prove the love of God, if not in this life, in the life to come.

And that's the hope of the apostle Paul. If it wasn't true, the cross would have no meaning, because the greatest suffering and the greatest evil that ever occurred in this world is the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. No one has ever been more innocent, no one has ever been more pure, no one has ever been more approved by God. But He faced the very wrath of God for us; and that's why we take this Supper together. And before we do, let me pray.

[Prayer] Father, thank You for the bread and the cup most suitable for us to take in in light of the reality of divine judgment. The greatest example of that is on the cross of Christ. [End]