

Psalm 77: The Infirmary of Self-Proclamation

Tyler Velin | July 14, 2013

We are looking at Psalm 77 today, if you have your Bibles you can turn there. My primary job here is to preach and lead Grizzly Christian Fellowship, which is our college aged ministry.

Earlier this March we took a men's retreat over into Idaho and the 15 guys who were on the trip read through a little book called "Thoughts for Young Men," by a guy named J.C. Ryle. If you have breath in your lungs, you should read this book.

As we were working through this book together one of the big themes that Ryle seems to hammer on for young men is that of thoughtlessness. How often it is that the people of God stroll thoughtlessly through life. I can't help but think of James' illustration of a wave tossed about by the sea, our thoughts have little resolve to them, our thoughts take little effort, our thoughts are consumeristic where we expect to be fed, entertained and we wish to leave with a gluttonous overflow of satisfaction with little to no work on our end.

"Don't think,' whispers Satan; he knows that an unconverted heart is like a dishonest businessman's financial records, they will not bear close inspection. 'Consider your ways,' says the Word of God, stop and think, consider and be wise."

Psalm 77 (written by Asaph) will challenge us by causing us to think about what occupies our minds in the times of trouble. What thoughts, hollow as they may be, do you cling to when the day of trouble is upon you?

Pray

This Psalm is broken up into three themes that we will look at as we work through it. The first is **The Crushing Weight of a Troubled Heart**

Ps 77:1-3

This is a very bleak picture that is being painted here by Asaph the Psalmist. The reality for us in church today is that some of us hear this Psalm and it resonates with us. We have been in this day of trouble. We have felt the crushing weight of our surroundings and felt like there is no relief for the weary.

Look at how emphatic he opens this Psalm: I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me.

By repeating that phrase, "aloud to God," Asaph is showing us the depth of his trouble. This isn't a silent mutter, this isn't a flare prayer, this is not only a passionate and audible plea to the Lord, but it is also a physical plea. He can't stop thinking about his discomfort and his trouble his mind is occupied with this thought of trouble and his desire for help.

Look back at Verse **2 and 3**

In the day of trouble he seeks the Lord, in the night his hand is stretched out without wearying....He wants to be relieved he wants to be consoled, he wants God to reach down and solve his problems.

And yet, despite his best pleas for relief, the great irony of this Psalm, “my soul refuses to be comforted, When I remember God, I moan, when I meditate, my spirit faints.”

Now I say that everyone has felt the emotions of Asaph here, because even if you have not been to one to cry aloud to God, all of us at some point have struggled at finding comfort in God.

Did you see that subtle reality in Asaph’s dark night? We would think that the solution to his immediate distress would be solved by crying out to God. He seems to be doing everything right. He isn’t running from God, he isn’t drinking away his sorrow, he isn’t friending away his sorrow, he is appealing to God to deal with this tumult, this rough night, and by appealing to God he finds himself even more discomforted.

Owen, my son is 9 months old. And it scares me to look at him because I see myself. There are some days, where he is just resolved to be frustrated with everything. He’s just a little hardened baby sinner. But I remember when I was growing up, if I didn’t get my way, or if I was having a bad day, “my soul refused to be comforted.”

I remember distinctly a couple times where I had to work at maintaining my level of upsetness. I would become troubled, or frustrated, and I would hold on to that. For hours after it, I would be saying to myself, “look miserable, don’t you dare find enjoyment in this.” Even in marriage, I remember one occasion where, Sarah had done something, and in my fragile sinner state, it irritated me, and hours later when Sarah asked me what was wrong, I said, “I just feel like being in a bad mood.”

I think that is why Asaph is troubled in this Psalm, he is so troubled, that he wants to stay troubled, and when he looks at God and his goodness, it makes him more troubled because he knows he shouldn’t be troubled.

You see that a little in the book of Job, when Job invites his friends to come to him, he really doesn’t want to be comforted, he just wants someone to be upset with him. Misery loves company. The problem is that God doesn’t allow us to wallow in self-pity. When you look to God, your heart will be changed. It is a dangerous thing for someone who wants to stay the same to turn their gaze to God. **2 Cor 3:18** speaks of change as simply seeing God. This is exhausting for Asaph.

I think what Asaph is talking about here, and what I have experienced, is the difference between being comforted, and finding comfort. Asaph wants to be comforted. He wants God to reach down and solve his problem immediately.

And sometimes God does that. Our God is merciful and abounding in steadfast love. He does bring immediate relief to tough situations, but other times he doesn’t. What then?

This brings us to part 2: **The Search of the Troubled Heart, Ps 77:4-9**

I love the tone of this passage. Because sometimes as we mentioned before, God reaches down and puts his own healing hand on our situations, and sometimes rather than giving us comfort through the removal of our trouble, he teaches us to find comfort in the midst of our troubles.

For the Christian God will not let you wallow in your trouble. He will not let your sinful soul seek to waste away in a “woe-is-me” attitude. God takes the apathetic eyes of the soul and he holds them open.

God forces you to look at your life through his eyes. Even in this Asaph is troubled. So troubled that he cannot speak. That is because when God holds your eyes open you see who he is, and you see who you are. When God holds your eyes open you see the goodness of God, and the depth of your own sin, and this can be a troubling reality.

This is where we learn to find comfort. This is where we cannot afford to be thoughtless. Look at the language of Asaph: “I consider, Let me remember, let me meditate, made a search.” It is no thoughtless and empty way in which the Psalmist chose to look at God, instead, the Psalm is showing that it takes work to force yourself to see your life through the lens of God. This week go back and look at Psalm 27, and see how many times David says that he is going to seek God. I will seek you, I will seek your face, seeking takes work, but work produces a result. And when you begin to work at seeing God, then you begin to ask yourself these common questions? (verses 7-8). The answer Asaph is going to give to these rhetorical questions is a resounding “No.”

We see his answer worked out in Part 3: **The Hope of a Troubled Soul**

Psalm 77:10-12

For those of you who are reading along in a King James Version of the Bible, you will see that in verse 10, it doesn't say “Then I said, I will appeal to this years.” It says “Then I said, this is my infirmity the years of his right hand.” You see for a Christian we need to catch the good disease of appealing to God's track record.

The Psalmist is sick, in a good way, in that in the time of trouble he cannot help but thoughtfully appealing to what God has done in the past.

I want to read verse 13-20 and I want you (kids especially) to see if you can identify the Psalmists example of hope, and the along with that the two reasons for hope in times of trouble.

13-20

What event is Asaph alluding to in this Psalm? The Exodus. And no matter what current condition you are in, you are probably not worse off than the Israelites in Egypt. Your two year olds are not being massacred, you are not being forced into slave labor, or women are not being take for Pharaoh's harem. In fact the Israelites were so distressed in Egypt that when God appeals to Moses to go and get them, he says that “the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them” (Ex 3).

Asaph is rejoicing here because God does bring deliverance. That is what his infirmity of preaching to himself is

bringing to him. He sees that God does not forsake his people, that God is a God of deliverance that whatever the weight of suffering, that no matter the duration of trial God delivers his people.

I love Asaph's retelling of this. Because in verse one we hear him repeating weight of his troubles, but in 16 he is repeating the weight of God's salvation like a giddy school boy. "When the waters saw you O God, when the waters saw you they were afraid."

Asaph reflects on God's former deliverance and he finds comfort in his current state. Specifically he finds comfort in two things of God: **vs 13**.

The way of God is holy. Depending upon your translation it could say the way of God is in the sanctuary. What the Psalmist is saying here is that the way of God is entirely of God. It is holy, it is sanctified, which means to be set apart for something special. God's way of salvation is something entirely foreign to us. It is altogether different both in substance and in execution.

The second place Asaph finds comfort is in **vs 19-20**

Just one quick note here, simply because our motto is to engage the nations with the treasure of Jesus, and also to destroy coffee mug Christianity. If you look at verse 19, you will see God leaves no footprints. Let it be known, God doesn't leave footprints in the sand, he leaves chasms in the sea. God doesn't carry you when you get sleepy from walking, he delivers you when you are in danger of dying.

And that way of salvation, is the way of the sea. This is what Asaph finds hope in: the path of God is in the sea. Now have you ever tried to follow a path in the sea? Even if it is the wake of a boat, unless you can see that boat, that wake can be carried away by the waves and your path can easily be lost. The sea is not a safe place for clear paths.

But: **vs 20**

God led his people through the sea by the way of Moses and Aaron, the leaders of Israel. Like a shepherd leads his sheep, so God led his people through his choice leaders.

Now, is the point of this Psalm, that in your day of trouble, you should look back at the Exodus and take heart that God is a God of deliverance? Yes. Absolutely.

But to preach this passage Christianly, we have to look at the greater context of this Psalm.

Because what if I told you that the exodus was a dress rehearsal for a greater liberation. What if I told you that the way of God, that holy and set apart mode of salvation, that salvation that God keeps in his sanctuary, has been revealed to us in a total sense?

What if I told you that the true shepherd had revealed himself to us? What if I told you that someone greater than Moses has come to stand as a way point in the waves?

Thousands of years after the exodus, another man came on the scene. In **John 14:6 we read this**.

Millennia after the Lord shepherded Israel out of Egypt, Jesus said in **John 10:11**.

After years of Jewish officials waiting for another prophet of the caliber of Moses, the author of Hebrews tells us in **Hebrews 3:3-6**

You see for us on this side of the cross. The key to finding comfort amidst the troubles of our lives is to preach the gospel to ourselves daily. The most important thing for us to focus on is not our troubles, it is not the story of the Exodus, it is the story of a Savior who came and died for our sins, and in him we have salvation.

We fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith who for the joy set before him endured the cross. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace.

Church be a people who have a passionate infirmity of preaching yourself out of a spiritual slump. Be like Asaph who took the bitter pill of gazing at the deliverance of God, killed his own sorrow, and rose to worship in spirit and in truth.

Often times we can become frustrated and sorrow filled because we cannot see the path that lies before us. That is the burden of having a path laid on the sea, it is sometime hard to follow and even harder to see. And in the day of trouble it may be hard to see the trail, but it is then that we look up to see the trail blazer. Christ is our guide and our hope, a thoughtful Christian makes great effort to seek him in trouble and bathe in the comfort of the cross. Not only will you be delivered either in this life or in the life to come, but as a Christian you have been delivered find comfort in that. When we dwell on our greatest deliverance, our current problems tend to fade. That's of utmost importance.

For those in here who cannot yet see our True Shepherd, I pray that the Holy Spirit holds your eyes open to see the beauty of God's deliverance through Christ. I pray that the scales fall off your eyes and that the soul which refuses to be comforted takes up the yoke of Christ.

Church we never have to walk alone, but we must be willing to walk forward. In the day of trouble we gaze at the deliverance of God, and work to restore our worship.