

Psalm 77

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] okay so i think in the summer you've been looking at psalms is that right you're looking at different psalms okay so uh we're going to continue that this morning for a little while looking at psalm 77 now it might not be what you kind of expected for us to read this morning it's kind of a depressing psalm in some ways but i'll try not to be depressing uh because it's also one thing we can say about the bible uh as god's living word is it's hugely realistic and it doesn't mess about and give us a wrong picture of what life is like and what uh what our faith is like probably maybe more importantly because i think we're all aware and i don't know a lot of your circumstances today but a lot of us uh for for a lot of us life can be quite difficult can be very hard some uh for more than others for sure and sometimes i think as christians we can give the impression that uh we've got it all sussed and that everything's okay sometimes we even think that we come to become christians so that god will give us exactly what we want um and that you'll give us an easy life that sometimes maybe our thinking deep down and maybe we're in danger sometimes as believers when we share the gospel with other people of giving the impression that that's what will happen when they become christians that uh everything will be sorted you're friends with god now and your life will go swimmingly from this uh point on come to jesus and all your troubles will be over i know that's a bit naive and maybe we don't say that but maybe sometimes we think it and we hope for that in our own lives but that certainly isn't the bible message and isn't the reality that we find in our own lives and it's important for us as christians or if you're considering christianity that you think about what the bible says and what god says to us what christ says to us when depression hits or when we can't sense god's presence that he feels far away we rely a lot on feelings and sometimes god feels really far away from us miles away he's not answering our prayers he seems to be uncaring maybe we get a bad diagnosis or a loved one passes away or just bad things are happening in our lives and we think well where is god in this what's the point of being a christian if my life really just the same as it was before and it's certainly not what i expected so i think it's important to um hear what god says in something like a psalm like this whether you're a christian or whether you're examining the faith and looking into the idea of christianity it's really a significant passage because if we don't deal with these issues and when difficulties or struggles or doubts or suffering happens in our lives we can do one of several one of several things i think one week if we're christians we can despair and you can turn your back on god and he's going back to just being coping on your own i don't need god i've survived this long without him uh it's been uh a roller coaster ride i'm just going to go back to being on my own and you forget about your life of faith you go back to singing drunken songs in the pub again or whatever is the equivalent and yet suffering and despair remain your companions or as a christian you can be dishonest and you can just sing if you're happy and you know it clap your hands you know as if everything's all right i'm supposed to be full of joy and happiness even in suffering right i'll just smile and i'll go through it but inside you're dying because it doesn't seem real and it doesn't seem a proper response to what you're going through it's slaps that almost so it's just a smile uh covering what's going on side or i think what god wants us to do as believers is to learn a different song in suffering from god's words learn how to sing a different song when you're going through trouble and difficulty and heartache and when we understand who god is and understand who christ is it does change the way we see things and it should change the way that we live even in suffering and difficulty and doubt and struggle and the great thing about the psalms sometimes we ignore them but the psalms are great because they give us a vocabulary for dealing with suffering they give us the words and the expressions and the freedom to go to god in our difficulties and our struggling and help us to cope with them in a way that he recognizes and allows us to do so we're going to look briefly at psalm 77 what a psalm this is a great psalm it's a brilliant psalm it's a lament a lament and i think it's good for us to sing laments now and again we're

not we're not we like singing praise songs and that's great and that's important but it's i think in the right context it's a good thing to be able to sing sad songs you know the world in which we live there's a lot of sad songs because that's life isn't it you know the greatest songs come from places like manchester and glasgow and inner cities where there's struggle and battle and some of these greatest songs are are welded out of sadness and out of grief but this is a god breathed song this is god's living word to us and he wants us to know it and it's come through the poet asaph we don't know why he's thinking the way he is we don't know his situation that he that caused him to write this psalm and that's probably quite a good thing because it generalizes it for us all but he was struggling big time as a believer as someone who had put his faith in god and it's a cry for help to the living god it's gutsy it's honest it's not a sing along a smile kind of song it's quite tough and quite difficult and in the struggles and the battles he has he doesn't quote scripture and say all things well that's because it wasn't written then but if it was all things work together for good to love the lord he is giving us here from god a template of where to go in our suffering and our struggles and our doubts where to go in our sorrow and it's it's massive and it's it's a way that's open to us all and if you're not a believer in jesus christ i would encourage you just to think through this and think through what what is your answer to these battles and struggles and difficulties that we face in life um and indeed in death so the first nine verses i'm not going to go through it verse by verse you'll be glad to know but the first nine verses really uh are asaph's cry for help he's crying out to god it's a prayer really and that's the right place to go that's that's the first and most important thing he goes he faces god and he goes to god and there's no messing with him he's not coming in with a lot of nice phrases and uh biblical quotes he just he says how are you today god no spiritual platitudes at all he just comes straight in there because he's absolutely desperate i cried out to god for help i cried to god to hear me and the first 12 the first nine verses are quite self-centered not in a wrong way but they are 12 times he says i i cried i cried i remembered i meditated i was too troubled i thought i remembered it's all he's pouring out his own thinking and his own heart he's explaining his circumstances to god now god knows our circumstances but he wants us also to cry out before him uh and his hand has got this picture of his hand outstretched in the darkness of night he can't sleep he can't get any rest and he's he's wanting to cry out to god and he has lots of troubled thoughts verses three to five he says i remember i remember better days remember when my christian my faith in god was good and strong when i sang songs in the night and now he just can't sleep he can't think he's in despair his mind's an overdrive you know that's what it's like it's for us sometimes things are really bad we can't sleep our minds are an overdrive and he's aware of that and it's all spinning around in his head and then he comes to verses seven and nine with some davis stating questions to his god who is a savior am i rejected do i have your favor do i know your loving kindness where's your promises gone where's your mercy where's your compassion are you angry with it's tremendously honest because he senses that his relationship with god is broken he thought that he was one who trusted in god but it seems that the relationship is broken he says god i remember i remember what was between us have you forgotten he said he says that to god have you forgotten god and he's asking these questions you know that's a great thing the sam there's 170 sams in the question 170 questions even in the sams questions are a good thing and they're a good thing to bring to god and they're a good thing to ask together you know in a young church like this people come in and they may be examining christianity or looking at it or being interested in it they've got lots of questions don't discourage that encourage it more questions the better that's how we learn so much when we're asking questions and no question's stupid enough to ask no question's too stupid to ask questions for for you know it's so important to just feel free to ask any questions that you might have about the gospel so there's a cry for help and then in the second half which quite often happens in the psalms there's a change of mindset and he moves away kind of from himself towards the god uh his savior that he is praying crying out to and kind of verses 10 to 12 which are the middle of the psalm are actually the middle of the psalm they're the hub of the psalm they're the core of the psalm the turning point really then i thought and i meditated that i thought i said this i will appeal the years of the most high stretched out his right hand i'll remember the deeds of the lord yeah i'll remember the miracles of long ago i will consider all your works and meditate on your mighty deeds he remembers he's got an outstretched hand to god towards heaven pleading with god and he's remembering god's outstretched arm to his people uh in the old testament when he saved them and it goes on to explain where he said it's the story of the exodus where he took the people from slavery in egypt god's people who were enslaved in egypt and brought them into the promised land and he took them through uh the waters remember that great

story of uh taking them through the red sea in a marvelous act of miracle and power and strength and that's really what he's remembering his redeeming god his saving god who by his powerful hand saved the israelites it did seem if you go back to that story in exodus it did seem that all was lost they'd escaped out of egypt they were right at the they had nowhere to go they were right at the edge of the water it was a deep loch we would say in scotland they had no way through it and pharaoh and his army was pounding down to chase them and they could see the dust of the chariots nowhere to go and they cried out and moses tapped and the seas parted in that incredible act of salvation and it's like he uh he almost exaggerate well he doesn't exaggerate the story but um he says things in verses 16 to 19 that we don't get in the actual exodus story he talks about well he talks about the water saw you in the ride the very deeps were convulsed uh the clouds poured out water then he says there's thunder and lightning and a whirlwind and the earth trembled and quake he makes it almost maybe these they probably did happen actually but they're not recorded for us and yet he is probably as it came through uh people's story of what happened the amazing power and glory of the god and in exodus 14 when the people were standing there and it seemed like there was no hope for them and they cried out in despair god says uh oh what through moses he says fear not stand firm see the salvation of the lord there was an inescapable escape escape route provided for them his ways were not their ways and asaph's remembering that in the darkness because he's thinking he's wanting to hear that again that i i don't understand what's happening but god's ways are not my ways and i was still called to trust in him and that triggered for him meditation on god's character you know verses 13 and 14 your ways god are holy what god is as great as our god you're a god who performs miracles and so on he's holy he's great and he's caring an incomparable god and then interestingly right at the end he says you led your people like a flock by the hand of moses and and there's that reminder that his god and that amazing story was just like a shepherd he was leading them he was taking them even though they couldn't see the way even though there was darkness even though there was opposition even though they thought all was lost uh as they put their trust in him god took them through miraculously and didn't leave them on their own so that's the psalm uh it's a great psalm but why is that relevant for us today why is it relevant for us as christians or why would it be relevant for you if you're thinking about the christian faith and wondering what it is to be a christian because we've all got struggles i'm full of doubt at different times full of battles full of difficulties in dealing with god who's so different from me how do we deal with it how do we deal with what's happening in our lives with what we believe about god's love and about being a father and about caring and about his grace and salvation you know we're not super heroes in our lives we don't we don't just rattle through life without any difficulties we need this language of lament we need to be able to sing this in our lives and understand the process that we're to go through when we're struggling and battling and how we come through that on the other side and if you're not a believer and you have this great struggles and difficulties and even a sense of guilt through troubles and difficulties in your life listen to these words of c.s lewis which i think are really good he says we can ignore even pleasure but pain insists upon being attended to god whispers to us in our pleasures he speaks in our conscience but he shouts in our pains it's his megaphone to rouse a deaf world

so sometimes he will bring difficulties into our lives to waken us up to spiritual realities because the evil one will blind us to think everything's fine we'll just go on like we've always gone on and life's just happening and then we'll die and that'll be it and bang sometimes he wants to just shake us out of that because it's so dangerous and so unhelpful so just a couple of things as we close come towards the close that we can learn as believers and even if you're not a christian that you can think about in response to your life and in response to god the first is honest prayer honest prayer if this psalm is anything it's an honest prayer see asaph isn't holding anything he's not pulling his punches it's a desperately honest prayer he's accusing god of things he is questioning god he's expressing the darkness in his own heart don't turn your back on god and grumble elsewhere grumble to his face speak to him honestly because he knows anyway he knows anyway be honest and for that portion of your prayer be self-centered express the eyes that you're struggling with the difficulties the me's the questions the doubts the insecurities uh the lack the the the fear with identity all these kind of things express them bring them out to god but don't don't just stay there learn from the psalm work from where he goes with it but he knows these things he knows our questions our anger our struggle fear our fear our sadness but tell them anyway he wants us to do he wants us to tell them anyway i think so much of our prayer life as christians can be really trivial um skin deep uh asking for just petty things really santa claus things in many ways and it's not it's not getting into the

very heart and the the very reality of who we are and the real battles that we have there's a we're called to be emotionally honest before god not to be hypocrites in any way not to put on a show not to quote scripture to him as if you know we're saying i'm really i've got it together but he wants us to be honest helpless in need of his grace that's what the gospel is that's what becoming a christian is saying i'm helpless i can't save myself i can't make my way i can't i'm not even i can't even uh meet my own standards of goodness and my own standards of perfection i've constantly fallen short how am i possibly going to meet gods when i stand before him impossible i need him and that's what jesus has come to do isn't it to be the savior for us that we can't be for ourselves and he offers us himself so that's a great thing we need his grace so honest prayer and the second thing is deliberate meditation really you know that middle verse then i thought or i meditated and that's what he did he thought and meditated not not meditating the emptying of your mind but rather thinking of god as god has revealed himself now for for asap it was in the exodus story how god saved his people but that was just pointing forward to a greater redemption to a greater exodus to a greater salvation and that's what we're called to do we're to think of what that means for us personally as christians the day he saved us we remember that we remember the difference it made but more importantly we think of his character and what he's done and when you're struggling the best [20:16] place to go is the cross always the cross historically it's real historically jesus died and he rose again and then to go to his claims and to remember that redemption that he worked with do you remember the story you might if you know the bible if you don't you might not know it but near the end of jesus life there was a time when he was on the mountaintop with mooses and with elijah and we're told in luke's gospel that they discussed his departure that is the same word as exodus and his god is linking or jesus there is linking the writers linking what happened in the old testament to what jesus was about to do he was about to shed his blood on the cross and remember the story in exodus when all the doorposts were covered with the blood of the sacrifice the angel of death looked over them and so it is with us when we're covered in the blood of christ then the judgment of god will never touch us and we're called to recognize that and recognize that our sin separates us from him and it recognized that he has dealt with that in jesus christ and then we remember his promises as as asap was doing here i'm just going to close with this last wee bit i don't know if you noticed that i've skimmed through it so if i haven't mentioned it so far but i actually think it's a really brilliant and important little verse verse 19 he said you your path led through the sea your way through the mighty waters though your footprints were not seen now that's a great little verse i don't know how many of you've got a picture on your wall of a beach with one set of footprints on it and it's called footprints in the sand and it says these are the times that god carried you because there's only one set of footprints there's not two well it's even worse than that there's times when we can't even see god's footprints and when we don't know but nonetheless we're told that he led them through the sea even though they couldn't see it and i think in your struggles and your battles and your difficulties there will be times you don't see god's footprint in the sand you can't see him at all but we're still called to trust and believe in him because he is there and you know the interesting thing is he finishes although he can't see his footprints he says you led your people like a flock by the hand of mooses and aaron and i think what asap is and what god is saying to us there is sometimes we can't see god but sometimes we rely on the people he sends the people around us like for the israelites it was mooses and aaron and it was by their hand that god worked now that's why church is so important that's why the gospel community is so important because sometimes we can't see god's hand but often he uses fellow christians to can to help us to lead us to guide us god works through them to reveal what he is doing so often we kind of think ah can't we bother with the church or when we're struggling the last person i want to see is another christian and the last place i want to go is church actually these are the times when you've actually got to battle through you can't see god's footprints life is just disastrous and that may well be the time where he'll lead you by the hand through another christian and pull you through because that's what he chooses to do because we're part of his body and we all come together so i look forward to the days when there's hundreds of people here in winchborough leading one another by the right hand because god is working through them because god is in that midst and that's why i pray for me and i pray for winchborough and i pray for wherever you are in jesus christ so i think the only path through suffering is to know that god's there as we put our trust in him

he's already proven it by suffering in our place on the cross and rising again he can't do anymore he can't love us anymore whatever we're going through he'll pull us and take us home he will i was

moved when we were singing that song um and i can't remember it now but it's the one where he says uh it's sam 23 i think i will lead you home uh that's that's powerful isn't it i will lead you that's the one thing that is deep deep deep in all our hearts our longing for hope and he says i'll take you home i will take you home and that's to be with him both in this life and for eternity so i hope that that is both an encouragement and a challenge to us today in our battles our struggles our doubts our suffering our difficulties let's just bow our heads in prayer thank him for his word father we thank you for your word we thank you for its relevance for this reality that it doesn't soft soap trouble and difficulties it doesn't ignore it it doesn't uh um pretend that this it isn't real but we're given language and we're given a vocabulary to deal with our suffering before you we cry out in helplessness and need and we remember what you've done in jesus christ and we entrust ourselves to you and to your people so continue with us we ask and pray as we sing our our parting praise item together in jesus name amen oh my god the the