

I've been given the job of carrying on our series looking in the Psalms, and today is a very interesting psalm; and it's Psalm 77. It's not a psalm that's particularly well known. Crispin asked me earlier on, he had to look it up because it's not like the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm where we kind of all know it and we're all aware of it. So, it's a psalm, but it's a psalm that as I've studied it and as I've listened to other people preaching about it, I've realised that it's actually a very, very, important psalm. So before further ado, let's turn to God's word, let's read Psalm 77, and see what it says.

[Reading: Psalms 77:1-20] Amen

Like a lot of psalms, this psalm has got different parts: it's got four main parts. Before I get into that, it's worth noting: we don't know who wrote this psalm. Now, with some of the psalms, particularly the psalms of David, we can tell that they were a particular point in David's life, and we knew what was going on, and so we can kind of relate the psalm to that. We can't do that with this one; we don't know when it was written, we don't know who wrote it, it's just a psalm that we have. But it's a very beautiful psalm – as we go on you'll see why.

We don't know what despair this person was going through. But we can tell from this psalm that it was a very, very deep and serious despair. Whether he'd had, or this person had had, a major bereavement (the loss of a spouse or a child, or whether they had lost a parent) we don't know. In today's world that can translate as being made redundant and thinking, or unemployed and thinking, how am I going to survive, how am I going to feed the family, how am I going to pay the mortgage and the bills.

Whatever it was, it was an ongoing despair – he was in the absolute depths of despair. The kind of despair where you can't sleep at night, and the kind of depths where you can't really talk properly about it – it envelopes you, it encloses you, so tightly.

And to make matters worse, God seemed to have disappeared. This person was crying out again and again to God, but God was nowhere to be seen. And I think a lot of Christians go through this where I can't seem to reach God.

You know, in previous times, when there were new Christians (or, you know, in other times in their life they'd been really close to God) their prayer life's great, everything's fine and God seems to be really near, and then you go through periods, "The Dark Soul of the night", where God is just not, or just doesn't seem to be there – he seems to be a million miles away, doesn't seem to be listening, and you try to connect and you can't: you can't connect with God; you've got this deep despair and you can't connect with God.

It's the kind of despair, the kind of situation, where I've certainly known in my Christian life for people to have actually lost their faith at this point, and one of the things I was reading – that's what he was suggesting – this person in this psalm was losing their faith. There were losing their faith: was God really there? Did God really exist? Doubt! You know, if I've been following a false god all the time, something that wasn't real.

I can remember years ago, in my much younger life, a woman who lost her husband – they were a couple, they were I guess their mid 50s – and her husband sadly developed cancer, and despite the doctor's best efforts he died. And she was devastated – absolutely devastated – and she lost her faith. She stopped going to church, she stopped believing: she lost her faith. And you may

have known people who've been in that situation through your lifetime.

It's documented that people have lost faith when they've been through these really traumatic situations and they say God "Why did you allowed this?" "If there was a God, why did he allow this to happen?" "Why did he allow my husband to die?" "Why did he allow my child to die?" "Why did he allow my parents to die?" "Why did they go through so much suffering?" "Why did he allow me to lose my job so that I can't feed and support my family?"

And we all go through periods like that where we can't seem to quite reach God - he seems to have taken a bit holiday somewhere, and gone away somewhere. And you might ask "Well, why does God do that?" "Why does he do that?" "Why is he not with us all the time?" But, of course, if you're a parent, you can start to understand why: If you give into your child's every little whim, it doesn't bring them up to be a strong and balanced human being. It might even be very bad for them. If you give in every time your child, your toddler, wants sweets - "I want sweets, I want sweets mummy, I want; give me more sweets".

Well, if you gave them all the sweets they want, they wouldn't be healthy individuals - they wouldn't grow up to be healthy individuals. And we know now the problems of child obesity - and that's one of society's problems at the moment: all these children were child obesity. So a good parent will restrain their child and say "no, you're not having sweets," and a parent may not answer a child as soon as they call, so that they learn people don't always centre themselves around you, so that child can grow as a balanced, and not a spoilt, child. But it builds our faith up as well, because sometimes, you know, we just have to know God is there. He might not be answering us, but he's there.

And then we come to verses 11 and 12, and this is a really important verse here because it's sort of is the turning point: I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago." You see, one of the problems when we go into this Deep despair, is that it's us. Me. I've lost. I've lost my job. I've lost whatever... Now don't get me wrong at this point: I am not saying, and never will say, that if somebody has gone through a major bereavement, or lost their job, I'm not trivialising it - it is important you go through the proper stages of mourning for your well-being, and I'm not saying you should not mourn.

I'm not saying that at all - it's really important that if you lose someone very close that you do take time out, that you do go through that mourning process. It's very important. But what we tend to do is we centre it all around us: poor me; I've lost whoever; I've lost my job and God's not complying to me.

What is psalmist is saying here, is he flipped it around, and instead of thinking of himself, or herself (as we don't know who wrote this psalm), they start to think of God and they put God in the centre. And they start to think of what God has done. And they start to think of the miracles that God is already done. They start to think of the miracles, what God has already done for them. And they start to realise that God actually hasn't abandoned them, he hasn't changed, he hasn't disappeared, he's there - he might not be answering but he's there - and we can look in the scripture and see what a powerful God he is, because some of the miracles that are talked about later on in this psalm, we as mankind, even with all our science and engineering and knowledge, still can't do.

And one of the things that's talked about later on, is the crossing of the Red Sea when the Hebrews, when they came out of Egypt, they were in a pretty tight spot: they couldn't go forward because the Red Sea was in the way; they didn't have time to go around the Red Sea because the

Egyptians were after them; and they could go back because the Egyptians were after them – they were in a pretty tight spot. And they thought God had deserted them: “what we going to do now? You know, what are you going to do now?” So God parted the Red Sea for them.

God was there – he parted the Red Sea and they went through the Red Sea. I know they had 40 years before they got into the promised land, they had all the shenanigans that they went through (that's for another day), but God was with them, he performed that miracle, and that will always be there; God was there for them. Wasn't there straight away: they had to get out of out of Egypt first, but God was there.

And if you're in those depths and depths and depths of despair, we can call on God; he may not answer immediately, he may not seem to be there, but he is the unchanging, almighty God who doesn't change. He's always there, he's always steadfast. Always there, even though it feels as if he isn't, as if it feels as if he's not helping in this situation, “what am I going to do?” He's there for us. And we can take great comfort from knowing that, that even if we are going through the dark night, the soul of the night, where he just doesn't seem to be there, in great distress, that God is there. He might be silently there, but he is there.

We go to the very end of the psalm, to verse 20, and verse 20 says: “You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.” And of course, that's almost referring to them as a shepherd. When this psalm was originally written in the Old Testament times, they only had people like Aaron and Moses to fall back on, because Christ hadn't come back to earth then. Well, he was there – we know he was there at the foundations of the earth. We know that Jesus is God, but for the people of the Old Testament they didn't know Jesus, because he hadn't come back to earth, he hadn't revealed himself like he has now.

And so, of course, we have our Shepherd – we have the Shepherd, the Lord Jesus. And Lord Jesus will always care for us. We have the biggest miracle of all history to remember when we are in those depths of despair: Jesus died for us; he died and he was raised for us. We will always be able to cling to that: he will never let us go, he will always be the Shepherd that will be there for us, who will lead us, who will look after us, who will care for us.

Before I finish, if you want to go into this psalm a bit more at home, then I urge you to go and listen to a person called Ray Stedman, who in 1967 shows the agelessness of God's Word, because just as it was relevant way back (55 years ago), it's just as well for us today, and it will be for future generations. And it just shows the agelessness of God's Word. But Ray Stedman, back in '67 – 1967 – he preached on this very psalm; he had 4 Sundays though, so he was able to go into a lot more detail than I could (I think you all want to get back and get your dinner), so I had to précis it a little bit more. But if you do want to go into a bit more detail, if you google Ray Stedman (I can give you the spelling afterwards) Psalm 77, and you'll find those sermons.

Only slight little thing I will say is, in one of them I think they're perhaps a little bit “un-PC” about a certain group of people than we would be today, but you're talking about 55 years ago here, so it might be a tiny tad old-fashioned, but it's a wonderful sermons and they really, really, do make sense. So that's if you want to go further into this psalm.

But I just want to leave you with this: God endures forever, he will not leave you; even though he seems to be a million miles away, he isn't, he's there with you, you're his sheep and like a good shepherd he will never leave you.

Amen