

Remember God's Faithfulness

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, I'm going to share just very briefly. Thank you everyone for sharing those testimonies, spontaneously or prepared. When I hear those, I think of Isaiah 43, which is that when you pass through the waters, not if you pass through the waters, when you pass through the waters, you will not drown.

When you pass through the fire, you will not be burnt. The flames will not consume you. Rather, Lord your God and the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. And it's amazing how what Gary was saying so often in the midst of life's challenges, that's actually when we experience God's faithfulness the most.

So this morning, we're going to look at Psalm 77. And I want to help us just think about this transition period between 2018 and 2019.

Maybe for some of us, we come to the end of 2018 and you're so grateful that in two days' time, you can write 2018 off your calendar forever. For some of us, maybe, Lorna, you're waving an agreement.

For some of us, maybe it's been a year of ill health. Maybe you've been sick or some of your family has been constantly sick. Maybe for some of us, work has been challenging. Many late nights, demanding bosses.

[1 : 1 5] Maybe for some of us this year, money has been tight. Work's been slow. You haven't had enough work. Maybe you've had to rely on the kindness of family and friends. Maybe for some of us, school has been hard work.

Teenagers, high schoolers, you've been grinding it out, studying for exams, preparing for college. For some of us, maybe there's been relational tension. Maybe marriage has been hard.

You've swept things under the carpet for years, and this year those things have surfaced, and it's been difficult. Or maybe you were in a relationship, and you were hoping it was going to go one way, and it's worked out another way.

For some of us, we've grappled with our sexuality. What does it mean to honor God with our sexuality, even as we're attracted to people of the same gender as us? Maybe for some of us, we've wanted to have children, and God doesn't seem to be giving us children just yet.

And so this is how the psalmist starts. Look at verse 1 of Psalm 77. He says here, Except for the psalmist, his crying out to God isn't a place of comfort, because as he cries out to God and as he meditates on the Scriptures, that's even difficult for him to do.

[2 : 2 7] Look at what he says in verse 3. He says, He says, Coming to church, singing the songs, reading the Scriptures is hard work.

It's difficult. It's painful for him. And the reason is because he feels like, God, where are you? You've walked out the building and you've disappeared on me. You've got to admire his honesty and his vulnerability, right?

Friends, maybe for some of us, 2018 hasn't been such a bad year, but 2019 will be a difficult year. Maybe some of us, we will lose our jobs. Maybe some of us, we will lose a loved one, or we'll get diagnosed with a terminal disease.

For some of us, maybe 2019 will carry challenges that we haven't experienced yet. And when these things happen, the temptation is often to throw our hands in the air, or to shake our fists at the heavens, and to agree with our culture, and say, Where are you, God?

I thought you were supposed to be good. Why have you left me like this? Or maybe, maybe we respond differently. Maybe we just quietly, discreetly slip out of the building, Hope that no one, least of all God, notices as our hearts grow harder and colder towards him.

[3 : 49] And so the question is, what do we do as one year closes and another year begins? What do we do in these transition periods? What do we do when life hasn't been easy, or there have been challenges?

What do we do as we look forward to 2019 and all that it holds? Well, Psalm 77 is going to give us two things. The psalmist calls us to fix our eyes on two things.

Firstly, to remember God's track record of faithfulness, and secondly, to remember God's great acts of salvation. Remember God's track record of faithfulness, and to remember God's great acts of salvation.

So look at the first one. Remember the years of God's faithfulness. Look at verse 9 with me. The psalmist says this, Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion forever?

Then I said, I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High God. I will remember the deeds of the Lord. Yes, I will remember your wonders of old.

[4 : 54] Friends, as we go into this new year, where should we fix our eyes? Where should we look? How should we think about 2019? Well, as followers of Jesus, those of us that are followers of Jesus, we have the unique privilege of looking back upon years, and years, and years of God's track record of faithfulness.

We have years of looking back at the right hand of the Most High God, when He carried us, even when it seemed like He wasn't there. When He carried us, when we were unaware of His hands, and His involvement in our lives.

Friends, those of us that are Christians, we can call to mind the times when God carried us, even though at the time it felt like He had abandoned us. But years later, as we look back upon those times, we saw that His hand was there.

Just like Sam was saying, 4 a.m. in the hospital ward, emergency, God, where are you? Why haven't you made this labor go smoothly? Only to look back and say, God, your hand was involved in every detail of the journey.

And friends, this is the great privilege as Christians that we have. We recall those times when it seemed like God was nowhere to be found, only to later discover that He was guiding our steps every step of the way.

[6 : 07] How many of us have prayed passionate prayers, or cried out to God with tears? And at the time, it felt like God was answering our prayer with a resounding no. And we felt like, God, why have you abandoned us?

And then years later, we realized God's ways were so much wiser than our ways. He knew what He was doing all along. I'm about to finish a biography of Martin Lloyd-Jones, one of the greatest preachers of the last century, this amazing Welsh preacher.

And on his deathbed, he was dying of cancer at about 81, 82 years old. He was a medical doctor before he became a pastor. And so he knew what was happening to his body.

And he's coming to the end of his life. And he says these amazing words to Ian Murray. He says, when I went to Wales as a young man, if anyone had told me I was going to do what I have done, I would have told them they were mad.

I had completely different plans for my life. There's only one explanation. The guiding hand of the sovereign God. It is an utter astonishment to me.

[7 : 11] Friends, this is the privilege that those of us that are Christians have. We see that our lives on the hands of the sovereign God. And this is why it's so good to hear those stories and testimonies and be reminded, because sometimes when we're going through the mill, we feel like, God, where are you?

And then we hear the stories of friends around us. And it reminds us our lives on the hands of God's sovereignty. That as we look back, our lives are not just a series of events, but a story which the sovereign God has weaved together by his will.

And so this is what the psalmist is calling us to do. And so as we go into 2019, we don't just approach this new year as a blank canvas of opportunities. We actually remember that our lives are a book of stories, of God's hand writing every detail along the way.

And so 2019 is not just a canvas of opportunities. It's one more chapter in the story that God has been writing in your life, in my life, and our lives together. Has God forgotten to be gracious?

Has he in anger shut up his compassion? This is what I will appeal to, to the years of his right hand of the most high God. I will remember the deeds of the Lord.

[8 : 22] Yes, I will remember your wonders of old. That's the first thing. The second thing the psalmist calls us to do as we approach this new year is to remember God's acts of salvation.

Look at verse 14 and 16 with me. He says here, You are the God who works wonders. You have made known your might amongst your people. With your arm, you redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph.

When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid. Indeed, the deep waters trembled. Now, what's he referring to when he talks about your signs and wonders of old?

Any idea? He's referring to the signs and wonders in Egypt. The plagues that God did as he set his people free. So God's people are in slavery to the Egyptians, and God brings these signs and wonders that causes Pharaoh to release his hand and set God's people free.

Okay? The plagues which demonstrated God's sovereign power over all kings and leaders. And then what's he referring to when he talks about the waters which were afraid of God and trembled?

[9 : 32] Any ideas? The Red Sea. That's right. So remember, God's people in Egypt, they're set free. Pharaoh eventually says, okay, you can go.

And they leave Egypt, and they're celebrating, and they're rejoicing. But not long after that, they come to the Red Sea. And so, they're in trouble. There's a sea in front of them. They can't cross it.

And they can't go south, because there's more sea below them. And so, as they turn around to say, let's go find another way, they hear in the distance the armies of Egypt coming to them. Pharaoh's changed his mind, and he sends his armies after them to go and bring them back and to attack them.

And so, they've got the sea in front of them, the sea below them, and the army above them and behind them. And they're absolutely cornered, and they've got nowhere to go. And so, their situation is absolutely hopeless.

They are dead meat. They are sitting ducks, waiting for the army to come and corner them, and to destroy them. They've got no hope. There's a sea in front of them, an army behind them.

[10 : 35] Until, until God, by his sovereignty, opens the sea, and they cross over on dry ground, and God delivers them. God saves them, without them even lifting a single finger of their own deliverance.

They didn't pick up one sword, one shield, didn't do anything. They were in a helpless situation, and God, by his sovereignty, passed the Red Sea, and he saves his people.

God, who works all things together, for the good of those who love him, and trust him, and call on his name. In the midst of difficulty, in the midst of turmoil, in the midst of not knowing what our future is going to hold, or how things are going to pan out, this psalmist calls us to lift our eyes off of the situation around us, to lift our eyes to the sovereign God, and to remember his great acts of salvation.

He reminds himself that when God's people were utterly lost, utterly hopeless, God rescued them, and he saved them of his own initiative, without them doing a single thing, simply because he loved them, and because he had made a promise to be their God, and not to abandon them.

And friends, do we not have a far more dramatic, far more vivid picture of God's salvation, and God's acts of deliverance of us, that when we were absolutely hopeless, when we had no way of saving ourselves, when we were absolutely cornered, God sent his son, to die on the cross for us.

[12 : 06] And on the cross, he cries out, Father, forgive them, they know not what they do. And God saved us, without us lifting a single finger, not because of anything we had done, but simply because he loves us, and because he had made a promise to be our God.

Romans chapter 8, says it like this, If God is for us, who can be against us? For if he did not spare his own son, how much more will he not with him, graciously give us all things?

Now when he says all things, he's not talking about a Lamborghini, or a house in the Bahamas, okay? He's talking about all things that we need, for life, and godliness.

Friends, if Jesus Christ, could die on the cross, and breathe life into my soul, into your soul, when we were dead in our sins, if Jesus Christ, could make my heart, which was bent in on itself, turn, and start to love him, do I not think, he can take care of my family?

If Jesus Christ, could save me from hell, do I not think he could look after my children, and my needs going forward? And so this is what the psalmist says, remember the years of God's faithfulness, and remember his great acts of salvation.

Except, verse 19, ends off with a warning, and look at this warning. The warning says, your way was through the sea, your path was through the great waters.

[13 : 33] It is true that, God is our great shepherd, and he leads us beside still waters, and green pastures, that's true, but he also leads us through the sea sometimes. He also leads us through the waters.

He doesn't always lead us to green pastures, sometimes he leads us through the fire, but his promise is that he'll be with us in the fire, he doesn't abandon us. But then look at the last line, he says, yet your footprints were unseen.

And that's the great warning. That we trust God, even when we cannot see him. Trust God, even when his ways seem hidden, or his fingerprints are unseen. Because there will be times, friends, when we don't know where God is.

There will be times when it seems like God has left the building. There will be times when it seems like God is saying, walk through the sea, and we won't know where his footprints or his fingerprints are. And yet God's promise is this.

When the waters rise up, I will not abandon you. When the flames come close, you will not be burned. For I, the sovereign Lord, am with you, your Savior. Friends, I don't know what 2019 holds, and you don't know what it holds either.

[14 : 38] But we do know this, that both individually and as a church, Mount Calvary proves that God will not abandon us. Mount Calvary proves that God will not forsake us.

That if our hands on the sovereign God, that if you are a Christian, who is committed to loving him and serving him and knowing him, that all things will work out for your good, even if his footprints are unseen, and that we can take great hope and confidence in that.

Two things to remember, the many, many years God's track record of faithfulness, and to remember his great acts of salvation. And therefore, we have great hope.

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