



Daily Devotions in the Psalms

Psalm 70-74

Monday 6th July - Psalm 70

Hasten, O God, to save me;
 come quickly, Lord, to help me.
2 May those who want to take my life
 be put to shame and confusion;
may all who desire my ruin
 be turned back in disgrace.
3 May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!"
 turn back because of their shame.
4 But may all who seek you
 rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who long for your saving help always
say,
 "The Lord is great!"
5 But as for me, I am poor and needy;
 come quickly to me, O God.
You are my help and my deliverer;
 Lord, do not delay.

I'm sure there are a few strange people who are born with a natural disposition towards patience, but I think they are the exception rather than the rule. For most of us, patience is something we grow in...slowly. There's a little bit of Veruca Salt from Charlie & The Chocolate Factory in all of us; we want the world and we want it now! Yet, this Psalm gives us a picture of how to live in the tension between God's ability to save quickly and the need for patience as we wait for Him to act.

The first and last words of the Psalm call on Yahweh to act quickly to save. Whatever is going on for David, things are desperate. People are seeking to take his life and people are destroying his reputation. He could be on the run from Saul or Absalom. Yet, this Psalm is meant to teach the faithful.

We're called to seek God and rejoice in Him...which must be hard when people are seeking your life!
We're called to praise Yahweh and declare his greatness (v. 4) even as we long for His saving work.

It's a challenge, isn't it? Praising God's greatness whilst waiting for your prayers to be answered? Normally we're too busy complaining to praise, but here David encourages Israel to rejoice and praise God, even as we wait.

For David and for us, seeking the salvation of the Lord starts with an admission. Like David, we're poor and needy. We offer God nothing except our sin. We come before Him acknowledging our inability to save ourselves and our desperate need for God to act.

But here's the good news - we've already been delivered. We can still pray this Psalm as we experience trials in our lives, but the reality is that in Christ, we already know His salvation. And it's this reality that helps us to continue praising God with patience despite all that is happening in our lives.

Father, thank you for saving us; you are great! We confess that we are poor and needy. We want to rejoice and praise you but we often find it so hard. Help us to see how you have already saved us, so that we can praise you and rejoice even in the midst of trials. Grow us in patience and give us a heavenly perspective. We pray this in the name of the greater David, King Jesus. Amen.

James

Tuesday 7th July - Psalm 71

In you, Lord, I have taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame.
2 In your righteousness, rescue me and deliver me;
turn your ear to me and save me.
3 Be my rock of refuge,
to which I can always go;
give the command to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.
4 Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of those who are evil and cruel.
5 For you have been my hope, Sovereign Lord,
my confidence since my youth.
6 From birth I have relied on you;
you brought me forth from my mother's womb.
I will ever praise you.
7 I have become a sign to many;
you are my strong refuge.
8 My mouth is filled with your praise,
declaring your splendour all day long.
9 Do not cast me away when I am old;
do not forsake me when my strength is gone.
10 For my enemies speak against me;
those who wait to kill me conspire together.
11 They say, "God has forsaken him;
pursue him and seize him,
for no one will rescue him."
12 Do not be far from me, my God;
come quickly, God, to help me.
13 May my accusers perish in shame;
may those who want to harm me
be covered with scorn and disgrace.
14 As for me, I will always have hope;
I will praise you more and more.
15 My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds,
of your saving acts all day long—
though I know not how to relate them all.
16 I will come and proclaim your mighty
acts, Sovereign Lord;
I will proclaim your righteous deeds, yours alone.
17 Since my youth, God, you have taught me,
and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds.
18 Even when I am old and gray,
do not forsake me, my God,
till I declare your power to the next generation,
your mighty acts to all who are to come.
19 Your righteousness, God, reaches to the heavens,
you who have done great things.
Who is like you, God?
20 Though you have made me see troubles,
many and bitter,
you will restore my life again;
from the depths of the earth
you will again bring me up.
21 You will increase my honor
and comfort me once more.
22 I will praise you with the harp
for your faithfulness, my God;
I will sing praise to you with the lyre,
Holy One of Israel.
23 My lips will shout for joy
when I sing praise to you—
I whom you have delivered.
24 My tongue will tell of your righteous acts
all day long,
for those who wanted to harm me
have been put to shame and confusion.

Psalm 71:16 "I will go in the strength of the Lord God..."

As believers, we are in fact travellers, like Peter says in the New Testament, "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims..." (1 Pet. 2:11). David said he would "go in the strength of the Lord," and would not even mention righteousness except for the righteousness of God (v16). Paul the Apostle wrote something similar in Philippians 3:9: "and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith." David had a clear picture of his own need to rely on God's righteousness, not his own.

Since Jesus completely relied on God, and not only earned the blessings of salvation that we don't deserve, but took what we do deserve dying in our place – If we trust in Jesus we can have the confidence of this Psalm in God's righteousness.

Charles Spurgeon describes Psalm 71 as, "the prayer of the aged believer, who, in holy confidence of faith, strengthened by a long and remarkable experience, pleads against his enemies, and asks further blessings for himself. Anticipating a gracious reply, he promises to magnify the Lord exceedingly."

Father God, thank you for your undeserved kindness every day. Help us grow in patience and joy as we see how patient you have been with us. Amen.

Martin

Wednesday 8th July - Psalm 72

Endow the king with your justice, O God,
the royal son with your righteousness.
2 May he judge your people in righteousness,
your afflicted ones with justice.
3 May the mountains bring prosperity to the
people,
the hills the fruit of righteousness.
4 May he defend the afflicted among the people
and save the children of the needy;
may he crush the oppressor.
5 May he endure as long as the sun,
as long as the moon, through all generations.
6 May he be like rain falling on a mown field,
like showers watering the earth.
7 In his days may the righteous flourish
and prosperity abound till the moon is no more.
8 May he rule from sea to sea
and from the River[b] to the ends of the earth.
9 May the desert tribes bow before him
and his enemies lick the dust.
10 May the kings of Tarshish and of distant shores
bring tribute to him.
May the kings of Sheba and Seba
present him gifts.
11 May all kings bow down to him
and all nations serve him.

12 For he will deliver the needy who cry out,
the afflicted who have no one to help.
13 He will take pity on the weak and the needy
and save the needy from death.
14 He will rescue them from oppression and
violence,
for precious is their blood in his sight.
15 Long may he live!
May gold from Sheba be given him.
May people ever pray for him
and bless him all day long.
16 May grain abound throughout the land;
on the tops of the hills may it sway.
May the crops flourish like Lebanon
and thrive like the grass of the field.
17 May his name endure forever;
may it continue as long as the sun.
Then all nations will be blessed through him,
and they will call him blessed.
18 Praise be to the Lord God, the God of Israel,
who alone does marvelous deeds.
19 Praise be to his glorious name forever;
may the whole earth be filled with his glory.
Amen and Amen.
20 This concludes the prayers of David son of
Jesse.

Paul calls on us as God's people to pray for the Government (Romans 13:1 and 1 Tim 2:1 – 4). So how do we pray? What do our hearts long for in these prayers?

For the people of this psalm the call to prayer for Government must have seemed almost impossible. The people of Israel, who have known how bad judges and kings can be, not to mention those of their neighbours who oppress and have regularly take them off to captivity. To pray this way across their history must have required significant faith and hope.

See how the Psalm begins in the opening verses, and how it changes. It seems that we move from an earthly king to one who is eternal (5) and a renewed creation (6 – 7) and then the fulfilment of the covenant given to Abraham (17) and finally to bring blessing to His people and bring the oppressing nations to justice (11 – 14).

Imagine for a moment you were in the synagogue next to Jesus singing this song. How would Jesus have sung this psalm? Knowing that he would be the one to fulfil the great promises that it contains. For Jesus as the Messiah, this song would be a reminder of what He would have to do in order to accomplish the promises written in these words.

Thursday 9th July - Psalm 73

Surely God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.
2 But as for me, my feet had almost slipped;
I had nearly lost my foothold.
3 For I envied the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
4 They have no struggles;
their bodies are healthy and strong.
5 They are free from common human burdens;
they are not plagued by human ills.
6 Therefore pride is their necklace;
they clothe themselves with violence.
7 From their callous hearts comes iniquity;
their evil imaginations have no limits.
8 They scoff, and speak with malice;
with arrogance they threaten oppression.
9 Their mouths lay claim to heaven,
and their tongues take possession of the earth.
10 Therefore their people turn to them
and drink up waters in abundance.
11 They say, "How would God know?
Does the Most High know anything?"
12 This is what the wicked are like—
always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.
13 Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure
and have washed my hands in innocence.
14 All day long I have been afflicted,
and every morning brings new punishments.
15 If I had spoken out like that,
I would have betrayed your children.

16 When I tried to understand all this,
it troubled me deeply
17 till I entered the sanctuary of God;
then I understood their final destiny.
18 Surely you place them on slippery ground;
you cast them down to ruin.
19 How suddenly are they destroyed,
completely swept away by terrors!
20 They are like a dream when one awakes;
when you arise, Lord,
you will despise them as fantasies.
21 When my heart was grieved
and my spirit embittered,
22 I was senseless and ignorant;
I was a brute beast before you.
23 Yet I am always with you;
you hold me by my right hand.
24 You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will take me into glory.
25 Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
26 My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.
27 Those who are far from you will perish;
you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.
28 But as for me, it is good to be near God.
I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge;
I will tell of all your deeds.

The writer of Psalm 73 has a problem that very nearly results in his spiritual downfall. He has learnt from Scripture that God blesses the righteous and punishes the wicked. But when he looks at the world around him he sees that wicked people are flourishing even though their lives are marked by greed, domination, ruthlessness, deception and arrogance. He also sees that others are influenced by their example and come to the conclusion that God is reluctant to interfere in human affairs.

The psalmist himself is impacted by this and even tempted to believe that living a godly life is a waste of time. He says in v.13 "All in vain I have kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence." Yet the writer is eager to keep his doubts to himself as he does not wish to become a stumbling block to others.

The turning point in Psalm 73 comes when God opens the writer's eyes and helps him to see the truth of Scripture. When his eyes are opened he understands that death shatters the ungodly person's life of apathy and complacency, just as waking brings to an end a pleasant dream. On the day of judgement the wicked awake to find that God is neither asleep, nor reluctant to administer righteous judgement.

As the writer looks back on his experience, he uses words like "stupid," "ignorant", and "brute beast" to describe himself. He calls himself a fool for ever doubting God. But when his eyes are opened he sees things from an entirely new perspective. No longer does he envy the wicked, but sees in God the fulfilment of his deepest needs and desires.

"Then He opened up their minds to understand the Scriptures." Luke 24:45

Lord God, we forever walk in darkness until you open our eyes and help us to see the truth of Scripture. Forgive us for those times when we have doubted you. Clearly show us, through your Son, that all our joy is in you.

John

Friday 10th July - Psalm 74

1 O God, why have you rejected us forever?

Why does your anger smoulder against the sheep of your pasture?

2 Remember the nation you purchased long ago,
the people of your inheritance, whom you redeemed —
Mount Zion, where you dwell.

3 Turn your steps toward these everlasting ruins,
all this destruction the enemy has brought on the sanctuary.

4 Your foes roared in the place where you met with us;
they set up their standards as signs.

5 They behaved like men wielding axes
to cut through a thicket of trees.

6 They smashed all the carved paneling
with their axes and hatchets.

7 They burned your sanctuary to the ground;
they defiled the dwelling place of your Name.

8 They said in their hearts, "We will crush them completely!"

They burned every place where God was worshiped in the land.

9 We are given no signs from God;
no prophets are left,
and none of us knows how long this will be.

10 How long will the enemy mock you, God?
Will the foe revile your name forever?

11 Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand?
Take it from the folds of your garment and destroy them!

12 But God is my King from long ago;
he brings salvation on the earth.

13 It was you who split open the sea by your power;
you broke the heads of the monster in the waters.

14 It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan
and gave it as food to the creatures of the desert.

15 It was you who opened up springs and streams;
you dried up the ever-flowing rivers.

16 The day is yours, and yours also the night;
you established the sun and moon.

17 It was you who set all the boundaries of the earth;
you made both summer and winter.

18 Remember how the enemy has mocked you, Lord,
how foolish people have reviled your name.

19 Do not hand over the life of your dove to wild beasts;

do not forget the lives of your afflicted people forever.

20 Have regard for your covenant,
because haunts of violence fill the dark places of the land.

21 Do not let the oppressed retreat in disgrace;
may the poor and needy praise your name.

22 Rise up, O God, and defend your cause;
remember how fools mock you all day long.

23 Do not ignore the clamour of your adversaries,
the uproar of your enemies, which rises continually.

We're not told the exact historical context of this Psalm, but with clues such as the destruction of the sanctuary, the smashing of the carved panelling and the tone of defeat, it is most likely when Jerusalem was overtaken by the Babylonians and when the children of Israel were led into their 70 years of captivity (2 Kings 25).

Despite the devastation, not all hope is lost. After all the Psalmist doesn't sink into self-pity and although feeling rejected still has the sense to cry out to God. The Psalmist reminds God of his saving acts in the past, eg the deliverance from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea. It's as if he is saying "You've saved us before, where are you now?" It is also interesting to note that it is not just about God coming to the rescue of his people, it's also very much about God's glory and His name not being mocked.

When God is seemingly absent in our circumstances do we sink into self-pity or do we cry out to our Lord and King? When the enemy seems to be gaining a foothold in our lives is it simply about self-preservation or are we grieved that our Lord's name is being trampled over?

Throughout the Bible we find many periods of time where God is seemingly quiet. It was about 400 years between the testaments, that's a long time, but then Jesus arrives on the scene.

If we're tempted to ask "where are you Lord?" remember Jesus didn't just pay a holding deposit for us, He paid the full price for our salvation. Take comfort Jesus will certainly return to claim what's rightfully His and to see that every knee bows to Him who deserves all glory.

Danny