

Distress

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Preacher: Rev Donald Lamont

[0 : 0 0] will you turn with me now for a little time as we meditate together in a portion we have read from the word of God, the Old Testament scriptures, the book of Psalms and chapter 61 and reading again from verse 1, hear my cry, O God, attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

The Psalmist was obviously in deep trouble when these words were penned. He felt himself, as he tells us, to be overwhelmed. His heart was overwhelmed. And there are varying renderings of this expression, the heart being overwhelmed. When, for instance, my heart is anxious or when my heart is in anguish or when my heart is in heaviness or when my heart is sinking. All these different expressions could be used equally well with regard to these words. It is to feel like this, to feel like this is to feel oneself under a confluence of distressing calamities, to feel forsaken and to feel alone. So the Psalmist obviously felt at this particular point in his own experience.

Our gracious Lord must have felt like this as the hour of his disease came nearer. In Gethsemane, for instance, we read that he was sore amazed and very heavy and he himself said, my soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death. And he prayed, you remember, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. This feeling was continued in even greater intensity on the cross and has given expression to that awesome cry of dereliction, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? But in spite of these feelings, he was also confident, he was also assured, he knew that the Father's love had in no way lessened toward him and that the bond was as firm as ever it was.

Indeed, the deeper he sinks into the darkness of anguish and suffering, the closer he seems to come to the Father in filial devotion and in love. And he is the one on whom his people seek to pattern themselves in all their ways and in all their experiences. When they are required to walk in an inscrutable way so that they have feelings akin to those expressed by the psalmist in these words or by our Lord in the course of his own sufferings, they seek to set him before them and draw their inspiration and strength from him. After all, he was made in all things like unto his brethren, so that he might be a merciful high priest in things pertaining to God. So then in these words, although they give a great strength of his own suffering, they give him a great strength of faith by the psalmist, in spite of feelings of being overwhelmed at this hour, we find that faith is mightily in exercise and this is seen in the way in which he approaches God. And so then the focal point of faith resorts in this hour of distress is God himself.

Hear my cry, O God, from the end of the earth, from the ends of the earth, will I cry unto thee. You see, faith, the faith of the people of God, it has reference to the being of God, the fact that he is, he that comes to God must believe that he is, he that comes to God must believe that he is, and the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. The fact that God is, that God exists, that God is a real, living, responsive, loving person.

[5 : 0 4] At times, some of God's people have been sorely tried with atheistic thoughts. Rabbi Duncan, for instance, had used to be frequently assailed with such temptations and was often brought into terrible darkness of soul as a result of this.

And when this happens, it is faith that has been eclipsed. Faith has come under a cloud and is no longer in exercise, as it ought to be in exercise in the believer.

And it would be an interesting study to discover why this happens. Clearly, it doesn't arise because there is anything, basically, at fault with faith itself.

Faith is a perfect grace in all its ways. And so, the folk must surely stem from the believer's own neglect of this grace, a failure to nourish it and stimulate it and tend it gently and carefully.

Faith is a very sensitive grace, and it requires careful and constant nurturing by the believer. And if this nurturing doesn't proceed, then it will come under a cloud.

[6 : 32] This problem, however, doesn't arise in this particular context. The eyes of the psalmist are firmly focused upon God.

Although there is much darkness and bewilderment around him, nevertheless, he is directing his thoughts and his prayers to God.

Faith has reference to the being of God. And, of course, faith has reference to the nature of God also, namely, that it is good, always good and unchangeably good.

Faith, when it is in a healthy exercise, as is the case before us here, always acts on the premise that whatever God does, and however God acts, he will not and he cannot act contrary to his own nature, which is good.

Thus, as the apostle says, we know that all things work together for good to them that love God. Romans 8.

[7 : 40] And the apostle knew better than most what it was to feel overwhelmed and distressed and persecuted and forsaken, as he tells us.

But he knew also that God's nature precluded him from doing anything that wasn't good because he always acts in accordance with his own nature.

Faith acts on this principle when it is truly an exercise, and it enables the believer to drink whatever bitter dregs may be handed to him without once questioning the goodness that stands behind that particular matter.

And so faith not only has reference to the being of God, but to the nature of God. And faith in the believer, of course, has reference to the name of God.

And the name of God is simply all that God is in himself. It is God himself and God in his fullness that we understand when we make reference to the name of God.

[8 : 54] And it is perhaps impossible to differentiate between the name and the nature of God. The name of God, then, is all that God declares himself to be.

When, for instance, in the Old Testament, he declared his name to Moses, he did so, you remember, by drawing attention to his nature.

He passed by, and we read, and he proclaimed his name. And in the course of proclaiming his name, he said, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.

This is what we mean. And understand by the name of God. And so, as the preacher says in Proverbs 19, The name of God is a strong tower.

The righteous runneth into it and is safe. And the church says in the Song of Solomon, you remember, that his name is as ointment poured forth.

[10 : 10] That is, his name is Abba. It brings comfort. It brings consolation. And faith in his exercise, it has respect to the name of Jehovah.

It considers how great and how gracious that name is. It is natural and it is proper that faith in exercise should direct the mind of the believer to God himself.

Because it is only there that he can find an answer to whatever problems may be perplexing him at any given time when his heart is overwhelmed.

This then is the focal point to which faith resorts in the hour of distress. But then, too, we see in the context the activity in which faith engages in this day of crisis.

And this activity is of a very comprehensive nature, as we can see. We have to see, for instance, that by faith, the psalmist discerns how acute the problem is.

[11 : 22] For he speaks here of crying from the ends of the earth, from a far away distance.

Now then, while these words in reference to the royal psalmist may have a literal bearing on how far removed he was from the center of worship, of the worship of Jehovah and Jerusalem, some commentators take this view.

It is far more likely to indicate, I think, an inner acute feeling of being at a distance from Jehovah himself, from God himself.

A feeling perhaps occasioned, no doubt occasioned, by his own sin, for sin always drives us away from God, or drives God, causes God to withdraw from us, so that there is this feeling awakened of being at the ends of the earth.

The patriarch Job, for instance, he expresses, you remember such a feeling of spiritual desolation when he says, Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive him.

[12 : 43] On the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him, he hideth himself on the right hand. We speak about faith then as see, and that is what faith is doing here.

It is discerning how acute the problem is. It is able to see to the heart of the problem. But then too, by faith, the psalmist feels how crushing this matter is.

And it is eloquently expressed here in his words, When my heart is overwhelmed. This is an experience into which the psalmist could enter, whatever the reason for it was.

This is not indicated to us. But he could feel in this way, that his heart was overwhelmed, that his affections were quite overcome by trouble, by anguish, by sorrow, or some other matter.

He could feel the effect of it within himself and in his own heart. He could discover a sense of inner desolation from this experience of being at the end of the earth.

[14 : 02] Now, many things can occasion such an overwhelming of the affections by the believer. The experience of bereavement, for instance, it can bring this about.

Surely we have an instance of that in the Bethany home. Not only being overwhelmed by the death of their brother Lazarus, but perhaps particularly overwhelmed by the seeming indifference of the Lord himself, who did not come to them until four days after the event.

And so this experience of bereavement and perhaps inscrutable happenings in connection with it may cause this feeling. In past days, I attended the funeral of a very dear old Christian lady, one who was a lifelong friend of my own in Glasgow and who was brutally murdered in her own home.

I felt that this sense of being overwhelmed by the inscrutable nature of this providence, it was very obvious among those who were the chief mourners, those who knew her and those who were so devoted to her.

They couldn't understand and they couldn't give an explanation. They had to be still and to know that they were in the presence of God. And so by faith, they could feel how crushing this matter was.

[15 : 46] But like the psalmist, I trust that their eye was turned to the God whom we know does all things well. And so we see too that by faith, the psalmist acts to restore the situation by crying, by calling, by praying, by coming into the presence of God.

Hear my cry, he says, O God, from the end of the earth will I cry unto thee. The very word signifies the intensity of his feeling and of his prayer.

There is a note of urgency, a note of importunity in the cry that he puts up to the throne of God. And it's surely a good omen when in an overwhelming circumstance, when it doesn't silence the lips of the victim, but rather does it send a man hurriedly to the throne of God to pour out his heart before God and to seek the guidance and the blessing of God and the possible answer to what is perplexing him.

Carry ye here, said our blessed Savior, in the hour of his anguish while I go and pray yonder. And this is a pattern which he sets before his believing people.

Call on me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify me. And so we see that by faith the man of God acts in order to restore the situation.

[17 : 33] He cries, he prays, he calls upon God, he draws near and he pours out his heart to him. And in itself, there is relief and there is comfort.

And then too, by faith, the man of God is able to pinpoint the one sure foundation upon which he can rest. Not only when the prayer is offered, hear my cry, O God, but also when the petitioner supplicates, lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

Lead me to the rock. Take me by the hand and lead me to a place whereon I can stand. He feels himself to be on unsure ground at this present moment because for the very reason that his heart is overwhelmed.

The foundations, they are gradually evaporating, they are going away from him. He no longer has the sure-footedness in his goings that he once had.

And so, he wants something surer, something firmer, something securer on which to stand. And he is persuaded that God alone, the sense of God in his own soul is the only thing that can give him this, the assurance that will be brought to him from having a sense of his presence with him.

[19 : 12] Let me hide in thee. Rock of ages cleft for me. Let me hide myself in thee. For thou art as a shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

And so then, by faith, here pin points the one sure certain foundation upon which she can stand and from which she can never be mowed.

and so it says lead me to the rock that is higher than I. When we are in circumstances and situations where our heart is overwhelmed and we are at the end of the earth, then the devil, Satan, can use these things in order to remove our attention, remove our eyes from being focused upon the one foundation of our hope upon God himself.

And so we all need the prayer, lead me, continue to lead me to the rock that is higher than I. If we are left to ourselves, we shall surely, our feet shall surely slide, and we shall go astray.

And so we are to be led to the rock, to the foundation that is higher than ourselves. So these are some of the activities in which the faith of the people of God engage in this hour of calamity and in this hour of distress.

[20 : 46] But we see, too, the confidence which faith demonstrates in this time of calamity. A confidence that is, of course, as we already said, clearly focused and clearly resting upon God himself.

And you see, this confidence stems from the psalmist's own experience of God, or the psalmist's own experience of how God had manifested himself to him, and how he had dealt with them in the past.

He speaks here of what God had done in him. Or, if you like, what God had graciously brought to him and bestowed upon him. He says, thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name.

Verse 6. You see, this speaks of the standing which he enjoyed before God by virtue of the operations of divine grace within his own soul.

He is referring to the fact that he had been made a partaker of the inheritance of the sense and light. He is indicating that he has been blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

[22 : 14] You see, there is nothing, my friends, will so quickly revitalize and reinvigorate the faith of the people of God as renewing one's acquaintance with what God has wrought in us and with what God has wrought for us.

The Lord has done great things for us whence joy to us is brought. This is Psalm 126. And this, of course, increases his confidence that God will continue to manifest his grace and his power as he has already done.

So his confidence in God stems from his own experience of God and his own experience of the doings of God, what God had done in him.

And also, of course, what God had done for him on past occasions and at other times. At verse 3, he says, thou hast been a shelter for me and a strong tower from the enemy.

he is thinking back on other times and occasions when he has seen the hand of God actively involved in delivering him.

[23 : 32] I have experienced, he says, thy preserving and sheltering and delivering grace on past times. Thou hast done great things on my behalf.

Thou hast delivered me in the day of my calamity. And David, surely, if anyone could, David could make this testimony, could make this claim and could give his testimony of the deliverances he had experienced at the hand of God.

And this, of course, is an added assurance and confidence to the man of God in the season of his calamity and, of course, a further incentive to him to cast his present burden over upon God.

Faith recalls the goodness of God in the land of the living and it therefore has hope. It returns to him as it recalls that goodness and as it remembers all that he has done for him.

And so his confidence in God it increases and it makes them return to God in his hour of distress. And then to this confidence that he has in God it is seen in how God had responded to him.

[25 : 01] For he continues and says at verse five for thou O Lord hast heard my vows thou hast already answered my prayers on other occasions.

It was customary in circumstances of calamity or distress in a past to make vows which consisted of a promise to offer certain things or certain sacrifices to Jehovah deliverance was secured and after deliverance had been obtained it was also customary to invite to a feast the widow and the orphan and the poor in order that they would share in the joy of those who had been delivered and this is probably what a psalmist had in view here he had made his vows before God he had seen the deliverance that God had brought he was able to rejoice with others in that deliverance wrought for him and wrought for others he recalled past calamities when he himself vowed and when God graciously and positively responded to such vows thus is he confident in the present hour that

God will not act in any way differently to how he acted at other times and so there is confidence expressed in God from what he had already experienced of the mercy and of the grace of God and so my dear friend how do matters stand with you I know not what your present state is what your present feelings may be what your present experiences are in the providence of God it may be that there are things similar to what was being experienced by the psalmist in your life at this time you may be overwhelmed by certain circumstances known only to yourself and what then ought you to do at such a time and in such a situation well for one thing you ought and you must submit to the providence in which you are placed you see the natural tendency is to rebel the natural tendency is to fret to become querulous and resentful if we and if we do not express this in actual words we all know how this unruly spirit can well up within us in a moment of time you see the spirit of

Jonah is never far removed from any one of the people of God if we would analyze ourselves strictly and in accordance with holy scriptures do us though well to be angry said God to him and his sad response was I do well to be angry even unto death remember it is Jonah himself who is recording this unhappy episode in his life for us under the hand of God so that others wouldn't be caught up in the same error in after days so as the scriptures themselves indicate to us our duty is to be still and to know and to know that he is God to submit to whatever providence he is graciously pleased to send into our lives and along with submitting in the spirit of meekness we are also you're also to cry to him mightily just as

David is doing in this particular context hear my cry oh God from the end of the earth will I cry unto thee when the heart is overwhelmed and in perplexity the danger is that we keep silence and such conduct can only aggravate the situation when we keep silence psalm 107 is a psalm of thanksgiving particularly and there it records God's doings and God's wonders and the experiences through which his people passed under his hand these experiences had a great deal in them to be thankful for there was also much trauma associated with their experiences they wandered worried in the wilderness in a solitary way they were hungry and they were thirsty and their soul fainted in them because of trouble but we read that then they cried unto the

[30 : 14] Lord in their trouble and he delivered them out of their distresses when they were bogged down they looked up and this is what you are called to this what I am called to not only to submit in meekness and in quietness but also to cry mightily to the throne of heaven and we are also to wait on God believing faith is to be mightily in exercise surely that is precisely what the psalmist is doing when he says here I will abide in thy tabernacle forever I will trust in the cupboard of thy wings even although I am overwhelmed and at the end of the earth I will abide in thy tabernacle I will trust in the cupboard of thy wings he is trusting and he is not being afraid although the circumstances are such that he might well have reason to be afraid but you see my dear friend where faith is in exercise the fear of

God will then be expressed and this will keep submerged the natural fears that tend to come to the surface at such a time as this and so then it is your duty and mine to rest in the Lord and patiently wait for him not to fret for the one who is prospering in his way it is for you and for me to offer the prayer of another my soul wait thou with patience upon thy God alone to say to ourselves my soul wait thou with patience upon my God my God on him dependeth all my hope and expectation so if you are in this part of place at the end of the earth with your heart overwhelmed there is nothing you can do nothing better than you can do but do as a psalmist did hear my cry oh

God attend unto my prayer lead me to the rock that is higher than I and there you can rest in confidence and in hope and in the assurance that all things will work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose amen and may he add his blessing to our meditation his word shall we unite in prayer oh Lord our God we thank thee for the varied experiences of life however bewildering and perplexing they may be and we would accept oh God that all of them although inscrutable to us are clear to thee for thou knowest the end from the beginning and thou art able to provide for thy people against against every eventuality that may cross their path in the course of life and so enable each and all of us to rest in thee and patiently wait for thee to be still and to know that thou art God and what we know not now that we shall know hereafter we pray thy blessing upon us as we go from thine house now abide in our midst throughout the day meet with us again as we gather in the evening and lead us by thy spirit into the truth and God cause us to glorify thy name and cause us always to remember that this is our chief end and all we ask with the pardon of sin we ask it in Jesus name and for his sake amen ham and hello