

Hear My Humble Prayer

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Bible Verse: Psalm 143
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We come to Psalm 143 this evening as we have rounded third and are coming toward home in our exposition of the Psalms, and I'd like to read it to begin this evening, Psalm 143. "A Psalm of David." David prays as follows,

1 Hear my prayer, O LORD, Give ear to my supplications! Answer me in Your faithfulness, in Your righteousness! 2 And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, For in Your sight no man living is righteous. 3 For the enemy has persecuted my soul; He has crushed my life to the ground; He has made me dwell in dark places, like those who have long been dead. 4 Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me; My heart is appalled within me. 5 I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your doings; I muse on the work of Your hands. 6 I stretch out my hands to You; My soul longs for You, as a parched land. Selah. 7 Answer me quickly, O LORD, my spirit fails; Do not hide Your face from me, Or I will become like those who go down to the pit. 8 Let me hear Your lovingkindness in the morning; For I trust in You; Teach me the way in which I should walk; For to You I lift up my soul. 9 Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies; I take refuge in You. 10 Teach me to do Your will, For You are my God; Let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground. 11 For the sake of Your name, O LORD, revive me. In Your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble. 12 And in Your lovingkindness, cut off my enemies And destroy all those who afflict my soul, For I am Your servant.

When Nathaniel opened our study this evening, he quoted from Isaiah 66:1 and 2, and it fit perfectly with Psalm 143, even though we did not coordinate that. At the end of verse 2 of Isaiah 66, the Lord God says, "to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word." Well, Psalm 143 is a Psalm in accordance with the spirit of those words from the prophet, which came a few centuries after David wrote this. You could say in Psalm 143 that David's overarching prayer is, "Hear my humble prayer." That's the title of tonight's message, "Hear My Humble Prayer."

We're going to divide this Psalm into two sections. First of all, David's problem. and that's in verses 1 through 6; and then in verses 7 through 12, we'll see David's plea. His

problem and his plea. And one of the characteristic or distinctive features of this Psalm that we're going to see as we go through it, is that David speaks in triplets. He uses a triplet format to be able to make his emphasis and we'll see this as we go along, and as we start this first point here this evening, David's problem, you see that triplet emphasis right from the very beginning when he says here in verse 1,

1 Hear my prayer, O Yahweh, Give ear to my supplications! Answer me
in Your faithfulness, in Your righteousness!

And notice right at the start the repetition of the theme, not the exact terms but the repetition of the themes that David makes as he opens up. "Hear my prayer. Give ear to my supplications. Answer me in Your faithfulness." And those many expressions emphasize his need for relief. David, once again we find is praying urgently. This is not a rote prayer that he's giving here. This is not a memorized prayer recited without feeling and emphasis like some of us learned in our past religious backgrounds where you could just say kind of singsong your way through the same words and never have your heart engaged. David's heart is deeply engaged in what he is praying here in this Psalm and it's shown by the repeated emphasis that he gives. He says it repeatedly, "Hear me. Answer me. Give ear to me," because it's urgent to him and he wants God to respond to him.

Now notice as we look at verse 1, and this is very significant for the totality of the Psalm, as we see so often in the Psalms, his appeal, the grounds of his appeal for God to respond to him is found in the character of God, the attributes of God, the perfections of God. So that he says, he says there at the end of verse 1, "Answer me in Your faithfulness, in Your righteousness." He's appealing to the nature of God as the reason upon which God should respond to him.

And the word "righteousness" here is referring to far more than some kind of sense of moral purity or certainly more than any kind of external morality. It's more focused. It's more specific than that. David here is appealing to the faithfulness and righteousness of God in this sense, he's appealing to God's goodness that leads him to defend his people in their times of distress. One of the aspects, one of the glories of the attributes of God is that he is faithful to his people. He is, as the Lord, as the name Yahweh indicates, he is a faithful, covenant-keeping, promise-keeping God to his people, and when he brings us into covenant with himself, when he causes us to be born again and adopts us into his family, he has undertaken the responsibility to provide for us and to care for us in the midst of our afflictions here on earth. And so we have the privilege, we have the prerogative, indeed, going even further, we have the responsibility to go to God and humbly express our need and our dependence upon him in our times of affliction.

And I'd like to turn your attention to Matthew 6 again. I never get tired of going to this passage. But going to Matthew 6 yet again and just looking at the broad spirit of this, of this prayer that the Lord taught his disciples to use as a model for their own praying. There is, he says, in Matthew 6, verse 9, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.'" Now, in keeping with the dependence theme that I was alluding to just a

moment ago, notice what he goes on to say in verse 11. "Give us this day our daily bread. Father, I am depending upon You to provide for what I need in this life, what I need in this day. I consciously submit myself to You, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, and I consciously express my dependence upon You, Give us this day our daily bread." But it's more than just a physical dependence that he is expressing, it is a spiritual dependence as well when he says, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors, and do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." And so the Lord himself taught us to enter into the presence of God with this spirit of dependence, with this spirit of asking and receiving, as you see in Matthew 7 as he goes on and expands it. And beloved, that is completely at odds with, it completely contradicts the self-sufficient, boastful spirit of our age. It's completely contrary to the idea that, "I'm a self-made man," and in self-reliance. That is contrary to the spirit of Christianity. It contradicts the false idea that some people think they could find in the Bible if they look hard enough, God helps those who help themselves. God helps those who come to him humbly and dependently and express their need and ask for mercy and ask him for grace in their time of need. And so David opens on that theme of humility and of trusting in the character of God, and it's just a good opportunity for us to just step back and just take a quick temperature check of our attitude in prayer. Are we coming with that sense of conscious dependence of a patient trust in God to be the God that he has sworn himself to be and to do for us.

Look over at Hebrews 6 in that connection as well. Hebrews 6. God says this in his text in Hebrews 6:17. "In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us." God has made promises to us that he will care for us. God has gone so far as to swear by himself that he will keep that promise, and it is impossible for God to lie. And so the God who has committed himself to take care of us has sworn that he will uphold his promise. He has promised and he has sworn to keep the promise, and that should have an impact on the way that we approach him. In verse 19 of Hebrews 6. "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." God has promised us, Christ has redeemed us, Christ has ascended into heaven and there stands as our intercessor and as our brother in heaven, interceding for us, praying for us, and representing us before a holy God.

Now, beloved, don't you see that because Christ has done that on our behalf, because God has made promises and sworn to keep them, that there is every reason to go to him with great confidence in how he will receive us and how he will respond to us. The spirit in which we approach him is in this spirit of humility that is dependently asking him to be faithful to what he's already sworn himself to do. And so it's not with a boastful spirit, it's not with a high-handed demanding spirit, it's certainly not with a flippant spirit that we come, but a spirit of earnestness that we cry out to this God in our time of affliction and say with David, "O God, hear my prayer. God, give ear to my supplication. Answer me in Your faithfulness." You see this in the Lord's prayer, you see it in the book of Hebrews,

and we could have gone to many other passages as well. And so we we start on and we stand on a solid foundation to approach God in prayer.

Now David goes on in verse 2 and you see his humility expanded beyond just a dependence but also you see it expressed in a spirit of confession of sin. Verse 2, he says,

2 And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, For in Your sight no man living is righteous.

Now this seemingly passing statement in the context of this Psalm is very far-reaching. David as he approaches God is conscious of his sinfulness, he is trusting in God and yet he is mindful of the fact that he is a sinful man, a redeemed man, yes, a man whose sin that has been forgiven, yes, but still one who is coming in a spirit of confession and a spirit of repentance.

Now there are those who teach that once a man has been saved, that Christians should never confess their sins or ask for forgiveness because if God has already forgiven our sins, why would we ask him to do what he's already done? Beloved, that is deadly and lethal kinds of teaching. First of all, it contradicts the explicit instruction of the New Testament where John says in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The verb tense in that verb in that verse contemplates an ongoing, a repetitive, a repeated confession of sin, so that as we become conscious of the ways that we have sinned even as a believer, we are going to God and confessing those and asking him to cleanse us and to forgive us of what we have done. It's not that we need our justification renewed, it's not that we've lost our salvation, it's that we're going to God as a child and asking our Father to forgive us for the way that we have grieved him as we stand in a parental/child relationship with him. One of the products of that kind of ongoing approach to the confession of sin, is it cultivates in us a dependent and humble attitude that is mindful of the fact that even as we walk in this life as believers no man that is living is righteous in the sight of God. We have been declared righteous, but that is a judicial declaration; as we walk in this life, we understand that we, as James says, we all stumble in many ways. And so when you find yourself having stumbled, when you're conscious of sin in your life, you should be going to God and making a similar confession that says, "God, I have sinned against You. Be gracious and merciful to me. Be faithful to Your promise. Be loyal to the blood of Christ and wash me afresh." And in that way we keep a tender conscience before God, we maintain a humble spirit before him, and as we do that in the spirit of Psalm 51, he restores the joy of our salvation. There are teachers with books that would contradict what I just spoke to you and we just need to be mindful of the fact that that teaching that says Christians should not confess sin or ask for forgiveness is very misguided and is very dangerous because it hardens people in their sin and dulls their conscience to the reality of obedience to a holy God.

So don't go down that path, realize what David is saying in his humility here is, "God, answer my prayer and be gracious to me in my sinfulness." And we realize in other places Scripture says, Romans 3:20, "by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified in

his sight." In Galatians 2:16, a very important verse says, "a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified." I trust that those of you that have been at our church for any length of time have it well ingrained in your soul and in your understanding that you approach God on the basis of his mercy to you in Christ, not on the basis of any good that you have done. We have no good to offer him. We come with hands that need to be cleansed. We have not done anything to earn a place in his presence. If we were to have a place in the presence of a perfectly holy God, it must be on the basis of grace. We must approach him on a righteousness that is not our own, and that righteousness is found in Christ and in Christ alone, received by faith, so that we come in a posture of humility, a posture of confession, a posture that is poor in spirit, in the words of the Beatitudes, and this is the humble prayer that we offer to the Lord.

Scripture teaches that no man, no woman, no boy, no girl will be declared righteous based on his own works. Elsewhere in Isaiah, we read that "all of us have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment." Look, beloved, the point in the context that we're making here in Psalm 143 is that when we're mindful of our dependence and we're mindful of our sinfulness, that shapes our heart and the manner in which we approach God altogether. It's a posture of humility. We come as needing grace, asking for grace, asking for undeserved favor, recognizing that we don't have the power to fix our own afflictions, we don't have the power to overcome our own temptations. We need grace to change us. We need grace to forgive us. We need grace to help us. And that spirit is at the heart, that is at the very core of developing a godly soul. Without that, the best that we can hope for is a carnal life that is far short of what God would have us to be.

And so these things are fundamental to the disposition with which we live the Christian life. And, you know, one of the things and I have someone that corresponds with me regularly in response to my teaching and I appreciate the, you know, the encouragement that I receive from that correspondence, but one of the things that this person says is, as she refers to the the coldhearted way, the lifeless way that her former pastor used to preach and handle the word of God, and it's just an academic matter is what she describes. Well, what I want you to see as an earnest believer in Christ is that these things are not just intellectual to us. We grasp them with our minds but there's an earnestness, there's a spirituality that the Spirit of God instills into our heart, that these things are not just out there external to us, these things shape everything that we think vertically about God and the way that we view ourselves. And we appreciate God, we're grateful to him, we're thankful to him. We need him and we're glad and we freely confess these things in his presence, and we confess them freely to one another.

Now I remember someone else decades ago that I knew from the church that Nancy and I met in, and we were talking one evening and she was just, you know, and she was just describing difficulties in her family, concerns over her adult children and all of that, and I was struck so deeply that I'm remembering it in the moment 35 years later, of the utter humility with which she was speaking. She was freely confessing her inability to change

the ones that she loved. She was freely expressing her dependence on God and her need for him and her desire to pray and to ask God to pour out his blessing and to strengthen and help her because she wasn't able to do it on her own. She gladly spoke that way. She effortlessly spoke that way. Why? It certainly wasn't to impress the young new believer that she was talking with, it had nothing to do with that. It was a condition of her heart. She had learned from Scripture, and she had learned in the course of lots of praying, that through the word and through the kind of praying that we're talking about here, the Lord had conditioned her heart that this was the natural overflow of her existence. You know, to put it in terms that I've used recently in the past, you know, she knew what it was like to ask God for wisdom, to ask God for help, to ask God to sanctify her, "God, make me more like Christ, shape me, God, into what You would have me to be because I know I'm not naturally like that. God, bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in my heart and in my life because I see how far short I fall of those nine fruit that are listed in Galatians 5:22 to 23." You learn these things practically, experientially, they become life-changing as you enter into the spirit of the Psalms, and as you practice these things consistently in your private prayer closet through the course of time. And you know, this is what we see here in Psalm 143, so that we learn from the word and we learn on our knees that we are not righteous, that we are not self-sufficient, that we need grace, that we need mercy, that we need God to be patient with us, we need him to be good to us, and this becomes more than just what you do in a, you know, in a devotional time and then you move on with your life for the rest of the day. This becomes the whole spirit and the way in which you walk through life. You know, if we walk in the light, as he himself is in the light, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. That's the idea that we're dealing with here.

And so what we see here in this Psalm, Psalm 143, is we see an appeal to grace. This is one asking for favor that he's conscious that he does not deserve rather than someone coming in and demanding merit in the presence of a holy God. That is the spirit of all true prayer as we've seen from Matthew, from Hebrews, from 1 John, from Isaiah and other places that we've looked at. This is the biblical spirit of prayer. And so we take a moment to just kind of step back and let that sink in, kind of reflect, is something like that developing in your prayer life? Is that something that you find yourself growing in, at least aspiring after? "God, I want to be like that. I'm tired of being the boastful person that I was, that reflects the carnality before I came to Christ. Lord, I'm tired of the spiritual indifference and the coldness that it doesn't matter to me whether I'm growing in grace or not. Lord, I'm tired of living in bitterness. I'm tired of living in the past. I'm tired of living with a complaining spirit toward You. I'm tired of my spirit of laziness, tired of my spirit of accepting sin and making excuses for it and blaming it on someone else."

You see, beloved, what we're talking about here goes to the very heart and core of your existence, goes to the very heart and core of the way that you respond to life, the way that you respond to sin, the way that you respond to others. And so the one who shifts blame, "It's not my fault, it was somebody else that caused that situation to happen," that's contrary to the humility that we're talking about. Now beloved, it's not that hard to just say, "You know what, Lord? I'm responsible for my own actions. I'm responsible for my own attitudes. And Lord, I see that I have violated maybe others were participating, maybe others lured me into it but, Lord, You know what? In the end, I made the decision

to walk that path. So have mercy on me. I'm done with blaming others. I'm done with defending self. I'm done with my pride."

Look over at Luke 18 as we see it again. You know, if you're familiar with Scripture at all, beloved, it is effortless to draw upon multiplied passages to reinforce this to us. Luke 18, the prayer of the tax collector, verse 13 Luke 18:13, "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted." The tax collector was praying in so many words, "Lord, hear my humble plea." You know, and beloved, listen, you just have to be really careful about who you let influence your thinking on matters like this because the world in the spirit of even things that you can find within the church, will be happy to tell you that it's not your fault, blame someone else, blame your parents, look at what happened in your childhood, no wonder you're not able to live in a godly way, you have too much weighing you down. Beloved, you've got to reject all of that and just adopt the posture of humility that says, "Lord, I'm responsible for my own life. I'm responsible for my own reactions. I'm responsible for my own attitudes. Forgive me. Be gracious to me." And why, why...you know, Scripture says God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. You know what? I want to be on the grace side of that equation especially in the presence of God, "God, I humble myself before You. I need You. I depend upon You. I've sinned again, God, be gracious to me. I humble myself before You." Why would anyone who names the name of Christ want anything other than that spirit animating the very core and heart of their existence, I ask you? This is where the grace and favor of God is outpoured is upon hearts like that. Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, everyone who humbles himself will be exalted.

And so we see David's humble prayer, and what we find going back to Psalm 143 is that this is a humble prayer throughout, this is a humble prayer throughout the whole Psalm. And notice in verse 2, again, a statement that we should all identify with if we are in Christ. He says, "do not enter into judgment with Your servant. God, You're the Master. Christ, You're the Lord. I'm the servant here. I'm the slave. I'm the one that is under authority." It's a submissive posture that he takes, "I come to You as one that is obligated to You, under Your authority." And again, what I want you to see is the humble spirit that that reflects. "O Lord, I'm Your servant." And that generates a completely different trajectory of prayer, rather than coming with a demanding spirit that that says, "Lord, I shouldn't be going through this. I deserve better than this." Whether you would say that to God or not, the spirit of it is often residing deep and lurking in our hearts, isn't it? "I don't deserve this. Look at what that person did to me. That wasn't right." Beloved, that's contrary to the spirit that says, "Lord, I'm Your servant. Be merciful. Be gracious to me as I pray."

Now David has established the humble posture of his prayer and now in verse 3 he goes on and he kind of gives the occasion for his urgent prayer. Why is it that David is approaching with humility and urgency in this time? He explains it in verse 3 as he pours out his heart and his troubles before the Lord. Verse 3,

3 For the enemy has persecuted my soul; He has crushed my life to the ground; He has made me dwell in dark places, like those who have long been dead.

Notice again, beloved, the triplet that is woven into the fabric of the structure of this entire Psalm. Verse 3, number one, the enemy has persecuted my soul. Number two, he has crushed my life to the ground. Number three, he has made me dwell in dark places. And so there's this emphasis as he repeats his theme again and again, and so death is threatening him, death is on his doorstep. His need is urgent as he prays in this way. And beloved, this gives us encouragement in the midst of our own affliction, and the urgency that sometimes presses down on us, urgent matters in terms of how we're going to respond to family situations or very difficult work situations or financial health distresses, you know, and it's unclear what we're going to do tomorrow. Well, what we see in this Psalm is David taking the time, getting alone, either standing with uplifted hands or perhaps crying out on his knees, the physical posture is secondary, the crying out, "God, I have an urgent need and I don't know what to do. I can't rescue myself here. My soul is under persecution. My life is being crushed and I am in a dark place." No wonder then he says, "God, hear my prayer. Give ear to my supplications. Answer me in Your faithfulness."

And so it encourages us today simply to realize that the Bible, God's word, understands our distress, understands the urgency of prayer that, you know, fills some of our hearts and some of our needs even this evening as we come together. That is a great encouragement to know that we can draw near to the Lord without the answers. You know, you don't have to figure out what the answer is and then ask for it. The spirit of humility is, "God, I don't know the answer. Lead my path. Protect me. Cover me. Be my refuge, my fortress, my rock, my Redeemer. God, help me here. I cry out to You, because I don't have anywhere else to go." And the fact that Scripture lays this out to us in all of these passages that we've looked at, Jesus said to the tax collector, "that man went home justified," it gives us insight into the tender mercies of our God, the kindness, the goodness of our God, that we in our weakness come and he is willing and able to dispense his strength upon us in order to help us. Maybe the help doesn't come on our timetable. Maybe the situation gets worse before it gets better. That's okay. The point is, is the sure reception of a holy, gracious, faithful God is ours when we approach him in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I just think that's wonderful, don't you? I think that's just amazing to think that we, a little speck on the planet earth in the incomprehensible expanse of an infinite universe, that we would have that kind of access to our Creator, to our Maker, to the one who made it all, to the one who is high in the heavens and to whom earth is his footstool, that that great God is good to us, is faithful to us, that he hears our prayer. And you know, the sweetness of it and, you know, I trust that many of you know this by your own spiritual experience, if not, I invite you into it, the sweetness of it is that when we come to God like this, we pour our hearts out to him, we renew and refresh our trust and our dependence upon him, our faith in him, we renew our thoughts of Christ, that there is a

confidence and a peace that is generated over time even if the circumstances don't change. Even if the enemy is still hot on our neck, the inner perception and the inner response to it changes because of the way that we've exercised our faith in this way. Isn't that what Philippians 4 says? "Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." You know some of these Scriptures, all of them straight from the word of God. I'm not making anything up here tonight.

And so we just see these invitations from God through his word, "Come to Me," as the Lord Jesus said, "Come to Me, all ye who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." You know, I've been a Christian for coming close to 40 years now, I look back on those decades and just on the spirit of things and all I can do is say, "Man, I wish I had lived in the spirit of these things more from the beginning than I did." Ha, I wish I lived more in the spirit of these things today than I do because when the word of God opens up to us and we see how gracious and good and faithful and righteous God is to his people, why aren't we running to him to know this grace? Why aren't we repeatedly throughout the day pleading for a fresh supply like this? Why are we content to live in fear and anxiety and bitterness and resentment when this kind of door is flung open to the children of God for their blessing? When we look on a wicked world, when we look on repeated mass murders, when we look on a degraded society that just, you know, just presses us into corners again and again, why isn't the pressure of the world driving us more and more into the presence of our Father? The pressure of the world driving us into the presence of our Father? I don't know. There's really not a good answer for that, is there, except for our own lack of faith, our failure to stir up faith ourselves. And, you know, beloved, that's part of it. That's part of it, is that what I want you to understand is that you and I, we have a responsibility to stir these things up in our souls. This kind of triumphant faith that we're describing here, this humble dependence upon the Lord, it doesn't just happen. We have to stir ourselves up by way of reminder. We have to go back and remember those things. That's why it's so good for you to be here tonight so that through the preaching of the word, these things would be stirred up in your soul and in your mind to be able to remember them and to draw upon them.

You know, I don't know when I've last said this from the pulpit, but faith is not like a thermostat. Martyn Lloyd-Jones makes this point in his book "Spiritual Depression." You know, you set a thermostat at a certain temperature and the furnace kicks in or the air conditioner kicks in to maintain things at a comfortable place without you having to do anything. It just automatically happens because the system is designed that way. Beloved, this kind of triumphant, energetic, resourceful faith that we're describing here, it doesn't happen like a thermostat. It happens when we come back and we remind ourselves of these things, we come back to his word and stir our hearts up in response to his word, and then we express these things before the Lord and say, "Yes, Lord, I do trust You." You have a responsibility to stir up faith in your own soul.

Now, as we do these things, the Spirit is quick to energize it, to give fruit from it, but it's not enough, and I had to learn this the hard way, it's not enough to sit on the sidelines and just wait on the bench for something to happen in the game. No, you have to get on to the field of faith. You have to engage it. You have to be engaged in the activity that it requires in order for these results to take place. Thus you see David urgently praying, "God, help me. God, give ear. God, answer me. God, You're faithful. God, You're righteous." He's stirring up his own heart even as he's appealing to God. If, beloved, your faith has been weak, if you are chronically despairing and discouraging, and have been over time, I would venture to say, let me put it this way, let me encourage you to take a look at your life and see if you haven't failed in this way, to stir these things up actively before you feel like it, actively before the change has come. You know, Philippians 4 goes on to say, you know, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is pure, whatever is right, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there's any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, think on these things, dwell on these things and the God of peace will be with you. You see, even in that context of Philippians, it's stirred up by the way that you think, what you're meditating on. And so while the promises are abundant, we're not passive in the process. We're not just simply there waiting for God to pour something down on us. We are to stir these things up by the way that we use our minds to engage biblical truth. And so the promise is great, the responsibility is there as well.

So what David says and we find encouragement as he goes on in verse 4, he says in verse 4,

4 Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me; My heart is appalled within me.

In a sense, that's the starting point of his praying. His troubles extend beyond the external enemies that are persecuting him. He comes and as he comes, his spirit is weak. He's lost strength for the battle and yet he turns by faith to his God who alone can help him. And so in that heavy state, what does he do? His heart is heavy. Beloved, you're here tonight with a heavy heart, that's okay. The question is what you do with it in response. How do you respond to that heavy heart? What do you do spiritually? How do you respond by faith to that? This David instructs us in verse 5 as he states his problem. Verse 5, what does he do? He says,

5 I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your doings; I muse on the work of Your hands.

Another triplet. I remember the days of old. I meditate on all your doings. I muse on the works of your hand. Beloved, he steps outside of himself, he sets his enemies and his problems behind, and he engages his mind with the things of God. He goes back and reviews salvation history. If we were to do it, we could go back to the Old Testament and remember how God delivered Israel. We could go back and remember how he brought his people back from exile. Even more immediately and urgently, as Christians, we remember our Lord Christ came down incarnated, goes lives a perfect life, goes to the

cross, cries out, "Father. Forgive them for they don't know what they're doing." And we realize that in that plaintiff cry on the cross as the wrath of God is falling down upon him, he's not simply praying for his immediate persecutors, he's praying for everyone that would ever believe on him. You know, praying for you and me because he bore our sins, he loved me and gave himself up for me. Beloved, he's praying for us. He's praying for you and me as he does that. "Father, forgive them. He's so ignorant in his rebellion, he doesn't realize the consequences of the blasphemous way that he uses Your name. He's blind to the sinfulness of his carnality and his anger." Describing who I was, and to realize that the mercy of Christ, so great, so free, so abundant, that even as he's bearing the wrath of God for our sins, he's praying for us. Not retaliating against his tormentors. Praying for those that he came to save.

Beloved, that's the kind of thing that we muse on. That's the kind of thing that we remember. That's what we meditate on. We meditate on the doings of Christ and what he's done for us. We meditate on the fact that the Spirit dwells within us, that the Spirit is keeping us so that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. We remember that he's coming again after he prepares a place for us in heaven. We realize that we're going to see him face-to-face and be like him, for we will see him as he is, 1 John 3:2. Every tear wiped away. Every sin washed and cleansed. One day around the throne, casting our crowns at his feet. That's what he's done for us. That's what we remember. That's what we muse upon. And as we meditate on those eternal glories and riches that are ours in Christ, what do we have except that which refreshes our heart and strengthens us in faith? As we recall, what Christ has done for us, it changes our perspective on the present. So David here as he's remembering the days of old, musing on all of God's doings, he's not simply reciting history for history sake, certainly, it's not just for the sake of comfort, but it's reminding him of the contrast, God's faithfulness and goodness and what he has done in history provides the contrast to the present that he's currently expanding upon.

Now, as he's praying here and he says, "My heart, my spirit is overwhelmed within me," his present experience seems to be in conflict with those past things that he knows to be true, and he expresses that honestly in verse 6 when he says,

6 I stretch out my hands to You; My soul longs for You, as a parched land.
Selah.

He's renewing his prayer because the circumstances have not changed yet. God has not yet answered him in time in the way that he is looking for, and so he needs God to pour down his help in the same way that dry, cracked earth needs rain to soften it up and to restore it to its profitable condition. And so the Selah calls us to consider the concept of thirsting for God. David's heart is heavy as he prays, but he hasn't given up. His heart is burdened but he's remembering the faithfulness and the righteousness of God. He's remembering who God is, what he's done in the past and the roots of his faith are stretching for the moist soil where it can find the refreshment and nourishment that it needs.

And yet, as we end this first section, as he stated his problem, he has prayed without an answer. The answer has not arrived yet. So what does that teach us? What does that tell us? Well, beloved, just consider the fact that this Psalm exists. Sometimes the best things are just so basic. Consider the fact that this Psalm exists. David, in that time of discouragement, prays and records it in writing. What that shows for us, what it illustrates for us is that the pattern of godly men in Scripture is to persevere, to keep going one step in front of the other day-by-day and with each passing moment, drawing upon the strength of the Lord as we face our trials here. And the fact that God delays his answer – oh beloved, this is so important. If I could go back 30 years and talk to the young Christian, Don Green, 30 years ago, if I could time travel, I'd go back and I would firmly yet lovingly slap him a couple of times on the cheek, "Boy, listen up. Listen. The fact that God has delayed his answer to you is no call for you to quit. It's no invitation for you to disbelieve. It's no justification for doubt. The fact that God has delayed his answer is simply a call to you to persevere through the hard times without compromise, without giving up, without accusations against heaven. Put your fist down. Put your angry spirit aside. Lay your doubt aside and sink your roots of faith into what we've seen here in Scripture tonight." That's what I would say to the old Don Green or the prior Don Green 30 years ago, what he needed to hear.

Side note here, complete tangent. Those times were very profitable to me, those dark times that I walked through that I've alluded to from time to time over the course of my ministry. Very profitable. One of the things and just so you know, if this helps you have any kind of perspective on the preaching you hear from the pulpit, one of the things that I'm repeatedly mindful of is that I preach today the way I wish I had been preached to in those times. I wish that there had been, I wish there had been a voice and maybe there was and I just wasn't hearing it because I was too preoccupied, too self-focused, too self-absorbed to notice it, but to preach in a way that I looking back on, I know I needed to hear. You know, I didn't need, I certainly didn't need humor in those times of distress and darkness, and I didn't need just mere human sympathy. "Oh, I'm so sorry that you're going through hard times!" You know what? For a moment that sounds okay, and that's momentarily encouraging to get human sympathy, and that's better than nothing, I suppose, but, beloved, at the core of it, in our darkest times what we need is a clarion call to look to God, to remember his attributes, to remember who Christ is, what he has done, and that God could not possibly leave you as a believer in Christ in the current sad state that you find yourself in. That would contradict everything that he is. So look to Christ, look to who he is and trust him because of what he has revealed. Oh, beloved, it's not simply a call to exercise your volition and just try harder to trust God, that's not what we're saying at all. What we're saying is remember your God and rest in him even when everything about life seems to contradict what Scripture says. Persevere and trust him. The certainty of his faithfulness requires no less. And so if there are times where it seems like I'm particularly outspoken when speaking to a bruised heart, that's why. I know what I needed to hear back then I think, because we're all of a common lot, I think a clear call helps us more than sentimental sympathy that really does nothing to transform the fundamental disposition and priorities and affections of our soul. I can sympathize with you, and I do, but, beloved my sympathy can't be the ground or the strength of your soul. You have to look beyond that. You have to look vertically and you have to know God

and know Scripture in order for that to take root and to help you. That's why I preach like I do. I know what I needed 30 years ago and didn't get. So much for that tangent, I guess.

Well, let's go to point number 2. Thankfully, this isn't an 8 point message. Second point and final point tonight: David's plea. We've seen David's problem. We've seen David's plea. We've laid a foundation to be able to go through this rather quickly. The second section, the second section begins where the first section began. Verse 7, he says, "Answer me quickly, O LORD, my spirit fails." Verse 1, he said, "Answer me." Verse 7, he's come full circle, he's come back, he says,

7 Answer me quickly, O LORD, my spirit fails; Do not hide Your face
from me, Or I will become like those who go down to the pit.

The pressure is still intense. He says, "My spirit fails," that hearkens back to verse 4. You can see the repetition in the Psalm. Verse 4 he says, "My spirit is overwhelmed within me," and so he's working through this, you know, and that's one of the things that I think is very helpful to realize. You know, this isn't a one-time climactic moment and then you never experience the struggle anymore. This is a persistent, repetitive effort that we make as we battle against a great spiritual foe in our hearts. Great battles are never won in a day. Great athletic conquests are not won in the first three minutes of the contest. No, there is a persistent perseverance, a commitment to excellence, a commitment to victory. And you know, sometimes, you know, in athletics and in life, there are setbacks. And even spiritually, three steps forward and then it seems like two or four steps back, right? You know what that's like. And so we just go back and keep persevering in the principles.

And so that's what you see with David, "Answer me," verse 1, verse 7, "Answer me." In verse 8, it seems like maybe he's praying in the middle of the night as he prays in verse 8,

8 Let me hear Your lovingkindness in the morning; For I trust in You

He doesn't want to be like those who go down to the pit. His need is life threatening. And so he prays in the morning, appealing to God's loyal love. So it seems like he's praying at night, maybe just before dawn and the spirit that he's expressing here is the hope, the anticipation, the request, that God's answer will meet him at the start of the day. "God, let the day start with a manifestation of Your answer to me."

So a stress has God's loyal love as the ground for help and he gives another triple emphasis in verse 8 to express his faith. He says.

8 Let me hear Your lovingkindness in the morning; For I trust in You;
Teach me the way in which I should walk; For to You I lift up my soul. 9
Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies; I take refuge in You.

You see his faith being expressed even in the midst of the tension that he feels. "God, I trust in You. God, I lift up my soul to You. God, I take refuge in You." And sometimes

the faith is being expressed while the snapping turtle of doubt and conflict is snapping right at the heels and yet the cry for faith goes up.

He's humbly acknowledging that he cannot save himself. "God, I need help from You. I need help outside of myself." And yet his faith is even deeper and more multi-textured than that, his humility. remember this is a humble plea, his humility is seen in his teachable, obedient spirit. This is not a petulant child stamping his feet because he's not getting what he wants. This is David coming and expressing submissive, obedient faith. Look at it there in verse 8. He says in verse 8, teach me the way in which I should walk. Verse 10, teach me to do your will. He's coming and asking God to instruct him and in advance pledging his obedience. "God, show me the way and I will walk in it." This is nothing less than one who has said that he is willing to obey. It's a posture of humility. It's a posture of a servant. This isn't simply crying out for help. This is crying out for help saying, "Help me. I want to obey You. I trust You. Help me to obey."

I love this Psalm. An element of his trust is he's willing to conform his life to the word of God. Beloved, that's the only path of safety is obedience to the word of God and so he asks God to lead him in that path, lead him on the level ground, the path of obedience to God is level ground. There is no cause for stumbling in light of the wisdom and the authority of God's word and so he says there in verse 10. I love the submission of this. This is such a rich Psalm. First time I've ever taught it, tonight, won't be the last God helping me because this is really rich. Verse 10, he says,

10 ...Let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

He wants the Holy Spirit – watch this – he wants the Holy Spirit to open his mind, to enlighten him for greater understanding, and also for the Holy Spirit to incline his will toward obedience. And beloved, here's the core of the Psalm, here's the great challenge of the Psalm to you and me as we're walking through difficulties in this life. Beloved, look at where this Psalm is coming out. He opens up with a preoccupation with his trouble, trusting in the Lord, appealing to his attributes, but as you come and you work through his problem, and then his plea, you see David coming in like this: his preoccupation with his trouble has given way to a desire for obedience. "God, I want to obey. I submit myself to the instruction of Your Holy Spirit. I yield myself to the influence of Your Spirit on my heart so that I could walk in obedience to Your law." Beloved, when people spend their lives blaming other people for their problems and the sins that they've committed, they never come to this blessed point of submission. It's so important to just say, "Lord, I want to obey You. I humble myself before You. Now have Your way with me. Have thine own way, Lord, have thine own way. You are the Potter, I am the clay." You see, beloved, biblical trust is always accompanied by a submissive spirit. "God, I yield to You. God, I want to follow You. God, as if I was side-by-side with my Lord in Gethsemane, not my will but," what? "Thine be done. Your will be done as in heaven, so also upon earth."

So as we close in verses 11 and 12. Verses 11 and 12,

11 For the sake of Your name, O LORD, revive me. In Your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble. 12 And in Your lovingkindness, cut off my enemies And destroy all those who afflict my soul, For I am Your servant.

Do you see the repetition again? Verse 12, "I am your servant." Look over at verse 2, "Your servant. I'm Your servant. I'm Your servant. God, I belong to You and You belong to me therefore help me. I trust in You." And you see a final triplet here as well. What a wonderful Psalm. I mean the Spirit of God working through the pen of David really gave us something precious here. Look at it here, verse 11, "Your name, O Lord, Your righteousness, Your lovingkindness." In the midst of his trouble going from verse 1 to verse 12 and working through the process that we've seen where this has led him in the final outcome, what is his closing emphasis in this prayer while he is still under the pressure of his affliction? What is it that is occupying his mind as the climax of this Psalm? Beloved, it's nothing less than the glory and the character of God. The pressure of his affliction has led him to a posture of obedience, has led him to a preoccupation with the glory of God. He appeals to God's own reputation as the grounds to revive him and help him.

This kind of true prayer seeks the glory of God, not the ease of man. "God, don't give me the easiest, fastest way out. God, help me so that I'm not running away. God, do that which would glorify Your name. I rest in You. I trust in You. I'm confident in You. Help me in this time." And he closes with that, as I pointed out already but I want to emphasize it again, look at that closing line, "For I am Your servant." That submissive posture, that, as it were, yields his neck, as it were, to the Lord. "Take my hands, take my feet, take my eyes, take my ear, take all of me, take my heart, take my body, take my soul, take my spirit, take my mind and use it all for Your purpose, Lord. Glorify Your name in all the earth."

And beloved that is extended to us in Christ. It is further set forth for us in the New Testament. David prayed to God before the incarnation of Christ, we pray to him after it, and Scripture makes a point of that in the incarnation of Christ. How does he receive our prayers now? I don't even know if this is a great way to say it, but let's put it this way, with an added dimension of sympathy, our Lord hears us now. Following his incarnation, he knows what life on earth is like. And so Hebrews says to us, the writer of Hebrews 4:15, "we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore," therefore, in light of the incarnation of Christ and his sympathy for us, beloved, for us here tonight, therefore in light of Psalm 143 and everything we've seen from God's word tonight from a dozen books or more, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. "

Let's pray together.

Gracious Father, for the sake of Your name, for the sake of Your righteousness, for the sake of Your loyal love, for the sake of Your glory, for the sake of Your character, for the sake of Your beloved Son, look down upon us in our pitiable estate and grant us this

mercy and grace that is promised to those who draw near to You in Christ with confidence in our time of need. Father, help these dear brothers, these dear sisters, some facing most pressing issues to face tonight or even tomorrow. Father, it's so immediate and this is so directly applicable to the condition of life as we find ourselves tonight. O God, grant grace to each one to persevere, grant showers of mercy to help in this time of need that we might all grow in grace and expand our capacity to give glory to Your most wonderful name. For the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.

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