

November 4, 2018  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: Communion  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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## REMEMBER THE DAYS OF OLD

### Psalm 143:1-6

I love to hear older folks tell stories about the past. Part of the reason is because I know, have experienced, and understand much of the stuff they talk about. But, even when I was younger I enjoyed sitting around what I thought was a bunch of old folks reminiscing about days gone by. No doubt some of those stores tended to be embellished, but that just made the reminiscing more interesting.

Now I think that on occasion as I go on and on telling stories to the younger generation about past years' experiences, they don't really get what I am talking about all the time. For example, when I talk about records, record players, eight track tapes, and party lines, Millennials and Generation "Xers" probably wonder what those were. I do find that they are generally cordial and gracious to listen to this old guy.

But the greatest stories are testimonies about how folks have experienced God's intervention in their lives in past years. Stories about how God heard and answered prayer in very specific ways should be so encouraging to the rest of us who also love Christ.

Psalm 147 is like that. It is an outpouring, yeah, a full exposure of David's heart. To say that David faced some problems in his life is an understatement. While the Bible record shows that David received more of God's blessing than most people in history can imagine, it also reveals that David faced more and greater problems than most of us will ever face. Maybe there is a connection between those two truths.

Annie Johnson Flint grew up in difficult circumstances. Her mother died when she was three, while giving birth to her sister. Mr. Johnson felt incapable of rearing two little girls and sent the sisters

off to board with some friends at that very young age. It was a difficult setting, caused much trauma for the girls and then, after two years, the situation mercifully came to an end. In time a school teacher grew to love the girls very much and talked friends, Mr. and Mrs. Flint, into adopting them. The Flints were fine Christian people and offered a loving home to these two girls who at the same time became orphans when their father died from an incurable disease. As a teen, Annie came to salvation in a Methodist camp meeting revival. As an adult, she wrote this old hymn that speaks to our text:

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,  
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase,  
To added affliction He addeth His mercy,  
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.  
His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,  
His power no boundary known unto men,  
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,  
He giveth and giveth and giveth again.

David could say with assurance that when the burdens grow greater, the LORD provides greater grace. But we, like him, often stress out a bit when the burdens grow greater. We tend to get agitated and cry out to God as if He doesn't hear or as if we try to command Him. From this psalm, let's learn how to wait patiently as we call out to the LORD because we know from past experience that He will answer.

### David's Plea (vv.1-2).

As he did in so many of his other psalms, David expressed the sincere desire for the LORD to hear his plea. *Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my pleas for mercy! (v.1a)*. David illustrated the truth for us that the LORD's children are privileged to pray to Him. God has always desired to communicate with His children. The Creator enjoyed fellowship with Adam and Eve in the Garden. But sin broke the fellowship. Sin separated the created beings from the Creator. As a result of sin being passed from Adam to every person born after Adam, we are born separated from Him.

However, because the promised Seed of the Woman made reconciliation with God possible through His blood, we are able to communicate with our Creator again. In fact, our Creator, our

Heavenly Father, commands us to pray. Paul instructed Christians to *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)*. Peter likewise encouraged us to pray telling us to *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you (1 Peter 5:6-7)*.

Our loving Heavenly Father not only commands us to pray to Him, but He encourages us to pray. Jesus taught us, *“And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith” (Matthew 21:22)*.

And our Father invites us to pray. *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16)*.

On one hand, we have the amazing invitations, commands, and encouragement to pray to God. On the other hand, if we are truly the LORD’s children, we will desire to be heard by Him. If we really believe the LORD hears our prayers, we will desire to talk to Him. This should be true especially during those minutes of quiet time that we spend with the LORD each day. The intent of those times is to learn more about God as He reveals Himself to us through His Word. Then we can talk to Him intelligently according to what He has revealed about Himself. For example, we can rehearse His promises to Him.

This should certainly be the case when we find ourselves staring at difficult or impossible circumstances. The verbs *hear* and *give ear* indicate the depth of desire we have when we pray. To hear is to listen with attention. “Give ear” is an imperative which normally gives the sense of a command. Compared to the strong desire David expressed by these words, how much do you long for God to listen to you? If our habit of prayer is negligible or non-existent, there is not much desire present. Typically Christians seek the Lord’s face lightly in prayer. The intensity of desire for God to hear becomes quite obvious in cases of genuine fasting.

As we pray to the LORD, we need to request for the LORD to exercise faithfulness. David prayed, *In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness! (v.1b)*. The LORD is faithful to His promises. God is characterized by faithfulness. The word “faithful” speaks of God’s fidelity. It means that when God says something, He means it. Samuel reminded Saul that God had chosen him to be king over His people Israel. However, Saul did not keep his side of the covenant. The wicked king rebelled against God over and over until finally, God’s prophet announced that God ripped the kingdom from Saul to give it to a man who was God’s choice according to His will. The change was not because God is whimsical or unfaithful. Rather, God was completely faithful to His side of the covenant. He promised to bless obedience and punish disobedience. Therefore Samuel explained, *“In addition, the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind, because he is not a mortal who changes his mind” (1 Samuel 15:29)*.

Also, the LORD is faithful because His righteousness requires His faithfulness. Righteousness is conformity to a standard. God’s righteousness is perfect conformity to His own character. Therefore, even righteousness among human peers should be measured by God’s character. Stated negatively that means that righteous relationships prohibit lying, stealing, cheating, coveting, lust, and so forth. Stated positively, characteristics of relationships that reflect God’s character demonstrate love, peace, goodness, meekness, gentleness, faithfulness, fidelity, and such.

We must rely on God’s righteousness because when we pray, we do not have infinite wisdom. We often do not know what is best. We often do not know if or what God is doing in our lives through circumstances. Therefore, we are wise to submit our prayers to God and beg Him to answer us according to His perfect righteousness.

And at the same time, ask for mercy and leniency. That is what David meant when he expressed the desire for the LORD to forego justice. *Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you (v.2)*. No human fairs well in the light of the LORD’s justice. The word *judgment* speaks of the entire courtroom setting. The defendant is on trial. God looks at all the evidence. God the Judge passes sentence.

Even God's servants will not fair well in that setting. We rejoice in that we are able to serve as the LORD's servants. But we are not as righteous as we should be. God does not owe us anything that we pray for. What hope do we have?

Our hope stands on the fact that the LORD's justice is satisfied by Christ for His children. The perfectly Righteous Judge has reconciled us to Himself through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ. When the Holy Spirit miraculously regenerates us, God blots out all our sins – past, present, and future. In our standing before God, we are righteous and God sees us through the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. However, because we live in this fallen flesh, we are prone to commit sins which we need to confess and forsake. Forgiveness keeps us in fellowship with God, and being in fellowship with our Master gives us great confidence to ask our desires in prayer to Him.

But what was so pressing that David desired for God to hear his prayers?

### **David's Problem (v.3).**

Or we might also ask what kinds of circumstances cause us to pray? David was confronted by an enemy that seemed ruthless. He confessed to God, *For the enemy has pursued my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead (v.3).*

It is obvious from this plea that the enemy pursued him. Of course we know from the Bible record that David was pursued by literal enemies like the Philistines, Saul, Shimei, even his own son Absalom. It was no exaggeration for David to say they pursued his soul because these people actually wanted him dead. That is a fairly serious problem.

More graphically, David claimed that the enemy crushed his life to the ground. This is not so much a reference to physical crushing as it is emotional. Constant pressure from the enemy would make life very uncomfortable. As a result, it was also fair and accurate for David to conclude that the enemy depressed him. Continual emotional stress will lead to depression. David felt like he was sitting in the darkness of a tomb even when the sun was shining brightly.

We should be able to understand why David felt so deeply that he needed to pray because our enemy is also ruthless. Our enemy is generally not a literal person who is seeking to kill us, like Saul or Absalom sought to kill David. But our enemy is sin and Satan or the effects of sin and Satan. We know that he/it pursues like a lion. Satan is real, evil, and desires the demise of God's children. He is neither omnipresent nor omnipotent nor omniscient. But with his millions of demons at his beck and call, he can make life very miserable.

We know that our enemy seeks to "swallow us up," make us ineffective through challenging circumstances. Often those circumstances are sins others commit against us or tempt us to commit as Satan inspires them. That these things are so is affirmed by the Lord's warning to us through Peter, *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).*

Furthermore, our enemy desires to enslave us completely. Jesus warned us that the enemy sin will enslave us if we are not vigilant against it. He taught, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34).* Vigilance against sin means the ability to say, "No" to it. We must not *let sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions (Romans 6:12).* The enemy sin, driven by Satan, is spiritually deadening to the Christian.

And, our enemy also throws us into darkness like David's enemy did to him. We cannot be sunk in sin, engaged with sin, overwhelmed by sin and still walk in the fellowship of Christ's light. Sinners live in the darkness of Satan's influence. Jesus made that clear when He said, *"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19).* Christians are not supposed to live in that kind of spiritual darkness. Christians should live in the influence of the light of Christ's word. *So Jesus said to them, "The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going" (John 12:35).* When we are being besieged by sin and Satan, it is easy to slip into emotional darkness because we do not like the darkness of sin.

Realize that the downcast spirit is the work of the enemy and address it. Like David, acknowledge the condition. In Psalm 42 David wrote, *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? (Psalm 42:11a)*. And like David (as that verse ends), turn to the LORD for help. *Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God (Psalm 42:11b)*. Indeed, God Himself comforts the down cast soul of His child. *But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus (2 Corinthians 7:6)*. How did David respond to discovering he was downcast and discouraged?

### **David's Pondering (vv.4-6).**

To David thoughts of the enemy were appalling. *Therefore my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled (v.4)*. The LORD's child began to lose hope. This was a situation where the enemy seems unconquerable. It was one of those times when it looks like circumstances are out of control and the ability to plan a defense seems to escape you. The person's spirit is the foundation of life, the place where we find courage. But sometimes circumstances are so frustrating, seem so impossible, that all courage is lost.

David illustrated how the LORD's child is shocked at His feelings when so distraught or depressed. And maybe we are shocked at our response. We are appalled, overwhelmed by the feeling that circumstances caused by the enemy have caused our spirit to lose hope. Christians aren't supposed to respond like that! Aren't we God's children? Doesn't God promise to take care of us? Don't we have the promises of God? Doesn't God invite us to cast all our cares upon Him because He cares for us?

What are we to do? How can we get out of the darkness? How do we respond when we feel like Satan and the effects of sin crush us? David also illustrated how thoughts of God's faithfulness are encouraging. David declared, *I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands (v.5)*. The LORD has indeed worked faithfully in the past. Therefore, we are wise to remember what the LORD has done in the past. His Bible is full of examples and stories of His faithfulness to His covenant and promises He gives to His people.

Early in the history of Israel, just before God gave them King Saul, the people were led by the prophet named Samuel. Common sense wonders how a somewhat disorganized nation led by a preacher could possibly compete with a mighty nation of warriors like the Philistines. They had been established in the land for centuries. One day when the Philistines went to war against Israel, Samuel the prophet interceded for God's nation by offering a burnt sacrifice and praying. God answered the prayer, defended His people like He promised He would, and miraculously defeated the Philistines like He promised to do. In response, Preacher Samuel set up a rock, a memorial so that he and the people could think back to that day when God had been faithful to His promises. *Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, "Till now the LORD has helped us" (1 Samuel 7:12)*.

The name Ebenezer means "stone of help." We need to set up some Ebenezers in our lives to help us remember when God has helped us, strengthened us, delivered us. The LORD's children need to ponder His past faithfulness. God has been faithful to His promises. Even when God allows circumstances to chasten us, that is faithfulness to His Word.

When we remember that God is righteous and faithful to keep His promises, such thoughts of God's provision are satisfying. David prayed, *I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land (v.6)*. It is good for the LORD's servant to acknowledge His thirst. It is good to thirst for God Himself. A sinful nature thirsts for things that cannot satisfy. A sinful nature runs from one idea to the other, from one form of entertainment to another looking for satisfaction, but never finding it.

We should thirst for God's righteousness, His character. Often we are thirsting for that very thing but trying to assuage our spiritual thirst with material, temporal, passing things. But Jesus taught that those who thirst for righteousness are blessed. More exactly, Jesus taught us that we are blessed when we thirst for His righteousness. That kind of thirsting is a sign that we are His children. It is a sign that we understand that in the circumstances of the enemy sin and Satan attacking, we find satisfaction in Christ alone.

Because we live in a fallen flesh in a fallen world, we will have to deal with the enemy. The enemy is ruthless and desires our failure.

Sometimes we are surprised at how vicious the enemy can be and how weak we can be in response. In those difficult circumstances, we need to thirst for God and His truth. We need to remember how faithful God has been in the past to keep His promises to His people.