

The Glory of God in Affliction

Book of Psalms

By Ken Wimer

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Shreveport Grace Church
2970 Baird Road
Shreveport, LA 71118

Website: www.shrevegrace.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/shreveportgracech

Let's take our Bibles and look together in Psalm 108. I would like to talk with you about the glory of God in affliction. As David is writing this particular Psalm, it is in a time of affliction because he speaks of the need to be delivered and the last verse of the chapter, two verses, "Give us help from trouble," and verse 13, "Through God we shall do valiantly." Have you ever been in trouble? I've said that most of our life we spend either heading into trouble, in trouble, or coming out of trouble. It was Job that said that his days were few and full of trouble. One of the writers said that man is born unto trouble or adversity as the sparks fly upward. That's what sparks do. There's a fire, they fly upward and so we spend our days.

So let's read the entire chapter, Psalm 108, and look at how God's glory is manifest in adversity or trouble.

1 O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory. 2 Awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early. 3 I will praise thee, O LORD, among the people: and I will sing praises unto thee among the nations. 4 For thy mercy is great above the heavens: and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds. 5 Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth; 6 That thy beloved may be delivered: save with thy right hand, and answer me. 7 God hath spoken in his holiness; I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth. 8 Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my lawgiver; 9 Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe; over Philistia will I triumph. 10 Who will bring me into the strong city? who will lead me into Edom? 11 Wilt not thou, O God, who hast cast us off? and wilt not thou, O God, go forth with our hosts? 12 Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man. 13 Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies.

Let's have a word of prayer.

Gracious Father, as we take up Your Word today once again, I pray for strength, I pray for guidance, direction by Your Spirit to rightly divide this Word of Truth, this Word, the Word, which is Christ and the Truth which is summed up in Him, Who He is and what He has accomplished. I pray, Dear Father, that You would bring Your Word home to our hearts. Arrest these otherwise wicked rebellious hearts and cause us to bow to the One True Glory that is our Glory, that of your Son, and that whatever the affliction, whatever the trouble whether it be physical ailment, but even more so the Spiritual ailment of our flesh and the attacks of our Spiritual enemies whether it be the world or Satan or our own flesh, that Christ would indeed be our All in all. So we pray for Your blessing during this hour and I give You all the praise and honor and glory in our Dear Savior's name, Jesus. Amen.

So how does God manifest His glory in adversity? Well, in verse 1 we see that He does so by establishing the heart of His children. There is a foundation when you talk about strength and glory, when you talk about something being able to withstand the winds of opposition, even as the LORD gave that parable that when the flood comes in, if that foundation is not upon the Rock, the LORD Jesus Christ, it will not stand.

I often think of so many today that make a profession of faith but their faith is in their profession, their faith is in their faith. How many people have you heard say that as they face the prospect of entering into eternity, "Well, my faith is strong." My question is, "You mean it's strong enough to stand before a Holy God?" Because if you're looking to your faith to stand, that means you will have had to have perfect faith. That's all, perfect, and therein we see that man's profession is vain. It's nothing. There's none of us, not even myself that could ever even say for one minute or second or nanosecond that, "My faith is what gives me right standing before God." It's like this flesh, sure it's a gift of God but it takes the Spirit of God continually to cause me to look to Christ and rest in Him alone.

But here when David writes in verse 1, "O God, my heart is fixed," it's in the sense that there is a foundation upon which that heart is fixed. Jeff, you're a builder, it takes a firm foundation. You have to plant. Before you go up, you've got to go down. You've got to lay this thing on a foundation and that's what that word "fixed" means in verse 1, "firm; stable; immovable." We've seen the effects of a wind or tornado that goes through and just levels houses in a neighborhood and yet what's amazing is the foundation is still there. Thankfully, that our foundation never moves.

Times and seasons change. I was speaking on this this week with somebody, that even in our experience as God's children, nothing is the same. I don't think we sometimes like to think that our life is going to be exponential. In other words, I start here in weakness but I keep growing in strength, and so if you were to graph it, you would just see the curve constantly going upward. That's not how the Scripture describes life. In fact, you can go all the way back to Genesis 1, God when He created the earth, He created days and nights. He created seasons and He has made this world cyclical. What goes around, comes around. I believe that's why in Ezekiel's vision of the wheel, that wheel describes God's providence. If you put a spot at the top of the wheel, it may be at the top today but

what does a wheel do is it turns, pretty soon it's going to be underneath and crushed. Then in time, back to the top again.

This is how God has purposed our lives to be, but one thing that never changes with all the changes of times and seasons is the foundation of Who God is and how He has purposed to glorify His Son and when He graciously gives us eyes to see, it doesn't make those seasons any less difficult. When it's the winter season, for example, here in Louisiana everybody is complaining about the cold. We've had a few ice storms and weather and yet it comes and goes. There are some in some parts of the nation that are still under multiple feet of snow and you say, "Well, why is it that way there and here?" Well, it's because the LORD has purposed it. There's not one snowflake that falls. Weathermen try to predict whether it'll rain, storm, snow, but all they can do is guess. I wouldn't want to be a weatherman unless I just wanted to get paid to guess, but that's not my way of living my life. I like things that are certain, but one thing for certain is that in all the changes of times and seasons, it is God, His hand that is directing it all the while.

So I believe that's the sense here where David says, "O God, my heart is fixed." I don't believe that he's saying that my heart will never vacillate. You see, that's where we go wrong, when we think that somehow, "Okay, I've got it." How many times have we said that? We go through a life trial, the LORD has brought it, we come out the other side and we say, "Okay, I'll never have to learn that lesson again." Oh, really? No, when it says the heart is fixed, it's talking about fixed on a firm foundation and the reason the heart needs that foundation is because the heart is unstable.

This heart, it's not talking about the organ pumping blood in here but the heart, the mind, the thought, the soul, the very center of our being by which the Spirit causes us to know God when He gives life and look to Christ and rest in Him, that heart is not trusting in the heart. So we get back again to we don't put any confidence in this faith nor should we think because our faith is weak that somehow we're any less God's children.

I mentioned to you last time about people crossing the ocean on a ship, whether it's a muscleman who is physically fit in strength, or a little baby that has to be carried around in the mother's arms, the safety of both depends on the strength of the ship. The waves of the sea, you expect that as you cross the ocean. We expect waves in life, but the heart, as unstable as it is, one that the LORD has been pleased to grace with the presence of Christ, is fixed. It's on a Firm Foundation.

Look over in Hebrews 13. Now here the writer to the Hebrews beginning in verse 5 and 6 says, "Let your conversation be without covetousness." In other words, we don't want to have our mind and heart set on anything or anyone other than the LORD Jesus Christ. "Be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said," what? "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Here is something that the heart is fixed upon, that if we're the LORD's that even in the darkest hour while we may feel that the LORD has abandoned us, yet we have the Truth of His Word that He hasn't. Just because we feel that He's abandoned us doesn't mean that He has. He won't.

So verse 6, "So that we may boldly say, The LORD is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." So there, again, the heart is fixed. There are things to fear and yet in those times of fear, the LORD never lets lose of His own and so He says, "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." And when he says them that have the rule over you, he's talking about the apostles. Before the Scriptures were completed in the Canon that we have now, the LORD was still using these men such as Paul, even John writing the last of the books that we hold here in our hand, those were being written but these men the LORD established to be over His church in the early century.

It says, "who have spoken unto you the word of God." Here again, everywhere where you see "the word of God" in Scripture, I believe you can put there in the margin, Christ. The Word of God is Christ. A man has not spoken unto you the Word of God unless he's preached Christ unto you and that's what it says in the following, "whose faith follow." Now that's not talking about following their subjective faith or follow their believing. That word "faith" there is objective. Faith always has an Object. It's founded upon Christ. Faith's Object is always the LORD Jesus Christ, Who He is and what He has accomplished.

So follow and when it says there, "considering the end of their conversation," that word "end" means, it's the word that means the objective of why any of us live who are the LORD's children.

What is it? Now the editors put a period there at the end of verse 7 but in the original there are no periods, there is no punctuation. So keep reading, "whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation," which is, what? "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." What never changes? Who Christ is and what God the Father has purposed to do through Him. You see, this world might seem out of order to men but that's because they're blind. If you're walking around in a dark place, blind, and suddenly things begin to shake, it's a little more frightening, but put some light on it and whatever is shaking. We've done that in the middle of the night, we've heard a strong wind, a thunderclap, lightning, the windows rattle, what do you do? You bound out of bed and you walk around and check everything and you see, what? Everything is fine. The house hasn't moved. The storm came through but all is well.

That's a beautiful picture of how it is with us in this life in whatever storms. Again, remember that the LORD is the One that brings the storms. He does it naturally, but Spiritually. Any upheaval within your own heart or mind, you can be assured that it would not be unless the LORD Himself was directing it and therein we can rest. You see, that's the heart fixed.

I have a friend that jokes with me, when I ask her how she's doing, she says, "Well, my feet are firmly planted in mid-air," and I got to thinking, "You know, that's how we feel." But in reality, if we're the LORD's, our feet have never moved. "O God, my heart is fixed on that foundation." There is only One Foundation that can be laid and that is Christ Jesus.

So whatever the temptation, whatever the sin. You see, I think that we think somehow we're going to get to where we don't sin. Who told you that? Even in that sinning and fall, we have an advocate, Jesus Christ the Righteous. That's an amazing thing. God does not love His children any less when they sin or don't sin because we're always sinning, it's just our perspective. We think that but what does the Scripture say? He that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall, because in reality he's not standing.

Our heart is fixed not on our conversation, that's what it says here in verse 7, "the end of their conversation." The ultimate object of their conversation is none other than Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever, and that's why in verse 9, this is what I was getting to, it says and this is the conclusion therefore, "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines." That word is the same word as Aaron's sons that went in and offered a strange fire unto the LORD and the LORD slew them. We can never presume that somehow the works of these hands or our supposed sanctification, you see, that word is used in the sense that, "I'm getting better and better." That somehow I get to a point or I arrive at a point where I can enter into God's presence without the blood and righteousness of the LORD Jesus Christ.

That's the Truth that the LORD brought home to my heart back in 1984 when I read about, "The year that Uzziah died, I saw the LORD high and lifted up." Uzziah was the king. He was Isaiah's friend, had been for 40 years, but one of the longest periods of time that God kept a king in place but it says that Uzziah's heart was lifted up within him, pride, and he went to enter in to offer a sacrifice himself. He got to a point where he thought, "I'm able to offer this. I don't need a priest." And Scripture says there was a multitude of priests that surrounded him and stood in the way lest he should enter in, but he gave the order to stand aside and he went in and lay his hand on the altar and the LORD struck him with leprosy and he died.

Now when that news got to Isaiah and I can imagine knowing somebody for that length of time and thinking that somehow they were the LORD's. He didn't have any reason to doubt right up until the end, until what? He went in and lay his hand on the altar and God struck him. He offered strange fire. That's when Isaiah said, "The year that Uzziah died, I saw the LORD high and lifted up. I saw the cherubim around the throne saying, 'Holy, holy, holy.'" And he said, "Woe is me! I'm undone." I pray we never get over the woe is me. Now it's never comfortable but thank God He never leaves us to ourselves or pride, that if every day there's an exercise of this heart to remind us that it is not stable and that unless the LORD keeps it we would surely go the way of all flesh.

For David to be able to say, "My heart is fixed." Read the rest of the Psalms, he's not talking about that his heart is never troubled anymore. The only heart that is never troubled is one that's dead. The heart that has life in it feels the trouble, feels the darkness, feels the weakness, feels the sin. But here the warning is, "be not carried away," or about, "with diverse and strange doctrines." It's talking about people that are coming alongside of you and say to you, "You know, you need to get over that. It just seems like you're always in a funk over your sin." I'm just using contemporary language. "It just seems like

you can't think of anything else but the dark side." Well, when you're carrying a burden around, and who carries a burden around? It's one that is alive. A dead horse doesn't feel a burden. You can put all kinds of burden on a dead horse and it doesn't feel it, but on a live horse, as you continue to load that horse, pretty soon it's going to get unsettled. It's going to start kicking around. It's letting you know, "I'm not comfortable." That's an indication that the horse is alive and I apply that to the heart. Thank God that He doesn't leave us in a settled frame of the sleep of death that so many are in.

So "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is," what? "A good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein." That word "occupied" is the word "obsessed; addicted to," and when it speaks of "meats" it's talking about works religion. It's talking about going back to the old law, trying to work this thing out ourselves.

There is never any satisfaction but that our heart be established with Grace, and I believe that's what David is saying when he says, "O God, my heart is fixed." Where does the Grace of God establish the heart? In Christ, just as Faith always has Christ in His death as its Object. So grace leads one to Christ. Grace is not just a nice feeling, "I feel good today so God's being gracious." No, feelings come and feelings go and feelings are deceiving. I dare say that it's at those times when we're troubled and shaken by God's providence that at those times He's manifesting His Grace all the more, because when do you need Grace? It's when there's trouble. When the Scriptures say grow in Grace and in the knowledge of the LORD, it's telling you how you grow in Grace. To grow in Grace means to grow in my need of it and that comes through the knowledge of the LORD Jesus Christ. The more I learn of Him, the more I see my need. The more God opens my eyes to understand Who He is and what He has accomplished, the more I see just how undeserving I am. Who am I that the LORD should save a wretch like me?

So that's the first part of verse 1, "O God, my heart is fixed." There is no other foundation upon which the heart of God's children is fixed other than Christ. Now I said that this portion has to do with the glory of God in trouble, in affliction, because verse 1, the latter part says, "I will sing and give praise, even with my glory." And then again down in verse 5, that word is used, "Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth."

I read a commentator that is very knowledgeable in the Scriptures but I found it puzzling that on this particular verse he said it is difficult to assign any distinct meaning to this last clause of "even with my glory." Now wait a minute, Who is our Glory? Who is God's Glory? You can put there in the margin, Christ, and read it that way, "O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, even," the word "with" is in italics, "even of my glory." And down in verse 5, "Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth." Whose glory is above all the earth? Well, that's where Christ is seated upon the throne. He's the Glory of the Father in all things.

So the call here is that regardless of the circumstance, the trouble, the darkness of the hour, where is it that God causes the heart of His children that is fixed on the Foundation,

Christ, where are they caused to look? To Christ. When it says, "I will sing and give praise," this is talking about singing and giving praise in trouble. Now flesh and blood men, they wait until the trouble is over and then they say, "Wow, thank God!" But here it's talking about in the midst of that trouble, where is the comfort to be found? It's in Him Who is God's Glory.

We cannot worship God unless it be through His Son the LORD Jesus Christ and how sad to have such a precious statement before us and yet not see that here the Glory is none other than the LORD Jesus, and all who are His glorify God through His Son.

In John 1:14, I know our time is gone and we'll come back to this, but John 1:14, here's the confirmation that the Glory of God is none other than His Son. John wrote this. In verse 1 it says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God," so we know that Whoever this Word is, they were God Himself but as you read on in verse 14, it tells us, "And the Word was made flesh." At what point was God made flesh? When Christ came to this earth.

And it says, "dwelt among us." That's that word tabernacled. Think of the Shekinah Glory, where did it reside? Over the Mercy Seat. Everything about that old tabernacle had to do with Christ. It's a picture of Christ.

So this flesh, the Word, dwelt among us. Think of the old badger skins that covered the tabernacle. It was with the same badger skins that the people of Israel dwelt in their tents. If you looked at it, outwardly you would see no difference between the tabernacle covering and the tents. Well, that's what Christ did, He came and identified in the flesh with His people, but what was different inside the tents of Israel, there was nothing but sin and corruption. Inside His tent, the Tabernacle, there was nothing but holiness, righteousness. That's the difference. He was made flesh but He was not made fleshly in the sense that He was a sinner.

John said, "We beheld," what? "His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father,) full of Grace and Truth." That's the Foundation, Who He is and why He came and what He accomplished.

We'll come back to this but one other Scripture over here in John 12. I can hardly speak of Christ being the very Glory of God without coming to this particular Scripture because, remember, I told you that this is how God opened my eyes, this sinner's eyes. When Isaiah said that he saw the LORD high and lifted up, Who did He see? He's in the Old Testament. He was there where this temple existed and there's a difference here made in verse 39 of John 12, the LORD says, "Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart." A blind eye sees nothing. A hardened heart feels nothing.

So again I come back to this, when the LORD told His disciples, "Let not your heart be troubled," He wasn't chastening them or scolding them because of the trouble of their heart, He was telling them where to look when the heart is troubled. I'd rather have a

troubled heart, I'd rather go to my grave knowing my weakness and looking nowhere but to Christ alone than to go with a blind eye that has never seen the Glory of God in Christ, and a hardened heart that has never sensed any urgency or need for Him and Who He is.

It says "that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." That's a judgment that God has left a whole multitude in false hope, false religion today. Don't even be jealous of them. Don't even get your eyes on them.

Look at here, "These things said Esaias, when," what? "When he saw his glory, and spake of him." Whose Glory? God's Glory. And spake of Him, spake of Who? Christ. Because how were their eyes blinded? Toward Christ. How was their heart hardened? Toward Christ. But Isaiah was one of those like a firebrand pulled out of the fire as any one of us, to be given eyes to see and to look to Christ and see Him alone. That's God's glory in trouble and affliction. I pray that the LORD will use what we've heard to comfort the hearts of each of His children.