

Finishing the Race

Sermons on the Psalms

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As we turn our attention to the word of God this afternoon, we will take up Psalm 71. Its theme can be summarized by what we read in Hebrews 3 and verse 6, where it says, "But Christ," compared to Moses, "Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." These are marks of being a member in the house of Christ to hold firm the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm until the end and the same in Psalm 71, suppose it's David, is holding firm to the end in his gray hairs, and he is doing so both with confidence and with rejoicing. Notice how in the first three verses in our Psalm, the note is confidence, putting my trust in the Lord and trusting the Lord as my strong habitation. and who has given commandment to save me. There's confidence in the first three verses, and there is rejoicing in the final three verses, praising God with the psaltery, lips greatly rejoicing, tongue talking of thy righteousness all the day long. And we could think of examples of saints who did this, who held firm the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope until the end.

David, is one of these saints himself. He's expressing his own experience in this Psalm. He did indeed see great and sore troubles in his lifetime. Verse 20, "Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again." And he saw the rebellion of his own son, Absalom, and that coming after the persecutions of Saul. He saw Adonijah rising up and seeking to take the throne and we do read of him in the days when his strength was failing when he couldn't even keep himself warm in his own bed, and that even in his old days he spoke to Solomon his son and charged Solomon to walk in all the ways of the Lord and he reiterated to Solomon the promise that there would not fail of David's loins, a man to sit upon the throne. So David held fast the hope unto the end.

Another example would be Caleb and we read of Caleb in Numbers 13 and 14. He was a man that saw great and sore troubles. He was a man that had persecutors as we read of in this Psalm because when the majority of the spies, the ten, made the heart of the people to faint with their unbelieving and fearful report, Caleb stood up and stilled the people and then Joshua and Caleb said, "We're well able to go up and to take the land," and for this the people bade stone them with stones. They hated so much what Caleb said that they wanted his blood to flow on the ground through stones flung upon him. Caleb knew

persecution, but Caleb also knew going on in the strength of God the Lord as it's expressed in verse 16 of our Psalm, "I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD." So that in the book of Joshua Caleb says that at age 85 that his strength to go in and to go out and to come in and for war that it was the same as it was when he was 40 years old. His confidence was still in the Lord. He still believed the Lord's promise and therefore approached Joshua to claim his inheritance. Hebron was given to him and he like the psalmist in Psalm 71 who wanted to declare God's righteousness to the next generation, verse 18, Caleb's faith was contagious to his daughter Achsah because she also wanted the inheritance and she came and asked for the springs of water. So Caleb, likewise, was strong by the Lord's strength to continue firm to the end.

We have examples of David and we have Caleb as well, and what about our Lord Jesus Christ? We know that our Lord Jesus was crucified, perhaps age 33. We know that he did not have corruption. There was no principle of sin within him. He would not have grown weak. He would not have grown feeble from any internal principle of decay. He would not have become gray-haired but he was cut off by a violent death that he gave himself unto. He wasn't a sinner. Is Christ then sufficient to sustain the saints and even unto his gray hairs and those things that Christ in the days of his humiliation did not personally experience aging and so on? Oh, surely he is. We understand our Lord Jesus. He's sufficient for women, even though he as a man, he took to himself a human nature as he became man, but we see his tenderness in relating to the women that came to him and so on, and we know by that that Christ is sufficient for women who come unto him.

Likewise, our Lord Jesus is sufficient for the gray-haired and for those who go on in years to all who come unto him. We could think of it this way, our Lord Jesus Christ, he was in the deep water, Psalm 69, we hear his cries from the water flood that overwhelmed him and how much greater is his stature than ours, how small we are compared to him and yet in his great stature he was engulfed in the deep waters and he's made the waters shallower for his servants because of our lesser stature. And yet it may be that Christ's servants have to pass through the waters for a longer time, those shallower waters, many of Christ's servants have to continue in them, perhaps threescore and ten, fourscore years as Psalm 90 speaks of. Indeed, it's a wonder in a way that the Lord gives us only that long that we need to endure the troubles of this life. From one perspective, it's a long time to endure in a weary and wicked world, threescore years and ten or fourscore. But then we could think of Enoch. Enoch's course was shortened because God took him. His course was shortened after 365 years of walking with God, God took him to heaven, he was translated that he did not see death. And so if the saint must continue for 70 or 80 years, what is that in comparison to 365? Ought we not to bear it patiently and to wait under God's hand until he sees fit to bring us to glory? Indeed, what would it say about a man if he couldn't submit to God's hand of providence in the course of a lifetime for threescore years and ten or fourscore years, the man who is chafing under God's providence and the man who has bitter words against the Most High and not this praise more and more that characterizes this Psalm? Is that not a fearful sign that such a life of murmuring against God is in fact an accelerated preparation for hell? Whereas it's the life of praise. it's the life of trusting, it's the life of confessing God's righteousness, that's the preparation for heaven.

Well, we want to speak a word as God gives help to both to the young and to the old from this Psalm, and so the Psalm of the gray-haired can help the gray-haired saint to persevere, and also we can learn this from the Psalm as well, that for the young, all men are bidden and invited and called to come unto Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus stands at the head of the narrow way and he says, "Come enter in. Here is the narrow way, the straight way. You'll need to leave aside your baggage to enter in through this strait gate. You'll need to leave aside your self-righteousness, leave aside your darling sins to enter in through this strait gate. It's entered by repentance and it's entered by faith. Enter in here. Don't go with the crowds which go in the broad road that leads to destruction." The Lord Jesus is calling to all, to young and to old alike, and here's a wonderful thing that we are learning in this Psalm from this word, that those who come into this narrow way and who walk in this narrow way for a long time comparatively in this earth, those that walk unto gray hairs in the Lord's narrow way that lead to life, those who walk in this way will continue to find it a narrow way, a difficult way. We read and sing in this Psalm of great and sore troubles, we read and sing of enemies. The way is narrow, narrow all the way and yet always a good way.

Always a good way and that's something that can never be said about the alternative and so think of it. Here's what Christ offers you in the gospel, a narrow way leading to life. Apart from that, what can the world offer you for old age? You know, it says something to us, doesn't it, about the graciousness and the condescension of our God, that he has something good to say to the gray-haired because we see our society, what do they care about the feeble and gray-haired? We're headed in a direction as a society where the government will lift up their proud hand and foreseeably the government will be saying, "We can end the lives of people if they're not useful to society anymore. If they're just too weak, we will cut them off." But you see, our God is not like that. He has a word for his gray-haired servants. God, by implication, this Psalm is telling us that God delights to hear the praises of his gray-haired servant, that he accepts their prayers and praise. Blessed be God for this condescension.

The key to finishing the race, just as the key to the beginning of the race and the key to the middle of the race, the key is abiding in our Lord Jesus Christ, and I want to show you from this Psalm, although truly our Lord Jesus Christ did not come and would not have come to the feebleness of old age, we see many parallels to his own experience. I'll very simply try to open up a few of the themes of this Psalm by way of comparison with our Lord Jesus' experience, and particularly Psalm 22, which is in an outstanding way, the Psalm of our Lord Jesus Christ. We'll see some themes that are common to both Psalms.

There are five things to consider. The first is that abiding in Christ unto the end and finishing the race, it means in the first place, trusting in Christ God and Father. You'll notice the language that's used in this Psalm to address the Lord. He is called the Lord, and he is called my God. In verse 4 in this Psalm, "Deliver me, O my God," and again in verse 12, "O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help." And then in the 22nd verse, "thy truth, O my God." And it's the same way that the Savior has of

addressing God in the 22nd Psalm, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And throughout this Psalm as well, and how is it that the gray-haired saint or any any man can have a grip upon God as his God only by laying hold upon God in Jesus Christ, and when the saint does so the saint can pray boldly, "Cast me not off," verse 9, "and be not far from me," verse 12, "forsake me not," verse 18. And In the 22nd Psalm, you know that the Savior who cried day and night, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," he also says, "He despised not nor abhorred the afflicted's misery." And the Savior from his great distress and humiliation was raised up in his resurrection and is seated at the right hand of God. And so if God did not leave the soul of his Son in hell, if God, our Father, did not leave Christ in his humiliation, so the gray-haired saint may have assurance by that, that God will not cast me off when I'm in my gray hairs. He will not forsake me.

The first thing is trusting in Christ, God, and Father. The second thing about inviting in Christ and remaining firm unto the end is facing Christ's enemies. And you know that in the 22nd Psalm, Christ speaks of his enemies quite vividly by using animal language. He speaks of the bulls of Bashan. He speaks of a lion, of dogs, and of the horns of a unicorn. And our Savior, having faced his enemies, has been raised up and he's gone to heaven, but still Christ's enemies can attack someone else, which would be his members which are still left upon the earth. And so David in this Psalm is even in old age is mentioning his enemies. Verse 4, "Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked." And in verses 10 to 13, and when we look at verses 10 to 13, we notice that there the enemies use the same taunt that they used towards the Lord Jesus. Verse 11, they say, "God hath forsaken him: persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him." And you know that the taunt against our Lord Jesus was, "Let God deliver him if God delights in him." But Christ sees these enemies to be able to say, as the psalmist did in verse 7, "I am as a wonder unto many." That's actually an expression of fellowship with Christ. It's the language that one uses when Christ's reproach falls upon him himself. It's been granted to you not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for his name's sake. Facing Christ's enemies is part of abiding in Christ unto the end.

Also, a third thing is remembering Christ's youth. Remembering Christ's youth. You'll recognize again that Psalm 22 is being echoed by David, Psalm 71, when he speaks in verses 5 and 6, "thou art my hope, O Lord GOD: thou art my trust from my youth. By thee have I been holden up from the womb," and here you'll remember this, "thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of thee." And so it pleases the Lord when we take upon our own lips and make our own confession those very words that our Lord Jesus Christ did. It's already a marvel that any of us would have been preserved in the womb and brought forth by way of birth, that's a kindness from God. And how much more when we remember that our Lord Jesus shared that experience with us also being brought forth from his mother's womb by the special and extraordinary care of God to him.

The psalmist also says that God had taught him from his youth, verse 17. That's true in terms of common grace, that whatever any of us have learned in any sense from our youth upwards, it's been God who has taught us, and how much more when we have had the privilege from our youth of being instructed under the Lord as our God in his ways,

when we've had covenant privileges and may the Lord make those effectual to our covenant youth, to our children who are under the word even this day. May the Lord open your ear and enable you to lay hold upon this God who comes to you by his word, lay hold upon him by personal faith, taking him as your God and you see that even what is done in your youth matters even unto the grave and unto gray hairs. The best preparation for aging well and for dying well is to be taught by God in your youth and to confess him from your youth. Notice verse 17, "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works." So being taught and then declaring, that's the pattern and you know, children, we call upon you and we require you to confess and to declare and we ask you who God is. We ask you how many persons, in how many persons does God exist? And we expect you to confess the faith and to declare the works of God and his providence and so on and his commandments. Now, may it be, may the Lord so open your ear that you would confess our God's wondrous works, not simply as a matter of form, but from the heart. You see, where there is faith in the heart, there will be confession with the mouth and may the Lord make you confessors of his name from your youth.

Remembering Christ's youth and abiding in him from youth, this is a third thing, but then a fourth thing about finishing our race well is to be singing Christ's song. In Psalm 22, there in the end of the Psalm, our Lord Jesus speaks of declaring God's righteousness to a people yet unborn, and here in this 71st Psalm, this is a major theme as well, declaring that God is righteous. And so what work does God have for his gray-headed saints to do? To praise him more and more, verse 14. The more that troubles press, the more that infirmity presses, God wants his saints to praise him more, to praise him for being a righteous God who keeps his promises. This will be edifying to those around. Verse 18, David asks for God's presence so that he may be able to "show God's strength unto this generation and thy power to everyone that is to come." The gray-headed saint can leave behind him, can leave behind her a testimony that endures to those that haven't even come into the world yet.

We value when the Lord is pleased to bring baby Christians into the body. We value it when the Lord regenerates someone or when the Lord brings a new Christian, it's sort of like having a baby in the family and it refreshes everyone, rejuvenates everyone. But then there's also, not only is it wonderful to have a baby in the family, to have one with gray hairs in the family, perhaps the grandmother who moves in and she's in the family setting, she's able to tell of God's faithfulness to her. And we need the same thing in the church, those with gray hairs that will say, "God is faithful. God keeps his promises." It's interesting in the New Testament in Acts 21, where Paul is going to Jerusalem and he knows that he is going to suffer and he resolves not to even value his own life so long as he may finish his course, one of the disciples that he meets with is named Mnason of Cyprus, who is described as an old disciple, and that Paul and companions lodged with this Mnason, an old disciple. Think of God's providence in that, that as the apostle was going up, he knew that bonds and imprisonment awaited him, he was bound at Jerusalem and then came his long drawn-out trial, shuffled before one ruler and another and at last, through the dangerous ship voyage to Rome, he was imprisoned in Rome and eventually, we understand, was martyred, that in advance of all of that, in God's providence, he

stayed at the house of an old disciple, that this gray-headed saint, Mnason of Cyprus, no doubt had something to be able to say to strengthen the Apostle Paul. He could say, "As long as I've lived, I know that our God is faithful. He is righteous in keeping his promises."

It's interesting that just as the gray-haired saint is thinking of the brevity of his life and of going out of the world, that there's so much of the work of praise that God has for the gray-haired saint to do, especially the end of this Psalm is wonderful, it rises up to a crescendo of praise and of joy in the Lord. "I will also praise thee with the psaltery, even thy truth, O my God." We'll sing the verses at the end in the conclusion here. "My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee." It's as if we have David rejuvenated, David who is as the eagles age, renewed is his strength, he is waiting upon the Lord. Young men may grow weary and faint but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. Here is something of the old David, that young man in the wilderness who with all his heart he loved to praise the Lord, he wanted to be in God's house, and he saw great and sore troubles. He committed great sin. He was restored. He lived under God's rod. He had troubles bowing him down. But even towards the end of his race, notice he's still praising. He's praising more. And perhaps when it comes to joy and praise, perhaps we sometimes suspect is joy and praise mere enthusiasm, is it just the flash of a foolish youthful feeling, we may think, but oh, when we see a gray-haired saint who, as it were, can't do enough to express his praise to the Lord, well, then we can be more persuaded that this is no mere youthful flash of folly or enthusiasm, but that this is sincere. This is a saint who's on the borders of a world of praise, who's praising more. May the Lord give us such a spirit of increasing praise that we may be singing Christ's song.

The fifth thing about abiding in Christ and so finishing the race well is to glory in Christ's resurrection, verse 20. It's interesting, we consult different commentators on different places in the Old Testament and they'll say, "Well, you know, it really can't, we couldn't expect that the Old Testament saints would actually be talking about the resurrection of the dead. It must be something other than that." Well, we want to read the scriptures and believe the scriptures. When faith comes to verse 20, what can we see in verse 20 other than resurrection? "Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth." So not all the sore troubles of, not an accumulated weight of weariness of decades will be able to keep me in the grave. My God will quicken me. He will bring me again from the depths of the earth. We think there about the grave. There's something solemn, isn't there, about looking down into a grave, the cold depths of the earth, but from, as it were, even from the heart of the earth that God will raise up his saint again, and isn't that the reason why this gray-haired saint is able to go on praising more and more, like I was just saying, because he can see the resurrection coming.

So here is the race that's set before us. It's Christ that's calling. Christ is calling as if he were calling your very name, and he's saying, "Enter in at this strait gate. You'll have trouble in this world if you follow me. You'll have trouble all the way to the end. You'll be hated by men. You will face my enemies who can't get at me anymore. You'll have trouble, but at the end, there is life and there is resurrection and as you wait upon me,

your praise will only increase as you go on in my way." And so, may the Lord fulfill that in you, whether young or old. Amen.

And would you stand with me as we pray?

O Lord, our God and our Father in heaven, we bless thee for being a God for all seasons and for never failing thy people, for being the fountain that does not run dry, and we pray, O Lord, that the testimony of our older brethren would be precious, help us to heed it and renew their strength, O Lord, as they wait upon thee. And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.