

“YOU WHO HELPED US, COME HELP US AGAIN!”

Psalm 44: 1-26 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Perhaps there are few paraphrases of Psalm 44 as telling and accurate as Eugene Peterson’s rendering of Psalm 44. Listen to his paraphrase as it introduces our psalm today. “We’ve been hearing about this, God, all our lives. Our fathers told us the stories, their fathers told them, How single-handedly you weeded out the godless from the fields and planted us, How you sent those people packing, but gave us a fresh start. We didn’t fight for this land; we didn’t work for it—it was a gift! You gave it, smiling as you gave it, delighting as you gave it. You’re my King, O God—command victories for Jacob! With your help we’ll wipe out our enemies, in your name we’ll stomp them to dust. I don’t trust in weapons; my sword won’t save me—But it’s you, you who saved us from the enemy; you made those who hate us lose face. All day we parade God’s praise—we thank you by name over and over. But now you’ve walked off and left us, you’ve disgraced us and won’t fight for us. You made us turn tail and run; those who hate us have cleaned us out. You delivered us as sheep to the butcher, you scattered us to the four winds. You sold your people at a discount—you made nothing on the sale. You made people on the street, urchins, poke fun and call us names. You made us a joke among the godless, a cheap joke among the rabble. Every day I’m up against it, my nose rubbed in my shame—Gossip and ridicule fill the air, people out to get me crowd the street. All this came down on us, and we’ve done nothing to deserve it. We never betrayed your Covenant: our hearts were never false, our feet never left your path. Do we deserve torture in a den of jackals? or lockup in a black hole? If we had forgotten to pray to our God or made fools of ourselves with store-bought gods, Wouldn’t God have figured this out? We can’t hide things from him. No, you decided to make us martyrs, lambs assigned for sacrifice each day. Get up, GOD! Are you going to sleep all day? Wake up! Don’t you care what happens to us? Why do you bury your face in the pillow? Why pretend things are just fine with us? And here we are—flat on our faces in the dirt, held down with a boot on our necks. Get up and come to our rescue. If you love us so much, Help us!”

That paraphrase puts this psalm in our vernacular, and it rings true to what these sons of Korah had to say. God the Holy Spirit inspired the writing down of this psalm to show us all how we are when we go through times of testing. There are Psalms which express what it’s like to be disciplined by the Lord because of our sin or because we have been doing things our own way, and not His way. There are also Psalms that express what it’s like to experience evil or injustice undeservedly. In Psalm 44 the sons of Korah express the situation of what it’s like for believers in times of spiritual testing--times that may come about even though we have

continued to walk faithfully for the Lord. The psalmist here tells us what we may feel like during those times when our physical circumstances are so contrary to our spiritual walk—when we are living righteously, but everything is piling up on us—nothing seems to be going right—when we experience our own Job-like times of trial. And yes, the sons of Korah, as even righteous Job did, these inspired sons of Korah accused God of forgetting them, abandoning them, and not caring what happened to His own people. The occasion for this psalm is not known, but it appears that the Israelites has sustained some kind of loss either in war, in famine, in crop failure, or in all of the above—their stock market had failed, if you will. They had lost it all. Their wheat harvest perhaps was devastated by the locusts, the battle that raged on the northern or southern or eastern front with the Philistines or the Amalekites or the Ammonites or the Moabites or the Meunites or the Assyrians or the Babylonians had put their futures in jeopardy. Homes perhaps had been burned, vineyards had been robbed, synagogues perhaps had been leveled, and what was happening is presently no different and is now happening overseas in the 10-40 window—as believers are today being burned alive and their bodies are being thrown into pickup trucks—and hauled away like trash to the dump. What’s going on? Does anyone care? Is God asleep in the boat as He was with the disciples when their boat was being swamped in the storm on the Sea of Galilee?

Before we celebrate the soon coming of the Lord at His Table, let’s examine this psalm of the sons of Korah—it is a maskil meant to be memorized and some of these verses are verses all of us should put up on our refrigerators, on our bathroom mirrors, and store them in our wallets. Many a morning it would profit us to look in the mirror and echo Psalm 44: 26—“Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love!” The psalm breaks down into reflection on God’s help in the past and then puzzlement over His apparent abandonment of us in the present along with concerns about whether He will help us in the future. Nevertheless, there are five themes that overshadow the psalm that I want us to focus on as we face our own struggles. In verses 1-3, **Praise**, 4-8 – **Hope**, 9-16 – **Disappointment**, 17-22 – **Testing and Perplexity**, 23-26, **Desperate, Earnest Prayer** – With those themes in place, I want to focus our time of meditation today on lessons God wants us to learn in these five times that come in each of our lives.

WHAT LESSONS MUST WE LEARN IN TIMES OF PRAISE? (I.) Beloved, praising God for the past should be intimate and personal and spoken directly to God. Notice all the praise beginning with You, Lord in verses 1-3. “O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us, what **deeds You performed** in their days, in the days of old: **You with your own hand drove out the nations, but them You planted; You afflicted the peoples, but them You set free; 3** for

not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm save them, **but Your right hand and Your arm, and the light of Your face, for You delighted in them.**” Beloved, what should our children be hearing from us as parents and grandparents and great grandparents? Two things in Psalm 44 stand out to me. One—(1) **It is You we need oh, Lord.** The Newsboys have a song I think we ought to often sing—“As we lift up our hands, Will you meet us here? As we call on your name Will you meet us here? We have come to this place To worship you God of mercy and grace, It is you We adore It is you Praises are for Only you The heavens declare It is you It is you.” Holy, holy is our God Almighty Holy, holy is his name alone Holy, holy is our God Almighty Holy, holy is his name alone It is you We adore It is you Only you As we lift up our hands Will you meet us here? As we call on your name Will you meet us here? We have come to this place To worship you God of mercy and grace It is you We adore It is you Praises are for Only you The heaven's declare It is you It is you.” Have our children and grandchildren heard us sing “How Great Thou Art!?” But I see a second aspect of praise—and I want to us to get it—(2) **It is because we are weak, that we need the One who is strong. God has given us the way of weakness.** Live long enough to start to sustain aches and pains, arthritis, disease, aging, forgetfulness, and you will begin to have something to tell your children and grandchildren—they will hear it with their ears and remember it—as you and I tell them what Paul learned, and we all need to learn, that His strength is made perfect in our weakness. They will remember us telling them and singing to them, “Jesus Loves Me, This I Know, For The Bible Tells Me So, Little Ones, And Teenage Ones, And Single Ones, and Young Married Ones, And Middle Aged Ones and Older Ones and Dying Ones, To Him Belong, They Are Weak, But He Is Strong.” Let it be the heritage of all our children—to hear our praise—v. 1-3. Secondly,

WHAT LESSONS MUST WE LEARN IN TIMES OF HOPE? (II.) The sons of Korah in verses 4-8 tell us, “You are my King, O God; ordain salvation for Jacob! Through You we push down our foes; through Your name we tread down those who rise up against us. For not in my bow do I trust, nor can my sword save me. But You have saved us from our foes and have put to shame those who hate us. In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to Your name forever. Selah” Beloved, times of hope are not the same as times of praise. They may include praise, but underneath the praises, are problems lurking—Philistines, Babylonians—foes God has saved us from before and which He wants to save us again. But our greatest foes over whom we need to hope in God’s victory are foes of our own flesh. We don’t just fight the world and the devil, but the world, the flesh and the devil—as I John 2: 16, 17 tell us. We face our own pride standing in the way of hope, our own selfishness, our own bad temper, our own vulgar and

abusive language, our own lies and untruthfulness, our own lack of standing for God, our own cowardice, our own jealousy, our own self-will, our own stubbornness, our own blindness, our own ideas squared off against the promptings of the Holy Spirit, our own envy, our own unbelief. Listen to the sons of Korah, for it is only by hoping in God, only through You, Lord that we push down our foes, and tread down those who rise up against us. It's not by our sword, our bow, that we are saved; It is only by our hope in You, Lord that we boast continually.

On Friday, a man I love who used to go to our church came back to town and walked into my office. I knew his besetting sin, and I hoped to hear him tell me that he was clean—no longer a vodka-holic. This man loves Jesus, but he fights the flesh in addiction. I asked him if he was clean and he said, “Pastor, I am clean for four days.” I wept. I have spent long trips with this man mentoring him, but his addiction has sought to rob him over and over. I told him that the sins of the flesh are three parts—first – choices, second, habits, but in their deepest recesses, they are roots. We can in the flesh, by sheer will power, cut down the choices and habits of our addictions—but the poison vine of fleshly addictions must have the blood of Christ applied to the roots. This man agreed with me that he needed hope in the Lord and I told him it was time for training in his life, with a mentor, and we agreed on a mentor in his city to hold him accountable—and be like a cherubim with a flaming sword to help him learn to use God's power and not his own flesh to tread down his enemies. Beloved, what foes are there in your life that are killing your hope in the Lord? Martin Luther said it well, “Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing, Were not the right man on our side, The man of God's own choosing, Dost ask who that may be, Christ Jesus, it is He, Lord Sabaoth His name, From age to age the same, And He must win the battle.” With David I agree with the sons of Korah as he said in Psalm 146: 5—“Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord, his God.” Thirdly

WHAT LESSONS MUST WE LEARN IN TIMES OF DISAPPOINTMENT?

(III.) Notice verses 9-16. “But You have rejected us and disgraced us and have not gone out with our armies. You have made us turn back from the foe, and those who hate us have gotten spoil. You have made us like sheep for slaughter and have scattered us among the nations. You have sold your people for a trifle, demanding no high price for them. You have made us the taunt of our neighbors, the derision and scorn of those around us. You have made us a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples. All day long my disgrace is before me, and shame has covered my face at the sound of the taunter and reviler, at the sight of the enemy and the avenger.” Beloved, be certain that God is ultimately sovereign in our lives, but we do well not to blame Him in our times of disappointment. It is

so easy as Job did, and as the sons of Korah are doing in Psalm 44—to accuse God of rejecting us and disgracing us and selling us. God is in control of the circumstances we face, whether they’re “positive” and leading to victory or whether they are “negative” and inducing testing and trials. Yet, beloved, we cannot wisely make judgments about what is happening in our lives or in other lives, based solely on the circumstances. God is sovereign, yes, and He leads us through times of testing and hardship as equally as He leads us in times of blessing and victory. It is the same God in charge of us, our Father in heaven, regardless of external appearances one way or the other.

The lesson we need to learn in our disappointment is that we must retain our view of God that we held in our times of praise and hope. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, and today, and forever.” (Hebrews 13: 8) Do you ever wonder why we question God so much when we suffer because of sin in our own life - and nothing changes? There are no answers, no signs, no nothing but emptiness and frustration. The answer is so often found in the patience of God in His character. God is waiting for our view of Him to change. God is waiting for us to change our behavior, our direction, our attitude, and our heart's desire. The patience of God is a view of Him that we often overlook. I ask you today, “Is God waiting for you to do something that might bring you closer to Him? Is God waiting for you to come to Him in your disappointment so that He can mend what is broken in your life? Is God waiting for some of you to come to Him as Savior and Lord, really—in guilt and shame, repenting, believing and receiving Him? Don't delay, beloved. Come to Jesus now while there is still time. This teaching in Psalm 44: 9-16 boils down to our view of God and how we detect Him in our daily life. Proverbs 1:7 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." When we properly view God in His love, His power, His discipline, and His patience, we see Him in a biblical way that will change our lives! Do you have a proper view of God or are you accusing Him rather than repenting of sin in your life? God help us to remove the pointing of our finger at God or others, as Isaiah 58: 9 commands us. Fourthly,

WHAT LESSONS MUST WE LEARN IN TIMES OF TESTING AND PERPLEXITY?

The sons of Korah in verses 17-22 tell us, “All this has come upon us, though we have not forgotten you, and we have not been false to your covenant. Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way; yet you have broken us in the place of jackals and covered us with the shadow of death. If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, would not God discover this, for He knows the secrets of the heart? Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” The apostle Paul quotes this verse—Psalm 44: 22 in Romans 8:

36. First, the lesson for us is to hear these sons of Korah and with them be able to say, (1) **I haven't forgotten You, Lord.** Israel so often forgot God as we all can do. (2) **I have dealt truthfully with Your covenant, Lord,** and the other covenants in my life. The covenant of obedience to Jesus as Lord, the marriage covenant of faithfulness to our spouse are essential. Binding covenants must be taken seriously. Beloved, pay your vows to God. (3) **I have a loyal heart to You, Lord.** Is that true of you and me? Through all the times of testing and perplexity, have we remained loyal to God throughout? Deep down, have we refused to take Job's wife's advice to curse God and die? (4) **I have kept in Your path, Lord.** Do we as the sons of Korah know that God knows the most hidden secrets of our heart—He knows if we are telling the truth or boasting in a lie. The path of the just is not the broad way, but as Jesus said, it is the straight and narrow way. Not all believers stay totally true when the chips are down in times of testing and perplexity. The test of whether you are a true believer, and not a rootless believer is what happens in these tests and trials. Jesus defined the rocky ground believer in Mark 4: 17, saying, "And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while, then, when tribulation and persecution arises on account of the Word, immediately, they fall away." God forbid that any of us are rocky ground believers. Fifthly,

WHAT LESSONS MUST WE LEARN IN TIMES OF DESPERATE,

EARNEST PRAYER? The sons of Korah teach us to pull out the stops-v. 23-26. Listen! "Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever! Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our belly clings to the ground. Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love!" One of the greatest lessons of testing and perplexity is that it teaches us to be desperate, fervent, earnest and courageous to come with boldness to the throne of grace to find help in our times of need. We come not ignorantly, but boldly as the disciples did in the boat when their ship was starting to sink and Jesus was asleep. Their words led to Jesus standing and saying, "Peace, be still! The Savior is still longing for us to get serious, to pray through—to lay hold of the horns of the altar, believing that prayer still changes things. Why is God calling us to prayer, desperate prayer? It is because God alone can redeem us! It is no secret we are living in an ungodly world, and in an ungodly nation where God's vengeance and judgment already seems to have fallen upon us. Do you trust God to yet redeem us as His saints? Have you been obeying His gospel? That is where redemption begins. Have you been praying for God to save our nation and bring revival? It's high time for each of us to cry out in desperation for our loved ones who are lost, for our nation that is lost, that God will wake up in our little boat and redeem us for the sake of His steadfast love. The time is short. This is not time to be casual. Cry out! Cry out.