

“A Psalm for the Aged”
Psalm 71
(Preached at Trinity, July 17, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we come to **Psalm 71** we immediately notice the absence of the superscription that has become quite familiar to us. Over three-fourths of the psalms – 116 to be exact, have superscriptions added at the beginning. As we’ve seen, they usually give some editorial information such as historical information and musical instruction. They also usually identify the author.
2. So who wrote **Psalm 71**?
 - A. Some believe it came from the pen of Jeremiah – Calvin held this position.
 - B. Most believe this is another Psalm of David
 1. They see **Psalm 70** serving as an introduction to **Psalm 71**. Since this psalm finds David at the end of his life, it also is suitable that **Psalm 72** is written by or for Solomon as King of Israel.
 2. It also seems consistent with the inclusion of this psalm in the second book of the Psalter which ends with **Psalm 72**:
Psalm 72:20 – “The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.”
 - C. I’m going to assume this to be a psalm of David.
3. We find in this psalm the prayer of David as an aged man.
Psalm 71:9 – “Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth.”
Psalm 71:18 – “Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not;”
4. We find David in the condition that so characterized his life – the condition of affliction before unrelenting enemies. We find him facing his enemies with the same confidence that he demonstrated his entire life.
Psalm 71:1 – “In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust”
Psalm 71:4-5 – “Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man. ⁵ For thou *art* my hope, O Lord GOD: *thou art* my trust from my youth.”
 - A. We find no hint of fluctuation. No hint of wavering. “In God alone” was David’s theme.
 - B. David looked to God as his eternal rest. The word at the end of **Verse 1** literally means “forever.” Literally it reads, “Let me not be ashamed forever.”
5. **Psalm 71** can be divided in various ways. It would seem that no two commentators divide it the same way. I want to divide the psalm into five subjects:
 - I. Old age and its problems
 - II. Looking back to the past from the prospective of old age
 - III. Looking forward in terms of what is yet to be done
 - IV. Steadfastness in praise – **Verses 22-24**

I. Old age and its problems – **Verse 9**

A. Old age brings with it weakness

1. David states this reality - “forsake me not when my strength faileth.”
2. The fall brought with it mortality and with mortality comes progressive weakness
3. We begin as children with endless energy and then early adulthood with strength and vitality but already we begin to feel the progression of time.
 - a. Our muscles begin to lose their strength
 - b. Sometimes the memory becomes less acute
 - c. Pain begins to settle in the joints
 - d. Our balance becomes uncertain.
 - e. Eyesight fails. Hearing fails
4. John Wesley lived to be 88 year old. He kept a diary throughout most of his life. Two years before his death in 1791 the entry in his diary read: *Sunday 28 ... This day I enter on my eighty-sixth year. I now find I grow old: 1) My sight is decayed, so that I cannot read a small print, unless in a strong light; 2) My strength is decayed, so that I walk much slower than I did some years since; 3) My memory of names, whether of persons or places, is decayed, till I stop a little to recollect them. What I should be afraid of is, if I took thought for the morrow, that my body should weigh down my mind and create either stubbornness, by the decrease of my understanding, or peevishness, by the increase of bodily infirmities. But thou shalt answer for me, O Lord my God.*
The year before his death he penned:
I am now an old man, decayed from head to foot. My eyes are dim; my right hand shakes much; my mouth is hot and dry every morning; I have a lingering fever every day; my motion is weak and slow. However, blessed be God! I do not slack my labours. I can preach and write still.
5. In America we despise old age. We try to deny it. We are a culture oriented entirely towards youth
 - a. In a culture that is comprised primarily of older people we hide from the truth.
 - b. Most advertising is geared to youthfulness
 - c. Most older people tend to behave like they are in their youth. And the young have little respect for the aged.

B. The Bible presents to us the aged as those to honor and respect because of their years of experience.

1. This was part of the Levitical law
NASB **Leviticus 19:32** – “You shall rise up before the grayheaded and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the LORD.”
KJV – the hoary head
 - a. The instruction is to stand in honor when they enter the room
 - b. Those who are wise are worthy of double honor – their counsel should be sought and their wisdom appreciated.
 - c. We’ve lost this in our generation. We put the aged into nursing homes so they can be forgotten.

- d. The young would be prudent to be silent and seek the wisdom of those older than they.
Job 32:6-7 – “So Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite spoke out and said, "I am young in years and you are old; Therefore I was shy and afraid to tell you what I think. ⁷ "I thought age should speak, And increased years should teach wisdom.”
 2. The Apostle Paul had frequent commands concerning our duty to the aged.
 - a. They must be treated with respect
1 Timothy 5:1-2 – “Rebuke not an elder, but intreat *him* as a father; *and* the younger men as brethren; The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.”
 - b. They must be provided for in old age
1 Timothy 5:4 – “if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God.”
 - c. They should be looked to for wisdom and guidance. Paul spoke of the older women guiding the younger.
Titus 2:3-5 – “The aged women likewise, that *they be* in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; ⁴ That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵ *To be* discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.”
 - C. There is one more area of weakness that accompanies old age
 1. One might expect our warfare to decrease. Perhaps the enemy might let up and take mercy upon the weakness of our old age
 2. This is foolish thinking
David’s warfare was just as strong – **Verses 2-4**
 3. But God was just as mighty
- II. Looking back to the past from the prospective of old age
- A. David looked back upon his life and saw that God had always been mighty
Verses 5-6
 1. David had trusted God from his youth - *thou art* my trust from my youth.
Verse 6 – Even from the womb
 2. David knew that he had been chosen of God and anointed as God’s king, even from his mother’s womb. This caused David to live in great confidence before God.
 - B. Confidence is built upon a lifetime of experience – **Verses 20-21**
 1. David remembered his experiences as a small shepherd boy – how God had been with him.
1 Samuel 17:34-35 – “And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: ³⁵ And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered *it* out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught *him* by his beard, and smote him, and slew him.”

2. And he remembered Goliath
1 Samuel 17:46 – “This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.”
3. The psalms are filled with David facing mighty enemies but trusting in the Living God who continually defended David
4. Confidence is built upon a lifetime of experience. The early church father, Polycarp the Bishop of Smyrna was given the choice of bowing before Caesar or dying as a martyr.
 “What harm is there in saying, Lord Caesar, and in sacrificing, with the other ceremonies observed on such occasions, and so make sure of safety?” Polycarp declared, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: How then can I blaspheme my King and Saviour?”
 The proconsul said to him, “I have wild beasts at hand; to these will I cast thee, except thou repent. But he answered, “Call them then, for we are not accustomed to repent of what is good in order to adopt what is evil.” But again the proconsul said to him, “I will cause thee to be consumed by fire.” But Polycarp said, “Why tarriest thou? Bring forth what thou wilt.” While he spoke these things and many other like things he was filled with confidence and joy, and his countenance was full of grace.

C. What about you?

1. Do you find great confidence in knowing God chose you before you were born?
2. Peter admonished his readers to make their calling and election sure
2 Peter 1:10 – “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall”
 - a. How do we do this? By observing the evidence of God’s grace in our lives
 - b. Listen to Peter again:
2 Peter 1:4-8 – “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. ⁵ And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; ⁶ And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; ⁷ And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. ⁸ For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”
3. As God’s precious child have you not observed His mighty power in your life? Does this not give you confidence?
 Will this not bring you comfort into old age? Praise God for the experience of His grace.

III. Looking forward in terms of what is yet to be done – **Verses 17-18**

- A. Often people in old age languish in bitterness lamenting their life
1. They look back at past failures and lost opportunities.
 2. Perhaps their plans were never fulfilled. They think of what they could have done but never did. Now it is too late.
 3. They sit miserable while the weakness of old age consumes. Yet, they are afraid to look forward because all they see is further weakness and death and this terrifies them.
- B. David, on the other hand, looked to the future with great purpose and optimism
Psalm 71:18 – “Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto *this* generation, *and* thy power to every one *that* is to come.”
1. He saw himself as a teacher and mentor to the next generation
 2. With great energy he marched forward in life.
- C. This must be our heart
1. If we do not bring the gospel to the next generation who will?
If we do not teach the next generation who will?
 2. Will we embrace the modern mindset of retirement or will we press on?
 3. Look to Caleb as your example:
Joshua 14:10-12 – “I *am* this day fourscore and five years old. ¹¹ As yet I *am* as strong this day as I *was* in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength *was* then, even so *is* my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in. ¹² Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the LORD spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims *were* there, and *that* the cities *were* great *and* fenced: if so be the LORD *will be* with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the LORD said.”

IV. Steadfastness in praise – **Verses 22-24**

- A. David in old age never lost his liveliness in the praise of God
1. As he looked back at God’s abiding faithfulness his heart was filled with praise
The word for praise here is **תָּרַח** which carries the idea of thanksgiving.
 2. David’s praise centered around two things:
 - a. David praises God for His faithfulness – the word translated “truth” in **Verse 22** literally means “sureness or faithfulness”— God had always proven Himself faithful in David’s life
 - b. David praises God for His righteousness. Here David has in mind God’s right dealings. God always does what is right.
- B. Even unto old age, even unto the grave our lips must be filled with God’s praise

Conclusion:

1. Don’t be afraid of old age. While it has its difficulties it is also a blessed time. It provides opportunity to look back at God faithfulness and have your heart filled with praise. It provides a lifetime of experience with Christ and opportunity to share that experience with others.
2. In order to have experience you have to know Him and walk with Him. This demands giving yourself to the task.
3. Pray that God will enable you to press on in faithfulness to the end.