

“The Cure for Sadness”  
Psalm 77  
(Preached at Trinity, August 28, 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 enter **Psalm 77** we find another psalm designated as a “Psalm of Asaph.” It is set apart for the Chief Musician, namely Jeduthun. His name is addressed in three psalms – Psalm 39, 62, and now 77. He is also called Ethan, one of the musicians designated by God to lead Israel’s music. His name means “*Praising*” which is an appropriate for one whose life was centered around leading the worship of Israel.
2. We find in **Psalm 77** one of God’s people filled with inner turmoil and grief. It’s the kind of all consuming sorrow that you can’t escape.  
**Psalm 77:2** – “In the night my hand was stretched out without weariness; My soul refused to be comforted.”
3. In some ways it shares some similarity with **Psalm 73** where we found Asaph looking outward at the wicked and pondering with grief why they seem to prosper while the righteous suffer.  
**Psalm 73:3-5** – “For I was envious at the foolish, *when* I saw the prosperity of the wicked. <sup>4</sup> For *there are* no bands in their death: but their strength *is* firm. <sup>5</sup> They *are* not in trouble *as other* men; neither are they plagued like *other* men.”
4. But while **Psalm 73** finds Asaph looking *outward* **Psalm 77** finds him looking *inward* and coming to the same conclusion: that God had forgotten him.  
**Psalm 77:9** – “Has God forgotten to be gracious”
5. His inner ponderings were filling his soul with great sorrow. We saw this inner depression with David in **Psalm 42**  
**Psalm 42:5** – “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and *why* art thou disquieted in me?”
6. It is unfortunate when God’s people fall into such times of such encompassing sorrow and grief that it dominates their life.
  - A. Lloyd-Jones – “Unhappy Christians are, to say the least, a poor recommendation for the Christian Faith; and there can be little doubt that the exuberant joy of the early Christians was one of the more potent factors in the spread of Christianity.”
  - B. God is Lord over His Kingdom and He is sovereign over its advancement. But it is also true that He extends His Kingdom partly through ordinary people.
    - a. Is it not important that when lost people look at us they see lives full of joy in Christ?
    - b. People can look at us and quickly discern whether we are living with joy or sorrow.
7. All of us are subject to times of sorrow. We live in a world of sorrow. Even those of strong faith and joyous hope can sometimes fall into a pit of sorrow and gloom. But in such a abyss he must not remain.
8. Tonight I’ll divide this psalm into two simple points:
  - I. The causes of this sorrow – **Verses 2-9**
  - II. The cure for this sorrow – **Verses 10-20**

I. The causes of this sorrow – **Verses 2-9**

- A. First, look at the intensity of his sorrow
1. He could find no comfort in his prayers – **Verse 2**
    - a. His hands were outstretched in prayer without weariness  
**V.2 KJV** - "my sore ran in the night, and ceased not"  
**V.2 NAU** - "In the night my hand was stretched out without weariness"
    - b. He could find no comfort in his prayers – the indication seems that God was far away so he found no peace – only sorrow
  2. He described his great torment  
**Psalms 77:3 KJV** - "I remembered God, and was troubled"  
**Psalms 77:3 NAU** - "*When* I remember God, then I am disturbed"  
**Psalms 77:3 KJV** - "I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed."
  3. His sorrow brought him sleepless nights  
<sup>4</sup> **Verse 4** – "You have held my eyelids *open*"
  4. As he sunk further into the abyss of sorrow he even ceased finding comfort in God  
**Verse 3** - "I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed."  
    - a. This is particularly true if we are wrestling with a matter of sin. If our consciences condemn us we often find peace with God an elusive thing.
    - b. John Owen on our conscience's condemnation of our sin –  
"Is this the return that thou hast made unto him for all his love, his kindness, his consolations, mercies? Is this thy kindness for him, thy love to him? Is this thy kindness to thy friend? Is this thy boasting of him, that thou hadst found so much goodness and excellence in him and his love, that though all men should forsake him, thou never would do so? Are all thy promises all thy engagements which thou madest unto God, in times of distress upon prevailing obligations, and mighty impressions of his good Spirit upon thy soul, now come to this, that thou shouldst so foolishly forget, neglect, despise, cast him off? Well! now he is gone; he is withdrawn from thee; and what wilt thou do?"
  5. As the hours passed he could no longer even pray  
**Verse 4** - "I am so troubled that I cannot speak."
  6. It was a sorrow that swallowed him up like a dark shadow that consumed him.
- B. There are endless possible causes for sorrow in this life
1. This life is full of loss.
    - a. There is the loss of material goods, perhaps the loss of a job
    - b. There is the loss of health
    - c. The death of a loved one can bring intense sorrow. But the sorrow must not consume us.  
Spurgeon: "The sufferer has a right to mourn, a right which Jesus Christ has sealed, for "Jesus wept," but that right is abused into a wrong, when protracted sorrow poisons the springs of the heart, and unfits the weeper for the duties of daily life."

2. Looking backward is often a source of sorrow – **Verses 5-8**
  - a. Asaph looked back at previous acts of God’s mercy. He longed for the previous tokens of God’s grace – but now all he saw was bitterness.  
**Psalm 77:7-8** – “Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? <sup>8</sup> Is his mercy clean gone for ever?”
  - b. We have all been guilty of thinking the past is better than the present. Memories of better days can make us unhappy with today. The more we dwell on the past the more discontent we are with the present.  
Matthew Henry – “Melancholy people are apt to pore altogether upon the days of old and the years of ancient times, and to magnify them, for the justifying of their own uneasiness and discontent at the present posture of affairs.”
  - c. There are more suicides during the holiday season than any other time. The loneliness is more than they can bear.
  - d. People long for the experiences in their memories of days gone by.
  - e. Christians are often full of joyless sorrow now longing for some religious feeling they had in the past rather than looking unto Jesus now
3. Another source of sorrow is a preoccupation with self
  - a. Notice in **Verses 2-3** Asaph looks towards God  
**Verse 2** – “In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord”  
**Verse 3** – “I remembered God, and was troubled”
  - b. But he was really only thinking of himself  
**Verse 6** – “I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart.”
  - c. Often our sadness is the result of selfish preoccupation. We simply fell sorry for ourselves. We are far more interested in ourselves than what is most glorious to God
4. The ultimate cause is unthinkable but is the most common – Because we refuse to be comforted.  
**Verse 2** – “my soul refused to be comforted.”
  - a. Some have developed a habit of unhappiness. They don’t want to be joyful. They enjoy being unhappy.
  - b. It is a dangerous thing to nurse sorrow and hold it close to your bosom. It is the seed of doubt and the root of unbelief.
  - c. The heart of sorrow is fertile ground for Satan who will use it to keep your attention only on your self. He will use it to plant in you the evil sin of unbelief.
  - d. The mind that embraces sorrow is the mind that curses Christ for He is the source of all comfort and the source of all joy. It is a denial of Christ!

## II. The cure for this sorrow – **Verses 10-20**

A. The cure for sorrow is always the same – looking upward to God

**Psalm 77:10 KJV** - "And I said, *This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High.*"

**Psalm 77:10 ESV** - "Then I said, "I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High.""

**Psalm 77:10 NIV** - "Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand."

**Psalm 77:10 NAS** - " Then I said, "It is my grief, That the right hand of the Most High has changed.""

KJV - שָׁנָה shaneh

NASB - שָׁנָה shana

1. Asaph comes to himself. He recognizes the folly of his sorrow and unbelief – “*This is my infirmity*” – it literally points to a disease. In this case, a sickness of the soul.
2. Asaph remarked in **Verse 2** - “my soul refused to be comforted.” What an unbelievable statement – God was there to give comfort, yet Asaph in his sorrow refused to be comforted.
3. To wallow in our sorrow is an act of idolatry – it is to trust in something other than God to give us comfort.  
Spurgeon – “Much of unholy rebellion against the Most High will be found as a sediment at the bottom of most tear-bottles. Sullen repining and protracted lamentation indicate the existence of idolatry in the heart. Should it not be the endeavor of God’s children to avoid excessive and continued grief, because it verges so closely upon the two deadly sins of rebellion and idolatry?”
4. When we are afflicted our eyes must immediately go upward  
**James 5:13** – “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. . .”
5. It is great foolishness to have help so near and refuse to be comforted by it  
Illustration: It is said that many years ago, a vessel sailing on the northern coast of the South American continent, was observed to make signals of distress. When hailed by another vessel, they reported themselves as “Dying for water!” “Dip it up then,” was the response, “you are in the mouth of the Amazon river.” There was fresh water all around them, they had nothing to do but to dip it up, and yet they were dying of thirst, because they thought themselves to be surrounded by the salt sea. How often are men ignorant of their mercies! How sad, that they should perish for lack of knowledge! But suppose after the sailors had received the joyful information, they had still refused to draw up the water which was in boundless plenty all around them, would it not have been a marvel? Would you not at once conclude that madness had taken hold upon the captain and his crew?
6. As long as Asaph refused to look to God alone he could find no relief – But when he looked upward he found peace and comfort for his soul.  
**Psalm 77:10** – “*This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High.*”

7. He remembered the almighty hand of God. Nothing frustrates God. Nothing can resist His power. And God works His almighty power for our good.
- B. Asaph meditated upon the past triumphs of God in working for His people
- Psalm 77:11 KJV** - "I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old."
- Psalm 77:12** – "I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings."
- Psalm 77:13-14** – "who is so great a God as *our* God? <sup>14</sup> Thou *art* the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people."
1. God worked in the past. Will He not work now?
  2. **Verses 16-20** – Asaph recounts God's mighty deliverance of Israel from Egypt. He meditates on God's mighty power in parting the Red Sea and leading His people to safety and security.
  3. We must do the same thing. Not only has God worked mightily in the lives of others, God has also worked wonders in our own lives. We must continually remind ourselves of God's mighty power to deliver.
- C. **Psalm 77** ends abruptly because the end is the beginning.
- Asaph began with an introduction of hope
1. He prayed and God heard
  2. Notice the passion of his prayer – "I cried unto God with my voice" Repetition in Hebrew makes it emphatic. It was an earnest and fervent cry to God.
  3. And there was confidence in God's attendance to his prayer.  
There are differences in the translations:  
KJV, NKJV – "he gave ear unto me."  
ESV, NAS, CSB – "He will hear me."  
NIV – "I cried out to God to hear me."
  4. The focus should be on the prayer and the answer – God hears our prayers
- D. At the very beginning of this psalm we are given the comfort that it will end well
1. This is our hope in all things – it will end well
  2. God hears our prayers – this is our confidence. God will hear in due season. This is our comfort—that all will end well.

### Conclusion:

1. There are certainly physical maladies that can cause us great anguish of heart. Charles Spurgeon knew of these times of physical suffering. He suffered with neuralgia and gout that left him in great pain and sometimes made it impossible for him to walk or even write. He also suffered with severe headaches and these physical ills often left him with terrible bouts of depression that often brought him to the brink of despair. He wrote "Alas, my God, the writer of this exposition well knows what thy servant Asaph meant, for his soul is familiar with the way of grief. Deep glens and lonely caves of soul depressions, my spirit knows full well your awful glooms!"
2. Apart from these physical maladies, the primary cause of our unhappiness is always unbelief. We begin to focus upon ourselves and our situation rather upon Christ. Our contentment becomes fixed on something apart from Christ. We set our hope on something apart from Christ.

3. As I said at the beginning, it is a terrible testimony before the unbelieving world because they see us behaving exactly like them.
4. The command given to us is to be filled with joy. We are filled with joy when we take our eyes off ourselves and we fill our lives with Christ.  
We must always remember the richness of His grace. We become filled with sorrow as we forget the rich storehouses of His grace and mercy.