

Psalm 31 • Declaring the faithfulness of God in our prayers

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We begin chapter 31 of the Psalms. And I don't know how many of you have read ahead at all here, but we're going to look through this Psalm. But when you read through it as is the case, once you get about this far into the Psalms, you start wondering did I read that before?

There's a great similarity in the Psalms because David is pouring out his heart to the Lord. He's going through great difficulties in life and he's asking God to help him. And I suppose that you could say to yourself, well, this sounds a lot like several of the other Psalms that we've looked at, but in this particular Psalm, verses 9 through 13 really encompass the main body of David's complaint. I want to isolate that first this evening, and I want to read just those verses and then we'll go back and pick up the rest. Alright.

Verses 9 through 13. Look with me there. I'm reading from the ESV. It says, *“Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also.” (ESV)*

Notice David refers to both the soul and the body. The soul being the intellect and emotions, physically the body. He's saying, emotionally and physically, I am just exhausted. I don't know if you've ever been there

Verse 10, *“For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away.”* Remember what he says there about his bones wasting away? We'll deal with that in the next Psalm.

He goes on in verse 11 to say, *“Because of all my adversaries (or enemies your Bible may say,) I have become a reproach, especially to my neighbors, and an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. ¹² I have been forgotten like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel.”* Well, that's an interesting picture, isn't it?

“¹³ For I hear the whispering of many—terror on every side!—as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.” Alright, stop there for just a little bit.

Wow, what a situation he finds himself in. Between the vicious enemies who are seeking after his undoing and his own physical afflictions, which he talks about here. And specifically makes reference to the fact that he's physically under it. And we don't know exactly what's going on here, but there seemed to be a lot going on in David's life that really needs the Lord's attention.

And this is something we see as pretty regular in the Psalms. Sometimes we can read through parts of the Bible or we can remember David. You remember stories about David or something like that. You might come away thinking, David had a really cool life. I mean, he conquered a giant when he was a teenager and he was anointed of the Lord even long before he became the king. Did a lot of pretty cool things, eventually became the king of all of Israel. He was a mighty warrior. This is a man who the women sang about in their songs. They literally made up songs to speak of his heroic, feats and victories and stuff like that.

But David was a man who knew suffering. David was a man who knew what it was like to be discouraged and to be hurting. He knew what it was to cry out to the Lord and he often describes times of illness where he talks about... And he talks about it usually in like terms of physical affliction, like he's doing in this one. He talks about his bones and so forth. You wonder...

And then more often he speaks of his enemies, those who are bent on destroying him. But now since we've already read about the crux of David's pain, and we know how common it was in his life, what I want to do, is I want to read the rest of the psalm minus the section we just read, and I want to point out to you how many times David cites the faithfulness of God.

And here's the reason. I'll tell you ahead of time why I want you to be noting that. Because typically, I think, although you and I probably don't sound like David does when he prays, I mean, I don't pray in a poetic fashion like he does. And this is Hebrew poetry.

But these verses, verses 9 through 13, this is usually about what our prayers consist of. This is basically what we say to God and when we're done, we say, amen. Lord, amen. We start off with our problems and we tell Him what's going on in our lives and we ask Him for what we want Him to do in our lives and then we say, amen, and we sign off from there.

But I want you to know there are several other verses to this prayer/song/Psalm and I want you just to, I want you to really take note of, again, the times that David cites makes note of God's faithfulness.

Start in verse 1 with me. He says, *“In you, O LORD, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me! ² Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me!*

³ For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me; ⁴ you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge. ⁵ Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.

⁶ I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols, but I trust in the Lord. ⁷ I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love, because you have seen my affliction; you have known the distress of my soul, ⁸ and you have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy; you have set my feet in a broad place.” In other words, a wide place.

Now skip down to verse 14, *“But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, “You are my God.” ¹⁵ My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors! ¹⁶ Make your face shine on your servant; save me in your steadfast love! ¹⁷ O LORD, let me not be put to shame, for I call upon you; let the wicked be put to shame; let them go silently to Sheol. (or the grave) ¹⁸ Let the lying lips be mute, which speak insolently against the righteous in pride and contempt.*

¹⁹ Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind! ²⁰ In the cover of your presence you hide them from the plots of men; you store them in your shelter from the strife of tongues.” In other words, from hurtful words.

²¹ Blessed be the LORD, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was in a besieged city. ²² I had said in my alarm, “I am cut off from your sight.” But you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cried to you for help.

²³ Love the LORD, all you his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride. ²⁴ Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD!”

All right, beautiful Psalm. But what we did is we took the complaint part out of it. Most of it anyway. That that middle portion. And now we've basically just read the rest of the Psalm in essence. The part where, David continues to talk to the Lord.

But sprinkled throughout there are no fewer than, and probably more than 15 references to God's faithfulness in the midst of this very difficult prayer. 15 references that take up, frankly, more verses than do the body of his complaint and his request.

What I'm going to do is I'm going to put them up on the screen for you. We're going to go through them. We're going to talk about them. It's going to take 2 screens to see them all. And, by the way, when you see any of them that are in brackets, that's I took a fairly lengthy sentence and I reworded it to fit on the screen.

David's Expressions of Faith

- You are my rock and my fortress
- You lead me and guide me
- [You free me from my enemy's net]
- You are my refuge
- You have redeemed me
- I trust in the Lord
- I will rejoice in your steadfast love
- You have seen my affliction and know my distress

He basically said, **You are my rock and my fortress. You lead me and guide me. You free me from my enemy's net.** In other words, from the things that my enemy lays for me to be trapped in. **You are my refuge. You have redeemed me. I trust in the Lord. I will rejoice in your steadfast love.** And he also goes on to say, **You have seen my affliction and you know my distress.**

David's Expressions of Faith

- You have not delivered me to my enemy
- You have set my feet in a broad place
- My times are in your hands
- How abundant is your goodness!
- [You hide and shelter your children]
- You heard the voice of my pleas
- The LORD preserves the faithful

You have not delivered me to my enemy. We go to the next one. You have set my feet in a broad place. My times are in your hands. How abundant is your goodness! You hide and shelter your children. Again, that's me rephrasing what David said there. **You heard the voice of my pleas and the LORD preserves the faithful.**

Now, what we've just did, and I just did this quickly. I took the things that David said, and I wrote them down. And again, these are just the ones that I just found quickly, where David added to his prayer, and said, but, this is You. This is You. You are faithful, You are my rock, You are my fortress, You have redeemed me. Twice, he says, I trust in the Lord. Okay.

Why am I bringing all this up? Well, it's because it is so incredibly important that you and I add faith to our prayer. We've talked about this before. But since the Lord has seen fit to repeat this in the Psalms, I think it's something that He definitely wants us to get a hold of. And that is the amount that David applies faith to his prayers.

And I think, by the way, there's something important and significant about speaking out those prayers, too. I mean, there's nothing wrong with writing down your prayers. There's nothing wrong with praying silently.

But you know what? There's something special that happens when we speak out our prayers because it's like we're more engaged, like we're more involved. Have you ever noticed when you're praying and you're not speaking verbally, that it's very possible for your mind to wander? It's very possible for other things to be going through your mind even at the same time, and pretty soon you're thinking about something else.

It's because you're more thinking your prayer. And not that God can't hear you in those instances. He can, and He does. But when we give word to our prayer, and not just our prayer, but also to words of faith, like David is doing here, there is something significant that takes place in our hearts that helps lock this in to what we're communicating to the Lord.

And I think, there's sometimes a greater sense of connectedness just in that conversation with the Lord, to talk to Him. To tell Him what's going on in your life as David does in these verses, but also to spend plenty of time speaking words of faith and assurance in the midst of your prayer.

David was going through some very difficult times when he, originally penned this prayer. There were some really significant and difficult things happening in

his life. And yet he took time to say, *“how abundant is your goodness,”* and, *You've been my deliverer. I love how David says to the Lord, “you have seen my affliction;”* and you know my distress.

Again, David is not speaking from the standpoint of having been relieved yet of the very things of which he writes. He hasn't yet been relieved. And yet he speaks to the Lord by faith and says, *you've seen my affliction, my distress.*

What do we do? What do we say when we're in the midst of praying in the midst of our distress and anxiety? Lord, are you even listening? Do you even care? Do you hear when I talk to you? I don't think He hears. That's what we start saying to other people. I don't think God's listening to me. I don't think God hears a word that I say.

Now, that's our conclusion. We don't know that we're speaking it out of our hurt and our frustration and we're giving voice to that attitude rather than doing what David is doing and giving voice to the attitude of faith. Even when he doesn't feel it saying, *I believe, I believe that You have seen my affliction and I believe that, my distress, I believe that you're listening right now. I believe that You care about me and I believe that You are abundant in goodness.*

What a wonderful thing to say in prayer. Lord, I believe that you overflow in goodness because you have an abundance. I would have to say that, that there's one particular statement that I think in this whole Psalm is probably the most important one, and it's in verse 14. If you look with me there again, and I've already made reference to it, but it's where he simply says, *“But I trust in you, O LORD;” “But I trust in you...”*

Can I encourage you to do something? When you're praying, if you don't add any other word of praise or faith, put this one in. Stick this one in your prayer. Even if it's at the very tail end. Lay out your needs to the Lord. Talk to Him. Go ahead and complain to Him. He doesn't mind. David laid his complaints before God and there was no problem at all.

But end your prayer this way. *But, I trust in You, O Lord, in Jesus name, amen.* What a wonderful way to just, to end it. *But I trust in You.* Isn't that such an incredible comfort when you hear somebody telling about what's going on in their life, when they're going through a difficult season and they'll tell you about it and then they'll say, *but we're trusting God.*

We're choosing to trust God through this time. We trust in the Lord because He's been good and He has delivered us. He's been good to us. And so we're

going to continue to trust that simple declaration of faith reminds me of the words of Jesus. Let me show this on the screen to you from Matthew chapter 10 where Jesus said,

Matthew 10:29-31 (ESV)

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Now that's the Word of the Lord to you and I. And I think that's something that, we really need to take to heart. And if you really believe it, it's going to change the way you pray. It's going to change your attitude. If you don't believe it, that's going to change your attitude as well.

I think this is a great passage to mark in your Bible and then ask yourself, do my prayers reflect Matthew 10:29 through 31? Do I pray like I am cared for? Far more than mere birds. Because the Lord told me so. Does my prayer reflect my faith in His statement? Do you get that?

You see, there comes a point in our lives where we have to decide how we're going to pray, how we're going to address the Lord when difficult seasons come into our lives. Am I going to pray by faith or not?

And praying by faith means, I'm going to believe what God said and I'm going to stand on it. It wasn't, I didn't say it, He said it. He said, hey, fear not. No, it doesn't mean you and I are never going to be afraid. But we have a reason to take heart and to have hope, because the Lord told us He cared for us.

And so when the enemy comes to whisper in your ear and say, God doesn't care for you, He's not listening to your prayer. You go back to Matthew 10 and you speak that aloud. In fact, it's a good passage to memorize.

No, I will not believe that. I'm going to believe instead that all the hairs of my head are numbered and God told me to fear not, because I am of great value to Him.

I think, like David, you and I have ample reason to fill our prayers with words of faith and hope. And that's what I wanted to bring out here in this Psalm, that David's prayers are filled with faith and hope in the Lord. It doesn't mean he felt it.

Faith isn't based on feelings. It's based on the promises of God's Word and our dependability upon those promises. We talked about praise last time we were in the Psalms and I was thinking more about praise. And you remember I told you, last week that you know when we praise when we just take time to praise the Lord for something about Him that's praiseworthy complaining and stuff has to take a quick vacation.

But I also got to thinking about the fact that when we're praying and I'm obviously when I'm praying, I'm processing what I'm going through and what I'm praying about. I'm thinking about it. I'm thinking about what's happening in my life, what's happening in somebody else's life what's and how I'm going to process that as it relates to communicating it to God. Okay.

But when I take a moment from that prayer time and I just begin to praise God, let's say, for example, I'm just going to praise Him about His faithfulness, which is frankly one of my favorite things to praise Him for.

And when I do that, while I'm praising Him for His faithfulness, I begin to process my need in light of His faithfulness. Do you get it? And so that's what happens when we praise.

For example, if I'm praising Him for His power, if I'm just saying, God Your power is amazing. Your power, it's unmatched in the universe. There's no power above You, and I'm just speaking those words. Eventually, I'm going to begin to process my issues, my needs, my fears, and so forth in light of His power. And I'm going to begin to actually understand that my need is dwarfed by His power, or whatever.

If there's one thing that the Psalms teach us about prayer, it's that we need to focus more on God and less on the things that face us that we consider dangerous, fearful, or whatever, or treacherous. We certainly need to bring those up to the Lord.

But what we see David doing over and over and over again is putting his focus on the Lord in the midst of his trials, in the midst of his pain, in the midst of the danger.