

The Balm of Asaph
By
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Villa Rica 7/10/05
Psalm 77:1-12

This year marks 150 years of history for this congregation. First Presbyterian Church was organized with fourteen members 150 years ago in 1855 as Villa Rica Presbyterian Church. First services were held in the homes of the members. All early records were destroyed during the Civil War and services were suspended until 1867. In 1885 a white frame building for worship was constructed on Candler Street.

Mr. W. B. Candler was Clerk of Session from 1888 until 1921. After his death, his children donated his home property to the church.

In 1930 the frame church building was moved to this present location on the donated property. It was bricked and a basement was added for Sunday school rooms. The mahogany pews, pulpit, and the stained glass windows were purchased from Old Wesley Memorial Church in Atlanta when it was torn down. The formula for the color in the windows has been lost, making them irreplaceable antiques.

Mr. Candler's home behind the church served as a manse for many years, and later for Sunday school rooms and fellowship activities. It was torn down in 1998, and a new fellowship building was erected. The sanctuary and basement underwent a major renovation during 2000-2001.

Also, the parking lot was paved and parking spaces were marked off. In 2002 the front steps of the church were replaced.

This early church of just fourteen members by 1925 had grown to sixty members, with a budget of \$925. From 1930-1972 the church shared pastors at various times with Austell, Bremen, Douglasville, Oak Mountain, and Tallapoosa. Many of these were students from Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia

In 1972 a new manse was built on Twin Lakes, and the first full-time pastor, Al Ruggles, was called. In 1986 the church name was changed from Villa Rica Presbyterian Church to First Presbyterian Church of Villa Rica. In 1991 the church withdrew from the PCUSA and joined the Presbyterian Church in America.

The church has now increased to a membership of over 100, with a budget of \$130,000.

Psalm 77 is a psalm for all of us at some time or another. It is a psalm written during a time of perplexity, doubt and soul distress.

Asaph in his prayer in the first nine verses argues with himself. He lays open his inmost thoughts during a time of deep distress and discouragement. This duress was physical and emotional. He was in a crisis.

His prayer had been unceasing and continuous. He prayed during the day and during the night. But although he prayed ever so fervently he was getting no relief. He was so overwhelmed by his sorrow and misery that he couldn't focus on anything else. This problem occupied all of his waking moments and he wasn't getting much sleep either.

In his prayer he openly admits that he has begun to wonder why God seems to be ignoring his prayers. He wonders if God has abandoned him. He is fearful that he has offended God in some way that cannot be remedied. He has prayed so long and so hard that he really wonders if his unresolved problem is a sign that God has cast him off and he wonders, is this permanent? Will I

never get straightened out in this matter? He asks in verse 7, **Will the Lord reject forever?**

And will He never be favorable again?

This is how you can feel when you face a problem that you have earnestly sought the Lord about for a long time and there is still no answer. The problem persists. Will God never be favorable again? Isn't this thing ever going to be lifted off my back?

Should you be now or some later time go through similar trials that persist and perplex the Word of God supplies answers. In Psalm 94:14 we are assured that God will not cast off forever or be favorable no more, **For the LORD will not abandon His people, Nor will He forsake His inheritance.** And in Lamentations 3:32 it says -- **For if He causes grief, Then He will have compassion According to His abundant lovingkindness.**

In verse 8 he asks, **has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore?**

In answer to his distressful question Hebrews 6:13-15 supplies an excellent answer,

¹³**For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,**
¹⁴**saying, "I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU."** ¹⁵**And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. Heb. 6:13-15 (NASB)**

There is just no way that the promises of God can fail. God is certainly not a liar and when he doubly confirms His promise with an oath we can know that it is impossible for God to fail to keep His promise. So if you are in the faith of Abraham and have accepted the

promised Savior seed in the person of Jesus Christ then you can be assured that he will never break his oath or fail to keep his promise.

Finally, in verse 9 he asks, **Has God forgotten to be gracious, Or has He in anger withdrawn His compassion? Selah.**

We can quickly put this question to rest. When Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Law ... ⁵**The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. ⁶Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."**
Ex. 34:5-7 (NASB)

By the time Asaph gets to verse 10 it is as though he stops and thinks about what he has been saying. He comes to the conclusion that he has been toying with unbelief by questioning God's goodness, mercy and love. So in verse nine he says **Selah**. He pauses and reconsiders his attitude and goes on to admit that his grief and faintheartedness are due to his own lack of faith.

He has been wallowing around in a slough of despond. He has had no answer because he has been full of doubt and mistrust of God. It is a grief that has remained with him because he has imagined that God is such a one as you and I –

fickle, changeable, and untrustworthy. So now he changes his approach. Now he reverts to a faith way of thinking about his problem. He says in

verses 11-15 ¹¹ **I shall remember the
deeds of the LORD;
Surely I will remember Your wonders
of old.**

¹² **I will meditate on all Your work
And muse on Your deeds.**

¹³ **Your way, O God, is holy;
What god is great like our God?**

¹⁴ **You are the God who works wonders;
You have made known Your strength
among the peoples.**

¹⁵ **You have by Your power redeemed Your
people,
The sons of Jacob and Joseph.
*Selah.***

Are there times in your own life that you go further and further into trouble because you have lost your spiritual bearings? This calls us to pause, look back, and remember who we are in Christ.

The solution for this soul is to remember God and his works. Remembering Godly works is a godly activity. All too often, we resort to our own ideas and plans. If you are growing faint from your own mental activities and swirlings, maybe you need

to learn this ancient art of remembering. Remembering
God is useful to reboot our

computers and to recalibrate our sights. And what does Asaph do? He looks back to the former days.

This is not a self-indulgent pining for a Golden age. No, this is a sanity check as the believer

reviews and reaffirms that God is unchanging and always at work. He says, ¹¹ **I shall remember the deeds of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old.** ¹² **I will meditate on all Your work And muse on Your deeds.**

Note, he did not confine this merely to his own lifetime, but he also went beyond his own horizon. That's a good practice.

Instead of asking foolish questions that put God on trial he begins to think of the truth about God, about his dealings with his people in former years.

Beloved, we have as our source book the Bible, which gives us many instances of the wonder working power of the Lord on behalf of his people, both of individuals and of the congregation of the Lord. So the psalmist now stops moaning and groaning and begins to meditate and see all of God's tender and loving care for His people in those historical events that we can know from the Bible, and yes from the faith of those who have gone before us, such as those who founded this church. They no doubt went through their trials and troubles as Asaph did, but they prevailed. They did not give up.

This church stands today as a lighthouse, a city set on a hill that cannot be hid. It is a constant reminder of the faith of those who have gone before who persisted in the face of great difficulties, who for a time were forced to suspend worship services due to Civil War disruption. But by 1867 the congregation had rebooted and worship was resumed.

God in his wonderful and mysterious providence builds his church. Congregations like individuals face difficulties and even heartache along the way. Like the psalmist we can go through periods when we may wonder if God has forgotten us or has stopped being

favorable to us. But like Asaph we should go back and remember the years gone by of God's faithfulness and care for his people. True saving faith does not give up; it presses on.

We may not always know why God lets things come in life that hurt and why some prayers seem to go so long unanswered, but we know that God is good and that he will never leave us or forsake us.

Oh listen beloved, studying the providence of God can be like studying the path of a ship on the high seas. You cannot know from the parting of the waves as it moves through the water the course it is on. You do not go back and look at the sea when the ship has passed by to try and determine the ship's course. It is impossible. Even so, we cannot know the ways of Providence. It is beyond our knowledge. But we know that He directs all things. Only the captain of the ship knows the course of the ship and why he chooses to maneuver as he does. The psalmist says, **Thy way was in the sea, and Thy paths in the mighty waters. And Thy footprints may not be known. Psalm 77:19**

We can see the footprints of man but not the footprints of God. Still, we know that He does make tracks everywhere. Nothing that happens can happen without Him. And our trials and troubles are not hid from Him. He in His infinite goodness and love is directing us in a way that is for our good. We must reflect on this when we pass through the deep waters and have travail of soul, as did Asaph.