

Bygone Years at God's Right Hand

By
Rev. Todd W. Allen

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Psalm 77:1-15

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 argues with himself. He lays open his inmost thoughts during a time of deep distress and discouragement.

His prayer has been unceasing and continuous. He has 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 can'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 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, **Will**

**the Lord cast off
forever? And will He be favorable
no more?**

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 we be going through similar trials 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 reject his people; he will never forsake his inheritance.** And in Lamentations 3:32 it says -- **Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. Lam. 3:32 (NIV)**

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

In Hebrews 6:13-15 we are told: ¹³**When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself,** ¹⁴**saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants."** ¹⁵**And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. Heb. 6:13-15 (NIV)**

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 seed in the person of Jesus Christ you can be assured that he will never break his oath and not keep his promise.

Finally, in verse 9 he asks, **Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?**

Selah

We can quickly put this question to rest. When Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Law ... ⁵**Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed**

his name, the LORD. ⁶And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." Ex. 34:5-7 (NIV)

By the time Asaph finishes verse 9 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, with the sin of questioning God's goodness, mercy and love. So he says **Selah**. He pauses and reconsiders his attitude and admits that his grief and faintheartedness is 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: ¹⁰ **Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High."**¹¹ **I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.**

12 I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds.

¹³ **Your ways, O God, are holy.**

What god is so great as our God?

13 You are the God who performs

**14 miracles; you display your power
among the peoples.**

**¹⁵With your mighty arm you redeemed
your people, the descendants of
Jacob and Joseph. *Selah***

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.

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 and then went on to build this sanctuary with their own hands to the glory of God 100 years ago. It stands as a monument to their faith and also to God's faithfulness. They went through their trials and sufferings, just like Asaph. But nothing could take away their faith in the God of the Bible who is ever and always faithful to his promise to save to the uttermost all who trust in Him.

My first contact with Midway occurred when I received a telephone call in 1957 at Columbia Seminary from Herbert Scott asking if I would come and preach one Sunday. I told him I would and that began a relationship that has lasted to this day. His telephone call led to the opportunity of preaching here throughout my seminary middler and senior years.

When I first came to Midway there were pot-bellied stoves for heating but no air conditioning. There was a plain floor and a metal ceiling, which incidentally provided excellent acoustics. Due to termite damage there was a somewhat rickety pulpit. But this sanctuary

was truly a sacred and hallowed place for the worship of God.

Because in those years the church membership was not large enough to support a preacher Midway had yoked up with the Mars Hill Presbyterian Church in order to have regular preaching. So I began serving both churches. Both churches would hold a service every Lord's day either in the am or pm, alternating every week between the morning and evening service.

When I became a seminary graduate both the Midway and Mars Hill churches extended to me my first call to serve as a pastor. Joe Nichols is the only surviving member of the Midway pulpit nominating committee that recommended my call. I was ordained right here in this sanctuary in 1959.

Like so many others I have fond memories and great appreciation for these hallowed walls. I have spent many hours privately on my knees on that front pew. I did my first wedding here, marrying Eddie and Jean Lawson. Eddie later became an elder in this church.

In 1961 the sanctuary was renovated. We held services at Due West Elementary School while this was being done. Ed Mayes and Clint Paris did the beautiful wainscoating. The light fixtures were selected and donated by Herbert Scott.

Our first child Deborah was born at Kennestone Hospital when Judy and I were living in the Midway manse. I served both congregations until I took a call to the Eastern Heights Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia in 1962.

Twenty-one years later in August of 1983 I was extended a call a second time to serve the Midway congregation. This second call lasted for 13 years. It was in this sanctuary that the congregation voted to embark on a building program that saw the erection of the new sanctuary that was formally dedicated in May of 1987.

It took a lot of faith for the Midway congregation to commit to build a new worship facility that would cost well over a million dollars. I believe our membership then was only about 140. But God richly blessed that faith decision.

I remember that it was hard for some to finally move from this sanctuary to the new one. We still held services in this historic sanctuary on occasion and some people insisted on conducting funeral services for departed loved ones in this sanctuary rather than the new one. Some members wanted to be married in this sanctuary rather than the new one. I am sure it still holds precious memories for many families.

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 at the right hand God most high. True saving faith does not give up; it presses on.

A building such as this one stands as a lighthouse. It is a substantial reminder that God does not forsake us. It was built by loving hands of faith that intended that it should weather the storms that blow against it. You can see that it was solidly built.

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.

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 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.

And so in verse 20 Asaph abruptly ends the psalm. He closes saying: **Thou didst lead Thy people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron.**

We know that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He is guiding us today using those means He has appointed. He is the author and finisher of our faith. He gives his people under shepherds like Pastor David Hall, Gene Hunt and Greg Doty, along with ruling elders and deacons. At Midway we are blessed to have officers with many years of loyal and faithful service.

Your part and my part is to go on trusting in the captain of our salvation, the Lord Jesus in all of our trials as well as in our times of joy. Like those who have gone before us who built this sanctuary, he saw them through to the end and he will see us through too.