**“Selah: Remembering the Deeds of the LORD”**

Psalm 77:1-20

Many Christians can relate to Asaph’s melancholy mood in verses 1 to 9 as they look at conditions in our world, nation, and individual lives. We see a world filled with calamity. Earthquakes, floods, forest fires, hurricanes, and tornados, as well as other natural disasters, have impacted our world.

We experience political ineptitude in our nation and in nations around the world as well. We see the inevitability of war and rumors of war, confirming exactly what Jesus predicted. We experience economic hardship. Many people live paycheck to paycheck, others on credit cards because they cannot keep up with the costs of inflation.

We are grieved as we reflect on the outright attack on our children. At a young age they are indoctrinated with gender identity ideas, with outrageously twisted teaching that men can be women and women can be men.

Christians around the globe, and frequently in our nation, are persecuted with increasing severity, hostility, and in many nations, martyrdom. Meanwhile, crime and the audacity of criminals intensifies with each passing year. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 seems to be played out before our very eyes, day after day: *“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power…”*

No wonder so many people in our world today can relate to the way Asaph felt so long ago*.* “Where is God? How could He allow such devastation and misery?” many ask.

Perhaps, even some people who don’t normally think in these terms have asked, “What is God saying to us through these events that shake our lives and change the course of our nation and world?  Even some Christians are asking with Asaph of old, the questions in verses 7 to 9:

*“Will the Lord spurn forever,
and never again be favorable?
   Has his steadfast love forever ceased?
Are his promises at an end for all time?
  Has God forgotten to be gracious?*

*Has he in anger shut up his compassion?” Selah*

No wonder *“Selah”* comes after verse 9. The word *“Selah”* has not been fully understood, as to why it is placed in some of the Psalms. But many commentators consider the word *“Selah”* to be like a stop in music. The psalmist is saying: “Stop.  Consider.  Has God – is God – forsaking us?”

Israel would reflect on this refrain many times in her history. For instance, Psalm 137 records this lament of the Israelites in their captivity: *“By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”* (Psa. 137:1-3)

Individual Christians, tried and grieved by sin in the world, tried and grieved by sin in the church, and tried and grieved by sin in themselves can relate to the struggles of the Israelites so long ago. Many can relate to the melancholy questions of Asaph, *“Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his, compassion?”* (v. 9)

**Prayers, But No Peace**

If this Psalm was one of the many short Psalms of nine verses or so, how tragic it would be, even though it begins with prayer. Verse 1: *“I cry aloud to God.”*  And there is confidence in the opening cry: *“And he will hear me.”*

Asaph’s prayer is not a one-time prayer request. Rather he is praying day and night. We see that, not only in verse 1 where he repeats the phrase, *“I cry aloud to God,”* but also in verse 2:

*In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord;
    in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying;
  my soul refuses to be comforted.*

Perhaps all of us can relate to that. Reflecting back on your life, have there been times when you called upon the Lord, day and night, yet were not comforted? Have there been times of prayer when the peace that surpasses all understanding – that wonderful peace that is usually a hallmark of prayer – simply wasn’t there at that time in your life?

Maybe some of you can relate even to verse 3 and verse 4:

 *When I remember God, I moan;
    when I meditate, my spirit faints. Selah*

 *You hold my eyelids open;
    I am so troubled that I cannot speak.*

Sometimes the troubles of life become so great in our sight that we cannot pray. We become so troubled that in our despair we cannot speak to God. At that time of spiritual drought, what a blessing to know that others are praying for us! And above all, what a blessing to know that Jesus, at the right of our heavenly Father, ever lives to intercede on our behalf, that He never fails to pray for us.

And Romans 8:26 and 27 assure us: *“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”*

**Remember and Meditate**

But if you have been in that situation of having your eyelids open all night, and no peace from your prayers – if you can relate to the sorrows of Asaph – then do as he did. By God’s grace and sanctifying Spirit, he found a remedy. Verse 5 and 6:

*I consider the days of old,
    the years long ago.*

 *I said, “Let me remember my song in the night;
    let me meditate in my heart.”*

To meditate means to remember and to mull over the truths of God’s Word. J.I. Packer wrote in his excellent book, *Knowing God*: *“Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God.”* (pg. 23)

And that’s what Asaph did. He remembered and he meditated. Those two words – remember and meditate – form a theme of the Psalm. They are first mentioned in verse 3; they are repeated again in verses 11 and 12, and they unfold and are defined in verses 10-12 where Asaph writes:

*Then I said, “I will appeal to this,
    to the years of the right hand of the Most High.”*

 *I will remember the deeds of the Lord;
    yes, I will remember your wonders of old.
I will ponder all your work,
    and meditate on your mighty deeds.”*

The antidote – the solution – to Asaph’s melancholy mood was to reflect – to meditate – on God’s deeds, wonders, and mighty works.

As he remembered and mediated, we see a shift in pronouns. Did you notice how often Asaph uses the pronoun “I” or “me” in the first 12 verses?  He uses the personal pronouns “I” and “me” twenty-three times in the first twelve verses.

But in the last eight verses there is only one personal reference, and that is a reference to remembering the deeds of the Lord. He writes: *“I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old.”* And as he remembers God's deeds in history, he uses *twenty-one references* to God in just those last eight verses. (The numbers vary depending on the translation, but the correlation remains).

Is it any surprise that Asaph’s attitude changed when he shifted his focus from himself and focused instead on the Lord? As Asaph reflected back, he saw the faithfulness of the Lord. He quit being preoccupied with himself and began to remember the great deeds and the steadfast faithfulness of God. And as he changed his focus, his attitude was changed as well.

And it is no different for us. When we reflect back on our lives, how many great deeds do we see God has performed? How many prayers has He answered, not just in the past year or two but throughout our lives? And how many of those prayers were answered above what we could ask or even imagine? How many blessings has He showered upon us, even though we may have been ungrateful at the time, and certainly undeserving? How many times, even in sorrow and hardship, have we been strengthened and comforted by our Lord and by the promises of His Word?

When we reflect back as Asaph did, on the years of the Most High and all His works, deeds, and wonders, then all the complaints and doubts of verses 1 to 9 will melt away. And in their place will be the joy of verses 13-15:

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

 *You are the God who works wonders;
    you have made known your might among the peoples.
You with your arm redeemed your people,
    the children of Jacob and Joseph. Selah*

Selah.  Stop. Pause. Remember. Think – meditate – on these things!

**Delivered from Bondage**

As Asaph reflected back, the context makes it clear that he was thinking about the deeds, wonders, and mighty works when the Lord led Israel out of Egypt. Their redemption out of Egypt into the promised land was a remarkable deliverance; it was a deliverance that only the one true omnipotent God could accomplish.

Through that mighty work of deliverance, the Lord redeemed His people. He redeemed them from the grip of Pharoah. Pharoah was a cruel taskmaster. He subjected the Israelites to relentless labor; he had no mercy on them and broke his promises to free them from their bondage time and again.

But that deliverance from bondage to Pharoah was just a foreshadow – a type – of our deliverance from a taskmaster far more cruel than Pharoah. Through saving faith in Christ we are delivered from a terrible taskmaster and tyrant; we are delivered from our bondage to Satan and to sin.

Our deliverance from bondage to sin and to Satan is, after all, the purpose for Jesus’ birth, for His perfect life, His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection. In the words of Hebrews 2:14-18:

 *“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.  Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.  For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”*

You see, the work of Christ in redemption and salvation is the greatest deliverance of all. It is far greater than the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt. The deliverance of Israel out of Egypt was just a type – a foreshadow – of how Christ delivers us out of our bondage to sin and Satan, how He guards and guides us through this life and delivers us into the heavenly Canaan.

Verse 15 of Psalm 77:

*You with your arm redeemed your people,
    the children of Jacob and Joseph. Selah*

Who are God’s people? Who are the children of Jacob and Joseph in the words of verse 15? By God’s grace, if you have saving faith in Christ alone, you are one of those spiritual descendants of Jacob and Joseph. Romans 2:28 defines the identity of a Jew this way: *“For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter…”* (Rom. 2:28, 29)

Galatians 3:6 teaches that *“…Abraham ‘believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’”* And verse 7 adds: *“Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.”* And Galatians 3:29 assures us: *“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”*

At those times when it seems as though God does not hear our prayers, when our soul refuses to be comforted, when our eyelids are kept open and our spirit faints, then think back to the greatest deed, the greatest work, the greatest wonder in all the years of the Most High: That by God’s grace through saving faith in Christ alone, His people are delivered from sin and from Satan’s tyranny.  Meditating on that greatest deliverance, we can echo with great joy the words of verses 13 to 15:

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

 *You are the God who works wonders;
    you have made known your might among the peoples.*

*You with your arm redeemed your people,
    the children of Jacob and Joseph. Selah*

Selah. Pause. Stop. Remember. Think through and meditate on these wonderful truths!

As Asaph reflected back on the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, he naturally thought about – meditated – on the great deed and wonderous work at the Red Sea. Verses 16-19:

*When the waters saw you, O God,*
*when the waters saw you, they were afraid;
    indeed, the deep trembled.*

*The clouds poured out water;
    the skies gave forth thunder;
    your arrows flashed on every side.*

*The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind;
    your lightnings lighted up the world;
    the earth trembled and shook.*

*Your way was through the sea,
    your path through the great waters;
    yet your footprints were unseen.*

From the account in Exodus 14 we know that the Lord commanded the Israelites to turn from the direction they were going. The Lord said to Moses, *“Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, ‘They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’”* (Exodus 14:2, 3)

When the Israelites saw Pharaoh and his army marching in against them, they were terrified. Their backs were up against the sea, there were mountains on each side too steep to climb, and here came Pharoah and all his army marching in upon them.

And at times it may seem as though we are in a similar predicament. At times, circumstances in our lives seem to put us at the brink of deep waters that we cannot cross, with mountains on each side that we cannot climb while the whole host of enemy forces and adverse circumstances marches toward us. Yet when God leads us through the sea, through the deep waters of this life, He will always be there, though His footprints are not seen, just as He was there for Israel so long ago.

The Lord gives us one of His many great and precious promises in Isaiah 43:

*“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
     I have called you by name, you are mine.*

*When you pass through the waters,*

*I will be with you;
and through the rivers,*

*they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire*

*you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.*

*For I am the LORD your God,
     the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.* (Isaiah 43:1b-3a)

When it seems as though God has not heard our prayers, when your soul refuses to be comforted, when your eyelids are kept open and your spirit faints, then pause. Selah. Stop. Remember and mediate. Think through and reflect on these wonderful truths – on the precious promises of God!

**Savior, Like a Shepherd, Lead Us**

In verse 20, Asaph also reflected back to think on how the Lord led His people by the hand of Moses and Aaron. Verse 20: *“You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.”*

The Lord still leads His people. His Son is the Great Shepherd of the sheep. Apart from Him, we would wander; we would be lost; we would be destroyed. But He keeps us in the grip of his hand and leads and guides us with tender love greater than that of the most compassionate earthly shepherd. He says, *“I know my sheep by name… I seek out the wandering sheep… I lay down my life for the sheep… No one can snatch them out of my hand...”*

It was a blessing for the Israelites to have Moses and Aaron lead them, to serve as under-shepherds, even though the people were ungrateful for their leadership and often rebelled against them. But how much of a greater blessing for us, as the *“Israel of God,”* to have the Great Shepherd of the sheep, Jesus Christ, to not only redeem us from our sin but to lead us and guide us day by day, year by year, decade after decade – for all the years of our pilgrimage here on earth!

Christ was also with Israel of old, for He was, in the words of 1 Corinthians 10:4, *“the Rock that accompanied them.”*  But the Israelites only saw through shadows the realities that we see through the cross: Our Savior is also our shepherd. And Psalm 48:14 assures us: *“He will be our guide even to the end.”* And before ascending into heaven, Jesus assured us of that same truth. The gospel of Matthew ends with this promise of Jesus: *“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

When the Lord brought the people of Israel safely through the Red Sea, He didn’t just leave them on the other side. He guided them by the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud. He fed them with manna and quail. He provided water from the Rock to sustain them. When they rebelled and served other gods He offered redemption, opportunity after opportunity to repent and to focus in faith and obedience on Him. And when in hardness of heart they refused to repent, the Lord brought righteous and eternal judgment on them. But, nevertheless, through grace beyond comprehension, He brought the remnant of Israel through the Jordan River into the land flowing with milk and honey.

 And that was just a shadow or type of what the Lord would do in redeeming His people – the *“Israel of God,”* the true spiritual descendants of Abraham. He delivers us from the taskmaster, Satan. He leads us through the desert of this life, providing our daily bread, feeding us physically and spiritually, living within us by His Spirit, and forgiving us innumerable times for our rebellious attitudes and sinful ways.

And then, for all who have true saving faith in Christ alone, when we come to the last river to cross, the River Jordan so to speak, He is there with us so that we need not fear death, but instead rejoice to know that for those of us who have saving faith, physical death is our entrance into the heavenly Canaan, our entrance into the heavenly Jerusalem, *“the city having foundations whose architect and builder is God.”* (Heb. 11:10)

And there we will dwell, not just for a season of time but eternally, no longer encumbered and weighed down by sin, but having every tear wiped away, living and reigning with Christ forever over the new heavens and the new earth.

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Many Christians can relate to the melancholy mood of Asaph in verses 1-9.  As we look at our world, our nation, our families, and our individual lives, there are, without doubt, reasons for concern. But there are far more reasons to look forward to the future – to each new day – with trust, joy, and praise!

Those six melancholy questions in verses 7 to 9 could, in some people’s minds, be expressions of doubt:

*“Will the Lord spurn forever,
    and never again be favorable?
Has his steadfast love forever ceased?
    Are his promises at an end for all time?*

 *Has God forgotten to be gracious?
    Has he in anger shut up his compassion?”*

But for the believer, those are rhetorical questions. God will not spurn His people. His steadfast love has not ceased. He has not forgotten to be gracious. He remains compassionate and true to every promise He has made. Consequently, all those questions are, and will be, answered with a resounding “No!”

And no matter what may come our way, we have the full assurance that the Lord Most High will still perform His great deeds and mighty works. He will still be redeeming His people. His protection and provision for His people through the deepest waters of life will continue. And His promise as the changeless God to lead His flock will unfold in our lives. For He is the ever-faithful God of our salvation who will always lead, always guard, and always guide His people.

Selah. Pause. Stop.  Remember. Think through and meditate on the wonderful truths and precious promises of God’s Word! And then joyfully trust the Lord day by day, for as long as the Lord grants His grace for you to live. Selah! Amen!

*“I will remember the deeds of the LORD;*

*yes, I will remember your wonders of old.”*

*Psalm 77:11*

**“Selah”**

Psalm 77:1-20

I.   Many Christians can relate to Asaph’s melancholy mood (1-9) as they look at conditions in

 our world, nation, and individual lives

II.  The antidote: *“To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will*

 *remember the deeds of the Lord”* (10-12):

       1) The redemption of His people (13-15)

       2) His protection and provision for His people through the deepest waters of life (16-19)

       3) His promise, as the changeless God, to lead His flock (20)

III. Application: Seeing God’s faithfulness in the past we are to confidently trust Him in the

 future (20; Psalm 48:14; Matthew 28:20)