

John Gilbert 9th August 2009 Aldridge Parish Church Psalm 77:1-20

1 I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me.

2 When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted.

3 I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint. Selah

4 You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak.

5 I thought about the former days, the years of long ago;

6 I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit enquired:

7 "Will the Lord reject for ever? Will he never show his favour again?

8 Has his unfailing love vanished for ever? Has his promise failed for all time?

9 Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?" Selah

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?

14 You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples.

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

16 The waters saw you, O God, the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed.

17 The clouds poured down water, the skies resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth.

18 Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked.

19 Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen.

20 You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

9th August 2009 Sermon Text

Slides 1 – 4

As we reflect on Psalm 77 and the teaching ministry of the psalms we are going through keep in mind Jenny Cornfield and the OPEN DOORS team at present in Ethiopia. Think of our brothers and sisters in Christ particularly the widows who are persecuted for their faith. They go through despair and experience the valley of the shadow of death. Bear with them as though alongside them.

Slide 5 Sheep

Last week Nigel Hopley gave us an excellent sermon on the 23rd psalm.

If you missed it do listen to it on the web site. We learned about the strange characteristics of sheep and their particular weaknesses and needs of care by shepherds. We learned interesting things such as they are unable to clean themselves and if flat on their backs have great difficulty righting themselves and might even die. They are short sighted despite having a wide angle of vision. They can easily get lost and are hopeless at finding their way back. If one falls over a precipice to its death others may blindly follow the same path thinking it's safe yet plunge to their death. In summary sheep are incapable of looking after themselves and God uses the analogy of sheep to humans. He describes us a sheep that have gone astray.

Nigel reminded us of the harsh reality of David ,the shepherd king's life and the 23rd psalm was a reflection of God's faithfulness to him over the years. We see the Christ as the Shepherd of our souls portrayed in psalm 23. In his life experience David knew what it was to come from a lowly sheep farming background into the courts of royalty and the military life. He knew what it was to face responsibility and fail. He got into sin by adultery and murder and was humbled through it and yet restored. He knew what it was to be hunted ; He knew family breakdown and what it was to be heartbroken by his son Absalom. His saving grace was that he had a heart after God and could not let him go.

With this back drop in mind today's exploration of psalm 77 gives us further insight into our humanity and the power and grace of God at work in his people. It might seem to be the ultimate psalm for depressed folk and those of melancholic and introspective dispositions. It certainly conveys a picture of despair and if you have not

despaired could drive you to it! It is a an opportunity for us to develop **empathy** and perhaps begin to understand how others struggle with their faith , their feelings and their depression and despair.

I have the privilege of people coming to me every day with all sorts of stories about their lives. Probably 50% of the people who come for consultation have psycho-social-spiritual problems. I probably do two to three anxiety- depression assessments a day and would certainly rate stress and chronic tiredness as symptoms which reflect how much modern life is out of balance. Deep inside people want to feel at peace. I would suggest that we cannot know real peace without a sense of being loved and accepted.

So many people desperately need to feel loved in a way that they feel secure.

Today's psalm is a journey from despair, depression and failure to finding faith again and thankfulness for God's faithfulness to His people over the centuries.

The journey should take us beyond into relationship and identification the great COMPASSION and Love of God.

Deliverance will bring freedom and peace and an overwhelming awareness of the love of God even though we have lived in the eye of the storm or been in numerous valleys of the shadow of death which Nigel alluded to last week.

Ideally a mother and fathers' love should be the source of a child's inner sense of love and security. It is no different with God in the intimacy of love in the Godhead – Father , Son and Holy Spirit. May be you have read “ The Shack “ which seems to be a popular read at the moment . For me when I read it I felt the author was wanting to take the reader from being distant to God and bringing them into the intimacy of relationship with God the Father , Jesus the Son and the ways of the Holy Spirit . It is this union and intimacy of love that God has intended since Creation when He made Adam and Eve and they walked with Him. God has not changed and He wants us to WALK with Him in a relationship of love.

Slides 6 and 7 the KISS

I was amused by **Nigel's anatomy lesson** which I trust you committed to memory , namely “ The anatomical juxtaposition of two orbicularis muscles in contraction “ This is what happens when two people kiss. I could suggest that you greet one another with an holy kiss (Paul encourages us to do this on three separate occasions and Peter catches up with the trend in ;

1 Peter 5:14 - 2 Peter 1:1

14 Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

How is your love life ? Our culture does not readily allow us to ask this question but it could be fun if we tried it a bit more often ! The anatomical picture does show is something of intimacy in the joining of the physical and the emotional into a union of oneness . God is more interested in having a relationship of love with us more than what we do for Him or believe about Him. One of the most frightening things I read in the bible is something Jesus said in

Matt 7:21-23

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'

23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evil doers!'

The word “ knew “ is the Greek word ginosko which implies “ being in intimate union with “. Later on in John Jesus prays for us that we might be one with Him and the Father

John 17:20-23

20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,

21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:

23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

My preamble is aimed at suggesting SOME INTIMACY IN THIS PSALM. A clue to this is in mention of the COMPASSION OF GOD? Can we unpack the psalm and discover God’s amazing love for us ? Do you remember the verse “ Kiss the Son lest he be angry with you ” Interestingly is at the start of the psalms

Ps 2:12

12 **Kiss the Son**, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Slide 8

PSALM 77 IS THE DEPRESSIVE'S PSALM

It was written by ASAPH who was appointed by David to be leader of choral worship. He was a descendent of Gershom a son of Levi (priestly order) and was thought to be a seer with a prophetic gift.

In nutshell it is :

- ✚ From FEELINGS to FAITH
- ✚ From FAITH to WORSHIP
- ✚ New HOPE
- ✚ And the secret of finding CHRIST in the Psalms !

Yes , HE can be found in the old testament.

Think about how God works. Did God work alone in the OT ? Is He not the TRIUNE God – the TRINITY – Father, Son and Holy Spirit . Were they not altogether as GOD the three in one led the Israelites through the Red Sea?

The KEY verse for me is v 10. The years (eternity) of the RIGHT hand of God

Who is at God's right hand ?

We can just read it as the works God did himself using his right hand but **if we cannot see the Godhead at work in the OT we are missing out.**

I always encourage to LOOK FOR JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT. He is there in the psalms almost palpably present or in the shadows or in the distance. He is seen in type in the characters of the Old Testament for example Moses , David and those God raised to be shepherds and saviours for God's people. He has spoken of by prophets and is seen in figure and type as Melchizedek , the priest of God as he appeared to Abraham. This is a picture of COMMUNION with God.

Gen 14:18-20

18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High,

19 and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.

20 And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything

Though veiled we also see Jesus in the adjacent psalms :

Ps 80:1

Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth

Ps 80:17-19

17 **Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself.**

18 Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name.

19 Restore us, O LORD God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.

The SHEPHERD HEART of God is to lead his sheep

JESUS SAID I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10:11

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Slides 9 & 10 Depressed man

- Verse 1: The cry of the human heart & a catalogue of symptoms of depression showing the physical, emotional & spiritual effects
- Verse 2: Distress, despair, sleeplessness, no peace, no comfort
- Verse 3: God seems so distant, so unreal despite perhaps previous spiritual blessings
- Verse 4: Sleepless, tired & unable to express oneself
- Verse 5: What were past blessings seem so far away. Many possibilities – overwhelming guilt, grief, emotional pain
- Verse 6: All is not lost – as we begin to stir up those things deep within and move out of introspection towards God then Hope becomes a reality.

Slides 11-12 Questions & eye of storm

Verses 7-9 are healthy deep questions. Questions are not always generated by ourselves but sometimes they are the PROMPTINGS of the HOLY SPIRIT to get us to start thinking from God's perspective. Of course He has not rejected us ; nor ceased to love us ;nor broken his promises ;nor forgotten to be merciful ;nor stopped being compassionate to us. He is actually saying - come on search me out , this is about discovering my ways .It is the discovery of knowing God through the life of the Holy Spirit invading us a deeper level than we have known before

Slides 13-14 Depressed people lady & man

Slide 15 v 10-12

Verse 10 "Then I thought "- the prompting of the Spirit to help our troubled minds and put them on track back to God.

Verse 11 Sometimes it is remembering what God has done both historically in the lives of His people as well as our own lives

Slide 16 v 12-20

Verse 12 - The start of THINKING properly again. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is about getting our thinking back to a healthy and positive position. It has to do with undoing MISBELIEFS. For us as Christians it is moving out of our introspective , self centred pre-occupation and making a move to Jesus that we find **light** in the darkness; **hope** when the storm clouds loom over us and **comfort** when despair would nearly paralyze us.

I know ,I have been there many times ! Some of us are blessed with a melancholic trait and the goal is to discover unspeakable joy in personal relationship with Jesus! He is the best prescription for these maladies of soul and mind.

Slide 17 Moses dividing the Red Sea

Verses 12 -19 Remembering God's Deeds, miracles, His creative works , His Holy ways His redemptive power and deliverance from trouble the example being the people of Israel being taken out of captivity in Egypt and led across the Red Sea on dry land . The Egyptian army who were out to destroy God's people were destroyed. Apply that to our individual lives – God does not want the enemy of our souls to destroy us but comes to rescue us POWERFULLY . If we need the power of God to be brought to bear in our lives then He is here and ready to do it .The process is activating our wills and making the move towards Jesus and this is what the psalm is about , namely to bring us to a state of readiness and hope.

The power of GOD to blast a way through what seemed impossible to the people of God is perhaps a challenge to us to believe afresh in the Almighty Power of God to change things.

Verse 20 This shows us the nature of God as the Shepherd of His people . God is personified as the GOOD SHEPHERD in the person of JESUS . Moses & Aaron were shepherds of God's people.

In the psalms we read of David as the Shepherd King .

Slide 18 the storm at sea v16

Verse 10

Now let's come back to the centrality of the psalm , verse 10 - The years of the right hand of God. Yes, there is all his work but was He alone or do we see something hidden yet wonderful namely the PERSON OF JESUS and the HOLY SPIRIT who were with Him as He made the path through the Red Sea ? Perhaps we now see this act in biblical history as a forerun of God's ultimate plan for deliverance, salvation and redemption to be brought about by the Good Shepherd , whereby Jesus lays down his life for the sheep. In the scriptures you will find numerous references to Jesus being at the right hand of God / at the right hand of the Power. **Do not underestimate the phenomenal power of God in Christ in his apparent helplessness on the Cross. When Jesus uttered his last great cry "It is finished " all of Satan's power base was shattered , hell was invaded (yes, the hell of what goes on in the troubled soul and mind) and the earth was shaken. That shaking is going on today as Jesus moves in the earth to build His Church. All that was and is false about religion and the philosophies and belief systems of the world were cut through at Golgotha , the place of the skull ; the place where Jesus was crucified. The skull epitomises death and the emptiness of all our human thinking in comparison to the mind of God.**

Slide 19 Come to me

Today , He comes to offer renewal and deliverance from our troubled thinking. The mind of Christ can be formed in us so we can be renewed, refreshed and restored into a love relationship with God day by day and for the rest of our lives.

As we discover the personal ministry and care of Jesus to us so we will be transformed by the renewing of our minds. The life of Christ , the NEW man will be formed in us and we will discover the joy of having His shepherd heart alive in us. Such is His offer and Jesus says come to me and I will give you rest.

Matt 11:28-30

28 "**Come to me**, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Do please make use of the PRAYER MINISTRY available after the service or if you need to talk to someone ask the stewards to point you in the direction of people who can help

Amen