

SBC – Sept. 22, 2024

Psalm 44 (NKJV)

“A Prayer of the Distressed”

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To the Chief Musician. A Contemplation Of the Sons of Korah.

The sons of Korah traced their heritage back to their father Korah who is infamously known for what is called “Korah’s rebellion”. Ultimately the earth opened up and swallowed him and those with him in the rebellion alive. Korah and those with him in the rebellion were Levites and as such had an honored position of service – but they wanted more. They wanted the top position held by Moses and Aaron.

Evidently, the children were not in on this rebellion because they survived (cf. Num. 26:10-11). These sons (descendants) of Korah went on to faithfully serve the Lord, and evidently, from the days of David onward, they were notable among the Levitical singers in leading in the worship of God (cf. 1 Chron. 6:22-28, 31; 2 Chron. 20:19). In 1 Chron. 9:17-24 and 26:1-19 they are called the gatekeepers in the temple. So it seems as time went along, they served as some combination of **gatekeepers and singers**. As Levites, they had a prominent serving role in relation to the temple.

When it says: “A Contemplation of the Sons of Korah” this may mean that it was given to them to perform – not necessarily that they wrote it.

The phrase “the Sons of Korah” appears in a total of 11 Psalms (Ps. 42; 44-49; 84; 85; 87; 88).

The occasion of the Psalm was a time of great defeat in Israel – although we don’t know when or what the exact occasion was. It was a time of national distress. Often in the Psalm the cause of distress is shown to be SIN, but not in the case of Psalm 44. Here the writer is perplexed as to WHY this is happening to them since they have been faithful.

Slide # 1

Outline of Psalm 44

“A Prayer of the Distressed”

- vv. 1-3 God’s Past Victories for Israel
- vv. 4-8 Confident God will Bring Future Victory
- vv. 9-16 God’s Allowing of Defeat and Crisis
- vv. 17-19 A Protest of Faithfulness
- vv. 20-22 Obedience and yet Defeat
- vv. 23-26 A Plea and Hopeful Prayer

1 We have heard with our ears, O God, Our fathers have told us, The deeds You did in their days, In days of old:

The Jews were told to pass along their rich history going back to Abraham and the patriarchs, then the Exodus and the birth of the nation, and then entry into the Promised Land. God worked mightily and miraculously to make them a people and give them the land, and, in this process, showed over and over that He is the One true God (cf. Ex. 10:1-2; 12:26; 13:14; Deut. 6:20; Josh 4:6; Ps. 78:3).

2 You drove out the nations with Your hand, But them You planted; You afflicted the peoples, and cast them out.

3 For they did not gain possession of the land by their own sword, Nor did their own arm save them; But it was Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your countenance, Because You favored them.

Note the strong dual emphasis that they were NOT a self-made people. It was God Who drove out the nations, He planted them as people; He afflicted the Canaanites and cast them out (cf. Josh. 24:12-13). This is all God's doing.

And then on the other side they didn't do this by their own sword, nor by their own arm. Again, it was God's right hand of might, His arm, the light of His countenance (meaning the presence of His favor). God in GRACE brought them to where they were.

4 You are my King, O God; Command victories for Jacob.

The writer personalizes it and brings it right up to date saying, "You are my King, O God" and then with the petition, "Command victories for Jacob."

5 Through You we will push down our enemies; Through Your name we will trample those who rise up against us.

6 For I will not trust in my bow, Nor shall my sword save me.

7 But You have saved us from our enemies, And have put to shame those who hated us.

He has learned the lesson of history. It is through God that God's people have victory over their enemies. He recognizes their dependence upon God. He affirms that his trust is not in himself or his human resources but rather that God is the Savior and that it is He Who gives victory over the enemy.

8 In God we boast all day long, And praise Your name forever. Selah

What a great memory verse! In God they boast continually and praise Him forever. Since God has done it – since He gives the victory God’s people should exalt Him, glory in Him, boast in Him all the day long. The praise and thanks belongs to Him forever. This is giving credit where it belongs – to God alone!

Selah is thought by most to be a reflective pause – like stop and soak this in.

The first eight verses reflect the greatness of God and the victory He gives to His people. It properly champions the position of faith and reliance upon God. The theology of the writer is good and strong.

But guess what? People are complicated. It is amazing how the same person can KNOW right theology and have their head in the right place but at the same time have mixed emotions and spiritual struggles as they grapple with the “WHYs” of life. We see that here.

Verse 9 denotes a complete change in tone.

Slide # 2

“A pause comes in fitly here, when we are about to descend from the highest to the lowest key.” – **Charles Spurgeon**

9 But You have cast us off and put us to shame, And You do not go out with our armies.

If you give God all the credit for your victories then what do you say when your experience is defeat? Well, since God is sovereign He must either be causing it or allowing it!

The sense seems to be they have been boasting in God but then when they went out to fight they suffered defeat which would seem to indicate God was not with them. He did not come through as He so notably did in the past. This left them ashamed – ashamed of their testimony.

It’s like the football team that brags mightily before the game, only to suffer a huge defeat. That is deflating. That brings shame. That is how the Psalmist felt.

“Put us to shame; made us ashamed of our boasting, and trust in You, which we have often professed to the face of our enemies.”

– Matthew Poole

The writer is now brutally honest to God about his feelings.

10 You make us turn back from the enemy, And those who hate us have taken spoil for themselves.

11 You have given us up like sheep intended for food, And have scattered us among the nations.

12 You sell Your people for next to nothing, And are not enriched by selling them.

13 You make us a reproach to our neighbors, A scorn and a derision to those all around us.

14 You make us a byword [example of scorn] among the nations, A shaking of the head among the peoples.

15 My dishonor is continually before me, And the shame of my face has covered me,

16 Because of the voice of him who reproaches and reviles, Because of the enemy and the avenger.

In view is a national defeat that was painfully embarrassing. Not only were they defeated, but they were also robbed of goods and their dignity. They became an object of mocking and scorn. No one had any regard for them or their God at this point. They hung their head in shame!

For seven verses he carries on describing how horribly demoralizing the situation was for them as a people. This defeat was truly disastrous!

And WHY did it happen? That is the great question.

17 All this has come upon us; But we have not forgotten You, Nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant.

It is common in the Psalms for calamity to come upon someone because of their sin. We would expect that. In fact, that would be consistent with the conditional old covenant which promised blessing on obedience and curses on disobedience.

Slide # 3

Deuteronomy 11:26–28 (NKJV)

26 “Behold, I set before you today a **blessing and a curse**:
27 the **blessing, if you obey** the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you today;
28 and the **curse, if you do not obey** the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known.

But here is the thing that is so hard for the writer. All this calamity has come upon them in spite of the fact that they have not forgotten God, they have not dealt unfaithfully with the covenant – meaning they have been faithfully living according to covenant regulations. It is because of this that this horrendous defeat doesn’t make spiritual sense.

The puzzling thing about all this defeat and shame was that it was not brought on by any conscious backsliding on Israel’s part. At other times in history there was a definite connection between suffering and sin. But in this particular case it was not so. – *William MacDonald*

18 Our heart has not turned back, Nor have our steps departed from Your way;

The Psalmist insists that they have been faithful, and therefore, this doesn’t make sense to him. He pleads their case of faithfulness and complains that in spite of it, God has dealt very severely with them.

19 But You have severely broken us in the place of jackals, And covered us with the shadow of death.

Jackals were part of the wolf family. They feed largely on carrion and are noted for their piercing and dismal howling.

Slide # 4



The place of jackals symbolically speaks of ruin and desolation (Isaiah 34:13; Jeremiah 9:10–11; 51:37).

The “shadow of death” is the very dark place where the threat of death is imminent.

Note the writer applies what is happening to them to God as being behind it. He specifically says, “You have severely broken us”.

In Psalm 44 we sense the psalmist honestly (and not self-righteously) makes the case that their present distress was *not* due to unaddressed sin or rebellion. In firm but polite protest, the psalmist insisted that Israel’s faithfulness to God had been answered by disaster sent by God. – **David Guzik**

20 If we had forgotten the name of our God, Or stretched out our hands to a foreign god,

21 Would not God search this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart.

He reasons that if they had indeed forgotten God or been involved in idol worship – then God would know this because indeed He knows the secrets of the heart.

There are no secrets with God! He knows all including the inner recesses of the heart – all the thoughts and motives of the heart.

Slide # 5



He strongly appeals to their innocence, even to the point of appealing to God’s omniscience. He is very sure that what has come upon them is NOT because of sin.

22 Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

Notice this happens to God’s people sometimes, not because of anything they are doing wrong – which is the context here.

Slide # 6

- v. 17 “we have not forgotten You”
- v. 17 “Nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant.”
- v. 18 “Our heart has not turned back”
- v. 18 “Nor have our steps departed from Your way”

Note the language of verse 22 where he says, “Yet for Your sake”.

For Your sake are the important words. It means that they suffered in faithfulness to God, and because of their faithfulness to God. Without developing the thought, this psalm suggests a revolutionary concept to the Old Testament man or woman of God: suffering may not be a punishment, but a battle scar, “the price of loyalty in a world which is at war with God.” (Kidner) – **David Guzik**

This is an important concept in the Bible. There is such a thing as suffering simply for being in the will of God and not because of anything you have done wrong. There is mystery here. But we must always remember that God’s ways are not our ways – they are ever as far above us as the heavens are above the earth (Isa. 55:8-9).

Slide # 7**1 Peter 3:17 (NKJV)**

17 For it is better, **if it is the will of God**, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

1 Peter 4:19 (NKJV)

19 Therefore let those **who suffer according to the will of God** commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

Sometimes it is the will of God for the righteous to suffer for reasons they know nothing about.

It is for God’s sake he says, “***we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.***”

God’s people are not exempt from terrible things happening to them. In fact, it is ordained of God. God has a purpose for our suffering.

This has been the experience of God's people down through the ages. It has been well stated that "***Believers who suffer are the rule, not the exception.***"

The saints are sheep for the slaughter! Name yourself among them, and cease contending for your "rights" in a world that has cast out Christ. ...Put up over your mirror the motto: "I am Christ's: a sheep for slaughter." – ***William Newell***

There is a reason Christ said, "take up your cross and follow Me".

"When Christ calls a man, **he bids him come and die.**"
- ***Deitrich Bonhoeffer***

The Psalmist knew the truth of God's power and victory as stated in the first 8 verses of the Psalm, but in his experience it seems God is allowing them to be killed constantly in spite of the commitment to Him.

And the most natural thing in the world is to ask WHY!

23 Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord? Arise! Do not cast us off forever.

24 Why do You hide Your face, And forget our affliction and our oppression?

25 For our soul is bowed down to the dust; Our body clings to the ground.

Note the repeated WHY question. He asks God, "Why do you sleep?" Now, God does not really sleep, but in this situation, His lack of intervening activity is portrayed this way. And so he figuratively pleads with God to "Awake" and do something to help the situation.

Again, he asks WHY saying, "Why do you hide your face?"

Sometimes it is the will of God for His faithful children to suffer and sometimes we have no idea WHY! We cry out for an explanation and there is silence. This is a major test of our faith. It is like the Psalmist faith in verses 1-8 is being severely tested.

This was a "Job like" experience. Job went through all the horrendous things he experienced as the most "blameless and upright" man on the earth. And yet he too had no idea WHY this was happening to him.

When we go through a “shadow of death” experience it is good to realize others have been here before us. We are not the first to experience this.

For whatever reasons, God allows us to go through it for His sovereign purposes. Sometimes all we can do is BOW and worship as Job did. All we know is God is God and He is sovereign. And as Peter says, He is a “faithful Creator” (1 Pet. 4:19).

I am thankful the NT adds to this verse. Paul quotes Psalm 44:22 in Romans 8:36 and immediately follows up with verse 37.

Slide # 8

Romans 8:36–37 (NKJV)

36 As it is written: “**For Your sake** we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

37 **Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors** through Him who loved us.

This quote from Psalm 44:22 comes in the same chapter of Romans 8, where just a few verses earlier, we have the promise of Romans 8:28.

Romans 8:28 (NKJV)

28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

Slide # 9

Those who give their lives in His cause are conquerors, not victims, and God can be glorified even in what seems like defeat. ... We can't always explain the so-called tragedies of life, especially those that happen to God's people, but Romans 8:28 is still in the Bible.

-Warren Wiersbe

We often don't see the final chapter on how God is working and His sovereign purposes on this side of glory.

26 Arise for our help, And redeem us for Your mercies' sake.

This Psalm ends where we should go when we have a tremendous experience of defeat in spite of the fact that we have been serving God faithfully.

We pour out our hearts to God, admitting we can't understand it. And yet we continue to wait on Him to act according to His sovereign will.

The Psalm ends with a plea for God's help and that He would yet bring deliverance. And he asks that God answer for the sake of His mercies. The word "mercies" is the Hebrew word "hesed" which is often translated as "lovingkindness", "steadfast love" or "faithful love".

He asks God to respond in keeping with His faithful covenant love.

And here is where faith comes in. We need to know God will always respond in keeping with His covenant faithfulness – even if that involves Him working in ways that we can't understand. Still we know He is faithful.

Johan Sebastian Bach lost his little daughter and then three sons and then his wife. Then he remarried and then he and his second wife, Anna-Magdalena, lost four more daughters and three sons. Eleven beloved children...

Many researchers have wondered: how Bach managed to handle these losses? How did he not stop breathing, how did his heart not stop? And most importantly, how could he continue to write music?... The most beautiful music the world has heard. Do you know how he did it?

Johann Sebastian Bach would often sign his compositions with the Latin initials "S.D.G.", which stands for Soli Deo Gloria, meaning "to God alone, the glory". He would also often begin his pieces with the Latin initials "J.J.", which stands for Jesu Juva, meaning "Jesus help me".

This is how we cope -all along the way we look to Jesus for His help and then our ending line is "to God alone be the glory". We should start and end every day that way. May this be the expression of our life's song.

Even if we can understand the WHY of what is happening, even if it makes no sense to us – may we continue to seek God every step of the way, and may we continue to say, ***"In God, we boast all the day long, And praise Your name forever. Selah"***

When all is said and done, if it is for God's sake that we are killed all day long and are accounted as sheep for the slaughter, even in this FAITH says, *"in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."* (Rom. 8:36-37). The final word for the believer on all the HARD impossible to understand things in life is CONQUEROR, yea, "more than conqueror"! As Paul says, "thanks be to God, who give us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!"